

East Haven Police Department 	Type of Directive: Policies & Procedures		No. 433.4
	Subject/Title: Death and Injury Notifications	Issue Date: April 29, 2025	
		Effective Date: May 15, 2025	
	Issuing Authority: Honorable Board of Police Commissioners	Review Date: Annually	
References/Attachments: Connecticut General Statute: § 7-294mm, § 14-108 (b)(1)		Rescinds: 433.3	
		Amends: N/A	

I. PURPOSE

- A. The purpose of this directive is to set forth the policies and procedures of the East Haven Police Department (EHPD) regarding death and injury notifications.

II. POLICY

- A. It is the policy of the East Haven Police Department to ensure that the next of kin of a deceased person is quickly and compassionately notified of such person's death.
- B. It is the policy of this Department to perform a timely and respectful notification to the relatives of victims involved in incidents resulting in death, injury, or the need for medical treatment.

III. DEFINITIONS

- A. Next of Kin: Refers to a spouse, an adult child, a parent, an adult sibling, or a grandparent.

IV. PROCEDURES

- A. Death Notifications
 1. Whenever an officer responds to or encounters an incident involving a deceased person or the remains of such person while on duty, a death notification shall be made to the deceased person's next of kin as soon as feasible, but not later than twenty-four hours following the identification of such person, except as set forth below.
 - a. If an officer is unable to identify and/or notify a deceased person's next of kin, such officer shall document the reason for the failure or delay of notification and

any attempts made to make such notification, whether successful or unsuccessful, in an incident report. .

- b. Any unsuccessful attempt to make an in-person contact with next of kin requires sensitive handling. Officer shall not leave impersonal notes or forwarding messages at a contact location. Any messages left should include the name of the officer leaving the note or message and ask that the next of kin contact that officer, rather than directing the person to call any other person or entity (hospital or other law enforcement agency).
2. In cases in which the deceased person's next of kin resides within East Haven or within a reasonable distance of East Haven, an officer and an on-duty supervisor shall respond to the next of kin's location to perform an in-person death notification.
- a. In the event an on-duty supervisor is unavailable to assist with performing the in-person death notification, two (2) officers, with at least one officer in uniform, shall respond to perform such notification.
 - b. During a death notification, officers are sharing highly personal information in an interaction between strangers, which only increases feelings of discomfort for all parties. Offering business cards with contact information is very helpful in these circumstances.
 - c. An officer's introduction should be made with simple, clear statements that are easy to follow. On the other hand, dispassionate, mechanical formal and impersonal delivery of statements and lack of empathy increase confusion and anxiety. The importance of projecting concern, empathy and gravity cannot be overemphasized.
 - d. In instances where the officer is performing a notification on behalf of another law enforcement agency, the officer should verify the correct telephone numbers for the contact person at the appropriate law enforcement agency prior to the notification. This ensures that if the next of kin wishes to contact the law enforcement agency, they can get correct and speedy information about the death.
 - e. While there is no "good" time to deliver sad news, officers need to keep in mind that notifications delivered in the middle of the night or in circumstances or settings that themselves present significant distractions or unnecessary distress to the next of kin require particular care and consideration. Arranging for a private location for the notification conversation, and careful consideration of other circumstances such as the presence of impressionable children, should be undertaken so that respect for the potential impact of the notification conversation is properly afforded to next of kin.
 - f. Officers should begin with a very brief "preparation statement" reviewing the circumstances surrounding the death to the extent it is known. The next of kin will be anxious and will not benefit from an involved, lengthy report. Still, a brief statement will provide a few seconds for the family to mentally prepare.

- g. The “core message” should include the deceased’s name, not a relationship (i.e., son, daughter, husband, wife) as the relationship may not be the same for each person present and the characterization may be incorrect. The word “died” is very important and should be repeated. Terms such as expired, passed or fatally injured are confusing to people under stress. The message should not be misunderstood. Messages should also avoid impersonal words such as body, remains or corpse.
 - h. Officers should express empathy. Officers should be prepared to listen and answer questions honestly, to the extent that they can do so. The notifying officer should remain calm and offer respectful support.
- 3. In the event a next of kin resides outside of the local area, the law enforcement agency in that jurisdiction shall be contacted to perform the death notification.
 - a. Telephone notification will only be utilized when all other methods are not feasible, and only when approved by the shift supervisor.
- 4. Occasionally, continuing investigations delay the release of a deceased person’s body and the next of kin must be told that they cannot claim it immediately. In such cases officers must inform family members of:
 - a. How they will be kept up to date.
 - b. What must happen that has not been accomplished.
 - c. Who is in charge of the event and its aftermath.
 - d. What the family member should do while waiting.
- 5. Unless immediate at-the-scene identification is necessary, next of kin should not be brought to a crime or accident scene.
- 6. Compassion and discretion should be exercised by the officer when performing a death notification. Be reassuring and understanding, and offer any assistance possible, which may include seeking a close friend, neighbor, family member, or other person known to the next of kin who can stay after a notification has been made.
 - a. The Department’s Chaplain may be contacted if it is determined that those services may be needed at the time of the death notification.
 - b. Officers should make reasonable efforts not to leave next of kin alone after a notification. Rather, the officer should inquire if there is any other next of kin who should be contacted, and, depending on the circumstances, officers should make reasonable efforts to contact them.
- 7. The completion of a death notification including an officer’s request to another law enforcement agency to perform a death notification shall be documented in an incident report.

B. Identification of Next of Kin and Information Assistance

1. Officers need to know with whom they are speaking in terms of both names and relationships. Limiting the size of a group when delivering a death notification should mainly focus on protecting “vulnerable” people, such as small children or the elderly, from hearing distressing information from a non-family member in a somewhat impersonal way. Asking to move to a more private area to deliver sensitive information should be considered. Family members, however, can provide emotional support for each other and should receive the information at the same time, if appropriate.
2. Next of kin may have questions that officers can answer at the time of notification. They may ask that other persons also be notified, ask the officer who else needs to be notified, or ask how to tell others. It may become an appropriate time to try to locate additional supporting members of the family, or local clergy if that has not yet been done. Officers should assist household or family members by making other contacts, if asked and within reason.
3. Making multiple notifications may present logistical problems, in instances where families are separated, officers should attempt to determine whether it is necessary to make subsequent personal notification to other next of kin, or whether the next of kin initially notified will make the additional contacts.
4. If children who are in school need to be informed immediately, most schools have a counselor who may be called upon to assist with the notification. Some employers may have a “human resources” department which can provide support as well.
5. All questions pertaining to organ or tissue donation need to be referred to a hospital staff or family doctor. Autopsy requirements are governed by law but issues relating to autopsy or even transportation of remains frequently involve cultural, ethnic, or religious questions.
6. In the event that the death relates to a law enforcement incident that involves a report, the case number, if available, along with any other reporting officer names, should be provided to the next of kin contacted. Information about how to get a law enforcement incident report from the appropriate law enforcement agency (e.g., the name, address and location of the law enforcement agency) should be provided.
7. Some deaths may be of media interest and may cause next of kin to be contacted by members of the news media. Officers should be aware of that possibility and alert next of kin to that possibility. Officers should let next of kin know that they may maintain their privacy and that they are not, nor are other family members or friends, under any obligation to speak with media representatives. Conversely, next of kin may exercise their right of free speech and speak to the media if they so choose.

C. Translating

1. If the next of kin does not speak English, the officer will need a translator, which should have been arranged in advance as part of the information gather process prior to the notification. Occasionally, it may appear necessary to use a child in the household to assist but that should be avoided. Children should not be expected or requested to assume the psychological burden of translating a death notification, and officers should not rely on children to accurately translate this type of critical information. Instead, the officer should have a professional translator available, if not in person, at least by telephone.

D. Dealing with Property

1. Property in the possession of the deceased at the time of death should NOT be turned over to next of kin at the time of notification. Any property seized should be properly documented and logged into the evidence room at the East Haven Police Department. If the property is not needed for any ongoing investigation or other legitimate law enforcement purpose, arrangements should be made for the next of kin to obtain the property in a dignified manner that carefully accounts for all property passing through the care of the East Haven Police Department.
2. Officers should inquire about the need to secure any property of the deceased in the absence of next of kin taking responsibility or wishing to claim possession of the property. For example, the person notified may not be able to also secure a deceased's residence and related property. All reasonable efforts must be made to arrange for appropriate security of such property.
3. If any property of a deceased is to be brought to the next of kin or secured for them for safekeeping, the use of any "garbage bags" or similar containers is to be avoided. Appropriate storage boxes should be selected and packed neatly. Property to be returned should be folded (if the item is clothing, for instance) or otherwise appropriately presented. A list of what is to be turned over to family should be given and discussed prior to its presentation since it may include items that are damaged, stained, ripped, or those that have been cut off a person.

E. Injury/Medical Treatment Notice

1. Officer's Responsibility.
 - a. When an injured person requests that a friend or relative be notified, the investigating officer shall perform the notification in a timely manner.
 - 1) If requested by the investigating officer, the Dispatcher will attempt to notify such person in a timely manner. The Dispatcher will provide the officer with the outcome of the attempted contact.
 - 2) When a victim is under eighteen (18) years of age, the investigating officer shall contact a parent or guardian.
 - a) If the officer is unable to make contact with a parent or guardian, it shall be documented in an incident report.
2. Supervisor Responsibility.

- a. Supervisors will ensure that each person that is injured is offered the opportunity to notify a friend or relative, when feasible.
 - b. If the victim is under eighteen (18) years of age and refuses medical treatment, the on-duty supervisor will ensure that a parent or guardian is contacted and made aware of the incident.
 - c. In the event the victim has succumbed to their injuries, or is in imminent danger of death, the on-duty supervisor may request the assistance of a family physician or the Department's Chaplain to make such notification, so long as this does not result in an undue delay.
3. Medical Refusal.
- a. If, in the investigating officer's judgment, an injured person is not in the proper mental state to rationally refuse medical attention, the emergency committal form may be used for such purpose.
 - b. When on scene with medical personnel from the Fire Department, all such refusals shall be administered by the Fire Department's personnel.
- F. Exceptions
- 1. Any exceptions to this policy may be authorized by the Chief of Police, if approved in advance in writing, and only if they are consistent with the requirements of Connecticut General Statutes §§ 7-294mm and 14-108a (b)(1).