

FAMILY CARE

Once the occurrence of an incident/accident has been verified and there is positive confirmation of the crewmembers involved, the next of kin/emergency contacts must be notified. Due to vacations, illness, etc., it may be necessary for any of the members of the management team to be involved in the injury/death notification along with the employee designated individuals (listed in the next of kin/emergency contact form). Some things to consider involving family notification include:

- Always use more than one individual, i.e., program director, chaplain, other team members along with the employee designated individual who is found on the next of kin/emergency notification form.
- Determine who your notification team is going to be prior to an accident. Have back-ups.
- Who should be notified? Spouse? Parents? Siblings? In-laws? Children? This should be on the next of kin notification form.
- Be cognizant of the diversity of family dynamics in this situation.
- Where will the notification occur? Home, work, out of state?
- Be prepared for delays.
- In the case of serious injuries, the most important concern is getting the family to the employee.
- A Family Liaison Officer (described below) should be assigned to each injured or deceased crewmember family.
- The family should learn of the injury or death before the media. Sometimes this is not possible due to the widespread use of smart phones and social media. Whenever possible, tell the family in person.
- If done via the phone, the notification team should meet with the family as soon as possible. If possible, use local law enforcement personnel to physically go to the home to be present for the notification if your agency is unable due to geographical distance or urgency due to media involvement.
- Use simple but clear and concise language when talking to the family whether there has been a death or injury; do not use words such as “passed”.
- Assist with other notifications if desired, such as contract employees (mechanic or pilot), or extended family.
- Be prepared for anger directed at you.
- Don't release names until family agrees.
- If multiple victims, assign a liaison to each family. Assemble in a neutral area that you have pre-determined and specified in your plan.
- Notification can be traumatic to the notification team.
- Be prepared to defuse and/or debrief those involved, particularly if there is more than one death notification or the response from the family is overwhelming.

The Family Liaison Officer(s) (FLO) will be critical to the family and the program as they navigate through the days and weeks that follow the incident/accident. This person is pre-determined by the employee and his or her name can be found in the next of kin/emergency contact form. The FLO(s) will be the point person between the family(ies) and the flight

program. It is therefore key that the FLO(s) be notified immediately and an initial briefing by the program director should follow. A cell phone should be assigned to each FLO to allow the affected family(ies) to contact them when necessary. If they use their own cell phone(which may be easier) plan for reimbursement of data/text/minute charges.

Thanks to the internet there are many excellent resources available online and in book stores on death notification such as “I’ll Never Forget Those Words: A Practical Guide for Death Notification” by Janice Harris Lord and Alan Stewart. A hospital or local chaplains can provide you with assistance as well. Role-playing is a useful tool in understanding the actual process of notification. For those who may be involved, this would be an excellent exercise. The basics of death notification come down to the following: in person, in time, in pairs, in plain language and with compassion.

The family(ies) will have ongoing needs for information and support that will funnel through the Family Liaison. It is important that the family of each affected crewmember know that they are and will continue to be kept informed and that there is genuine concern for them by the program and its staff. Communication is the key in this situation in maintaining positive relations with the family(ies). Ignoring the family and their questions will only result in negative feelings at a time when they are suffering. It is not only inappropriate, but it can increase the opportunity for litigation. Be prepared to deal with the possibility that legal counsel may recommend a shut down in communications between the program and the affected families should a lawsuit be filed. It is extremely important that the family does not feel they have been forgotten by the Program.

Whether crewmembers are injured and require hospitalization or are deceased, a Family Liaison should be assigned to each of the crewmember families. This person is determined based on the employee’s wishes expressed in the next of kin/emergency notification form. The Family Liaison should be assigned a cell phone(or utilize their own) so that the family can contact her or him at any time. This person will function as the liaison between the family and the program and will be with the family on a daily basis.

In the case of serious injury, the Liaison will support the family during hospitalization of their loved one and will assist with daily tasks during this time. In the advent of a fatal accident, the Liaison will also support and assist the family, helping them to deal with funeral, family and benefit issues. In either situation the Family Liaison acts as a “gatekeeper” to assist the family in screening or responding to the media, incoming telephone calls and well-wishers stopping by, whether at home or at the hospital The Family Liaison can also notify the family when the NTSB report of findings is to be released and will assist, along with the program director, in answering any questions that may arise from the report. By request, an NTSB liaison can be assigned to the family(ies) should they have questions regarding the investigation or final report; the FLO can assist in making this connection.

The family(ies) should be extended an invitation to be included in any memorials that are being planned to honor the fallen crewmembers, whether locally or on a national level at the National EMS Memorial Service (www.nemsms.org) held in Colorado Springs , CO or at the Air Medical Memorial(www.airmedicalmemorial.com) in Littleton, CO. If a physical memorial to honor the

fallen crewmembers is planned, the family(ies) should be included in the actual process of choosing and determining what the memorial will be, where it will be, and should be invited to the dedication of the memorial once completed. Each family may want to include something in the memorial that is unique to their loved one and should be allowed to do so. It is critical that the family(ies) feel a part of this process as it is important in the grief and healing process.

On the anniversary of the accident the family(ies) should be invited to any memorial service that the program may plan. They may decline, but it is important to include them in the event. Continuing to keep the family(ies) in communication with your program, if they are interested, may be a welcome connection to their lost loved one. Inviting them to program events and outings as well as phone calls and visits are ways of keeping them a part of the program and involved. Also offering to assist the family(ies) with help at home, such as cutting the grass or other tasks, will in a small way help them to cope with the feeling of being overwhelmed. In the end the family(ies) may choose to decline, but at least make the attempt as they will be grateful for the thought.

Survivor Care

As a society we know how to honor and memorialize those who die in the line-of-duty. There are comprehensive plans in place that direct the affected agencies through the emotional process of honoring their dead. When it comes to caring for and dealing with the survivors of war or other tragic events such as an air medical crash, we fall short. This is not on purpose, but rather the result of not knowing what to do and how to do it. The one of the most difficult aspects of an air medical incident/accident can be how to treat and interface with the surviving crewmembers after the event occurs. There is no “cookie cutter” answer or step-by-step process as each situation and the people involved are different. The intent of this section is to give basic information in the continuing care of survivors within your program. Below are a number of suggestions to incorporate into your planning process.

- Post incident/accident option for administrative leave with pay and benefits for affected employee(s).
 - Time-off needs will vary greatly on an individual basis; survivors should not be pressured to return until they are ready.
 - Be as flexible as possible as it is not only the right thing to do, it is a way to protect one of your organization’s most valuable assets-its personnel.
- Not only does your program need a financial plan for line of duty deaths, it should have one for survivors as well. It is easier and less stressful to work off of a plan than to make it up as you go. This will reduce the possibility of any errors or oversights.
- Dedicate one person in Human Resources to work with each survivor on disability insurance, FMLA, and Workman’s Comp questions and paperwork. The survivor(s) and their family(ies) will need help on these issues.
- Financial devastation can be a consequence of an incident or accident for those involved. The stress of the event plus concern over how to “pay one’s bills” can be overwhelming. Consider how your program will help to alleviate this through appropriate compensation and support. This can help to prevent unnecessary litigation.

- Choose a site prior to an incident/accident for survivors to have DOT lab work obtained, if required. This is important if your program is not hospital-based.
- Response to a traumatic event is individual and should be treated as such. There is no standard way that individuals will handle this type of situation.
- If crewmembers are hospitalized there will need to be accommodations for debriefing if possible.
- Provide the survivor(s), when the time is appropriate, the opportunity for a “question and answer session” with the management team, safety committee(s) and other team members.
- Having no obvious physical injuries is not an indicator there are no psychological injuries present after a major or minor incident/accident.
- Allow the survivor(s) the ability to stay involved and connected to the rest of the organization. Isolating them from their “work” family will only exacerbate any negative issues and feelings they are experiencing.
- Pressuring a survivor(s) to return to flight duty is discouraged. When the crewmember(s) are ready to return to flying, provide them the time and opportunity to do “confidence” flights. Providing the opportunity to get into the aircraft and take short flights without the pressure of a patient onboard can be very beneficial to their recovery and return to duty.
- Be prepared that the survivor(s) will not be able to return to flying.
- Have a set schedule that management and the family liaison officer will use to “check in” on the survivor(s) during the first year. This will depend upon the nature and severity of the incident/accident and the individual survivor(s) response to it.
- Those who survive may face multiple surgeries over a short or long period of time. Pain medication and management can create its own special set of circumstances. Be aware of this possibility and consider how your organization may be able to assist via pre-determined resources and support.
- Survivors need to relate to someone who has “walked in their shoes”. The Survivors Network for Air and Ground Medical Transport can be an invaluable resource to your program. They can be contacted online at www.survivors-network.org or www.facebook.com/survivorsnetwork and email at khaugen@survivors-network.org.
- Digital Safety Stories have been developed to aid management and other flight team members in understanding what the survivor(s) have experienced and how to relate to them. These stories were made possible through a partnership between the Survivors Network and The Center for Medical Transport Research with funding from the MedEvac Foundation. Each one explains an incident/accident from a survivor’s point of view; giving the person watching an opportunity to gain an insight into what the survivor experienced and how it has changed them. They can be accessed through the Survivors Network and The Center for Medical Transport Research website at www.tcmtr.org.

Compassion fatigue is ever present in a world where inconceivable things happen on a daily basis; as a people we deal with the crisis and in short order, move on. Survivors can be inadvertently left behind as they are forced to face long term physical and psychological wounds while the rest of the program moves forward. This is a reality that all too many survivors have faced and your organization should be aware of and prepared for. For more in-depth information the Survivors Network has developed an outstanding resource called “Accident/Incident Preparation & Recovery: Survivors’ perspectives on risk mitigation, preparation, response and

recovery.” This is a valuable tool that can assist your program in how to provide appropriate and compassionate assistance to all survivors. It can be found on the following websites; www.survivors-network.org, www.medevacfoundation.org and www.aamsvisionzero.org.