****MT DNRC****

*****Critical Incident Management Protocol*****

*****Liaison Guidance*****



***May 2022***

**PURPOSE**

To set forth guidance to MT DNRC **Unit or Area** employees acting in the Family Liaison position. It is the intent of the MT DNRC **Unit or Area** to provide immediate assistance and support to survivors, families and coworkers of those who die or are seriously injured in the line of duty; the role of Family Liaison is critical to that effort.

The primary focus of the Critical Incident Management Protocol & Family Liaison Guidance is to provide guidance in our toughest situations. To provide structure in how to work together to address accidents, injuries, or fatalities while employees or others are on duty or in travel status, performing agency missions.

**LEADERS INTENT**

The intent of this guidance is to provide a framework of communication that employees can use in their role as a Family Liaison. It provides a detailed overview of roles and responsibilities before, during, and after a critical incident.

**GENERAL INFORMATION**

MT DNRC **Unit or Area** Office is committed to ensuring the safety and welfare of all its employees. The Unit has developed this guidance to assist Family Liaisons in their roles and responsibilities when dealing with a critical incident that has affected their friend and coworker as well as the family.

We are deeply concerned with employees’ well-being as well as their families. In these most difficult times, we will work together to make the aftermath as easy as possible on everyone.

Communication of the plan to all employees is invaluable. Family Liaison candidates shall participate in an annual review of the plan to learn the processes, look for improvement opportunities and to increase understanding.

**Approved /s/\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_**

 **XXXXXXXXXXXX Date**

 **Unit/Area Manager**

Contents

[Family Liaison Before Incident](#_Toc450737141) 4

[Family Liaison 5](#_Toc450737167)

[Checklist for Family/Hospital Liaison 6](#_Toc450737168)

[Responsibilities of Family/Hospital Liaison 7](#_Toc450737169)

[Hospital Liaison 8](#_Toc450737170)

[Family Liaison 9](#_Toc450737171)

[GUIDANCE FOR COMMUNICATING WITH FAMILIES 10](#_Toc450737172)

## Family Liaison

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Before Incident** | **Location** | **Contact** |
| Determine who might serve as Family Liaisons in the **Unit or Area** and if the list is up-to-date. | p. 5 |  |
| Unit Manager |
| Identify online and personal resources that are available to assist the designated Family Liaison(s) such as grief counselors, peer supporters, administrative support.Examples are:- <http://www.firehero.org/>- <http://www.wffoundation.org/> | Appendix J |  |
| Identify internal policies that may apply when assisting the family. For example:-a work-related death autopsy may be necessary to ensure family death benefit-Determine what death benefits (funeral and burial costs) would be covered by the agency-Procedures for processing personnel papers-Determine what advice should be given for filing claims | Appendices C & G |  |

 **NOTES:**

# Family Liaison

**Considerations** **for Selecting a Family Liaison(s):**

The Family Liaison is critical in facilitating communication between the agency and the family. The Family Liaison must be capable of ensuring that agency needs are met while providing assistance to families. This balancing act occurs in an emotionally charged atmosphere that can be stressful to the Liaison. Agencies should be mindful of selecting the appropriate person to act as Family Liaison. Designate one individual listed in the Employee Emergency Contact Information or in the absence of that, select one Family Liaison per family but consider the need for other individuals to assist.

If a Family Liaison must be selected versus pre-determined by the injured party:

* Try to have local Liaisons, if possible.
* The Family Liaison should be available to the family within the first 24 hours.
* Being a Family Liaison is a long-term commitment that will often impact work. Family Liaisons can work with families for years.
* Consider identifying a pair of employees to serve as Family Liaisons. This will provide a backup contact and allow Family Liaisons to brief each other.
* Carefully weigh the pros (immediate rapport/trust) and cons (emotional involvement/lack of objectivity) of assigning a Family Liaison who is a friend of the family.
* Select a steady, levelheaded individual who is a good listener and communicator and will likely maintain their objectivity.
* A Family Liaison must be willing to take on the job, with an understanding of the emotional and time demands involved. Allow the selected Liaison the opportunity to decline the assignment.
* Work with the Family Liaison to develop a transition plan to allow a return to normal duties.

**MT DNRC Unit or Area Family Liaisons**

****

# Checklist for Family/Hospital Liaison

**The Critical Incident Management Protocol APPENDICES contain multiple resources**

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Phase 1 Respond** | **Priority** | **Completed by** | **Date/Time** |
| Determine which hospital patient is being transported to and respond safely. | Phase 1 | Y/N and Print Name |  |
|  |
| Identify yourself as DNRC Hospital Liaison and begin to coordinate hospital arrangements with hospital staff. | Phase 1 |  |  |
| **Phase 2 Assess** | **Priority** | **Completed** | **Date/Time** |
| Arrange for private waiting facilities for family and fellow employees to assemble (where possible). | Phase 2 | Y/N and Print Name |  |
|  |
| Strategize with Immediate Supervisor, Line Officer, Law Enforcement, Safety Officer and Hospital Liaison on notification of next of kin. Determine who, how and when to notify next of kin and if any cultural or religious requirements are necessary. **See Family Notification Guidelines (Appendix B).** | Phase 2 |  |  |
| Determine need to establish media staging area and briefing area depending upon significance of the event (coordinate with Unit Manager/Line Officer). | Phase 2 |  |  |
| Confirm hospital is aware that family has arrived and make certain family is updated on patient condition before others. | Phase 2 |  |  |
| For their safety, transport the family home, with approval from the Line Officer. If family members refuse, ensure that the family arrives safely back to their residence. | Phase 2 |  |  |
| Coordinate with Immediate Supervisor to confirm that Workers’ Comp. has been notified. Inform medical provider billing offices that all related bills be sent directly to Montana State Fund. | Phase 2 |  |  |
| Collect all information on the incident and relay to Process Tracker once designated. If unsure of whom the Process Tracker is, ask Unit Manager/Line Officer. | Phase 2 |  |  |
| **Phase 3 Manage** | **Priority** | **Completed by** | **Date/Time** |
| In the event of a prolonged stay, work with the Family Liaison to provide sufficient support at the hospital. | Phase 3 | Y/N and Print Name |  |
|  |
| Hand-off to Family Liaison. If Hospital Liaison will also be the Family Liaison, continue to the Family Liaison checklist. | Phase 3 |  |  |
| If uncertain, check with Line Officer to determine cultural or religious background for the family. | Phase 3 |  |  |
| Make yourself known and available to family immediately and for long duration. Reassure family you’ve accepted position by choice. | Phase 3 |  |  |
| Work with Hospital Liaison (if applicable) to coordinate a smooth transition. If no Hospital Liaison has been appointed, you may need to assume both roles. | Phase 3 |  |  |
| Request a designated representative to speak for the family. | Phase 3 |  |  |
| Maintain a log of all contacts to include decisions and requests of the family and agency [(restrict access to all Personally Identifiable Information (PII)]. | Phase 3 |  |  |
| Relay details of incident to family, with Unit Manager/Line Officer approval, prior to releasing to agency employees or media. Work with Unit Manager/Line Officer to advise family regarding media contacts and their preference for handling inquiries. | Phase 3 |  |  |
| Advise family of other official roles and processes related to the incident and their responsibilities | Phase 3 |  |  |
| Act as facilitator to coordinate and communicate family needs with agency officials. | Phase 3 |  |  |
| If applicable, determine if the family would like agency involvement in planning the funeral, wake and memorial service. If yes, refer to Funeral Liaison checklist, if no continue with Family Liaison checklist. | Phase 3 |  |  |
| Arrange for delivery of employee’s personal belongings to the family. | Phase 3 |  |  |
| Arrange for return of government property. | Phase 3 |  |  |
| Collect all information on the incident and relay to Process Tracker once designated. If unsure of whom the Process Tracker is, ask Unit Manager/Line Officer. | Phase 3 |  |  |

 **NOTES:**

# Responsibilities of Family/Hospital Liaison

### Hospital Liaison

**Protocols and Procedures**

**The Critical Incident Management Protocol APPENDICES contain multiple resources**

**PROCEDURE TIME FRAME: As noted in Checklist**

1. Determine which hospital patient is being transported to and respond safely. If patients are taken to multiple hospitals ensure Line Officer is aware.
2. Identify yourself to the family and Emergency Room staff as the DNRC Hospital Liaison and begin to coordinate hospital arrangements and help the family where you can.
3. Arrange for private waiting facilities for family and fellow employees to assemble (where possible).
4. Strategize with Immediate Supervisor, Line Officer, Law Enforcement, Safety Officer and Hospital Liaison on notification of next of kin. Determine who, how and when to notify next of kin and if any cultural or religious requirements are necessary. See tab marked “Family Notification Guidelines”
5. Determine need to establish media staging area and briefing area depending upon significance of the event (coordinate with Unit Manager/Line Officer).
6. Confirm hospital is aware that family has arrived and make certain family is updated on patient condition before others.
7. For their safety, transport the family home, with approval from the Line Officer. If family members refuse, ensure that the family arrives safely back to their residence.
8. Coordinate with Immediate Supervisor to confirm that Workers’ Comp. has been notified. Inform medical provider billing offices that all related bills be sent directly to Montana State Fund.
9. In the event of a prolonged stay, work with the Family Liaison to provide sufficient support at the hospital.
10. Hand-off to Family Liaison. If Hospital Liaison will also be the Family Liaison, continue to the Family Liaison checklist. Briefing during hand-off should include passing on any pertinent documentation, completed and status of processes not yet completed.
11. Prepare yourself physically, mentally and emotionally before visiting the family.
12. Wearing a uniform or professional attire may be appropriate for the initial visit.
13. Have another person accompany you on your first visit; establish his/her role.
14. Anticipate questions and be prepared. Keep an ongoing record of activities so you can remember to follow up on all requests.  See Family Support Checklist.
15. Ensure the needs and desires of the family are respected. The employee’s role is to the family first and the Agency is second.
16. Do not assume you know what the families and survivors want…ASK. Do not burden the family with unnecessary requests or demands. Try to ask ‘yes’ or ‘no’ questions when decisions are required.
17. Be prepared to meet the family at other locations, such as hospitals, helicopter/ambulance shuttle points and other public areas.
18. Coordinate with other Family Liaisons in the event of multiple fatalities or serious injuries. Consider scheduling daily conference calls or meetings.

##

# Family Liaison

**Protocols and Procedures**

**The Critical Incident Management Protocol APPENDICES contain multiple resources**

**PROCEDURE TIME FRAME: As noted in Checklist**

1. Check with Line Officer to determine cultural or religious background for the family.
2. Make yourself known and available to family immediately and for long duration. Reassure family you’ve accepted position by choice.
3. Work with Hospital Liaison (if applicable) to coordinate a smooth transition. If no Hospital Liaison has been appointed, you may need to assume both roles.
4. Request a designated representative to speak for the family.
5. Maintain a log of all contacts to include decisions and requests of the family and agency.
6. Relay details of incident to family, with Unit Manager/Line Officer approval, prior to releasing to agency employees or media. Work with Unit Manager/Line Officer to advise family regarding media contacts and their preference for handling inquiries.
7. Advise family of other official roles and processes related to the incident and their responsibilities
8. Act as facilitator to coordinate and communicate family needs with agency officials.
9. If applicable, determine if the family would like agency involvement in planning the funeral, wake and memorial service. If yes, refer to Funeral Liaison checklist, if no continue with Family Liaison checklist.
10. Arrange for delivery of the employee’s personal belongings to the family once no longer needed by claims/law enforcement. The belongings should be packaged in a dignified manner (for example, not a garbage bag). Do not return any belongings with blood on them or other effects of the incident (such as burns or scorch marks), unless requested specifically by the family. The property should be given to the family at an appropriate time, in a caring manner. Depending on this situation, the return of the property may be ceremonial.
11. Arrange for return of government property that the employee may have had at home (for example, a government laptop computer). Except where safety is a concern, this should be accomplished well after the funeral in an appropriate, caring and coordinated fashion. Report all information to designated Process Tracker. If unsure of whom the Process Tracker is, contact Dispatch.
12. Assist employee or beneficiary(s) identifying lost or damaged personal property. Coordinate with Personnel and others to ensure completion of the appropriate claim forms and documentation. Claims personnel provide the necessary information and assistance to the Family Liaison and/or claimant in working through the claims process.

# Guidance for Communicating with Families

**Communicating With Families**

This section is a summary of key principles that are useful for communicating effectively with next of kin and other family members.

 The first principles are for responding to emotion. Strong emotional responses by the next of kin can be expected and may be very helpful to long-term acceptance and readjustment.

 “Listening” is different from “hearing”—people hear with their ears, but listen with their minds. No matter what the family says, do not argue. It will not help and usually makes the situation worse.

 Negative information and high-stress situations tend to make people defensive. Almost any information can be presented either negatively or positively.

Telling people what to do and starting sentences with the word “you” are common triggers for defensiveness. Defensiveness can also be reduced by avoiding general statements and dealing instead with specific needs.

The key factor to giving complicated information is breaking it into small pieces. Do not assume that the information has registered or has been understood. The guideline in this section can save a lot of misunderstanding and future problems.

 Assist the family in establishing achievable goals. Some examples may be arrangements for funerals, memorials, meeting with Benefits Coordinator/Workers Comp coordinator, etc. Allow the family time to make decisions and do not make decisions for them. Goal-setting is a valuable tool for avoiding problems and keeping communication open. A long-term family representative assignment can lead to over dependence on the part of the next of kin and a dread of letting go of a relationship. Goal setting helps to keep the process focused on the end point of the assignment. A transitional meeting to officially end the assignment is usually helpful for both the family representative and the next of kin. Assure the family that you are still available, but your primary focus will now be returning to your normal duties.

 Communicate family/agency decisions to key agency officials. Chain of command is not required in this circumstance.

In the case of an accident on an incident managed by an Incident Management Team (IMT), the Family Liaison shall have a lead person or Coordinator who participates in IMT briefings and strategy meetings to relay information.

**Follow-up** **Contacts**

The Family Liaison should encourage the next of kin to begin funeral arrangements, with consideration given to the return of the remains, desires of the family, when travel arrangements can be made for family members, and agency logistics. Work with appointed Funeral Liaison or assume duties as identified under Funeral Liaison tab.

 The Family Liaison in, coordination with the Immediate Supervisor/Hospital Liaison, may need to help the family complete the forms and processing for:

* Workers’ Compensation
* Social Security Administration
* Veteran's Administration (if applicable)
* Public Safety Officers Benefit Program (if applicable)
* Agency benefit claims (e.g., retirement, life insurance, and Final Paycheck)

Stay in touch with family. Many times family and friends will care for the immediate needs of the bereaved well, but after a few days this support often disappears especially days after services are held. Would-be supporters might feel that a grieving person would rather face their loss alone. This is the time when the Family Liaison and supporters are needed the most and must stay in touch more than ever before. Provide families with access to support programs and resources such as Employee Assistance Program (EAP), Wildland Firefighter Foundation, and encourage networking with other affected families and coworkers.

Document and coordinate external offers of assistance and help the family determine the employees membership in organizations that can provide assistance.