



# MISSOURI FIRE SERVICE

Funeral Assistance Team



## FUNERAL SERVICE GUIDE

[www.mofirefuneral.org](http://www.mofirefuneral.org)

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1-888-4911HELP

**This article appeared in the March / April 2005 issue of National Fire & Rescue. It offers an excellent perspective to keep in mind when planning a funeral. We thought we should share it with you, as it sums up our beliefs and follows the ideals in which our funeral protocols were written.**

*Dear Fire Service Professional,*

*We published Chief Dan Jones' editorial in our March/April issue and have received numerous letters and e-mails in response to his opinions. To make sure we're reaching all of our audience with this information, we'd like to share it with you here.*

*Sincerely,  
The Editors of National Fire & Rescue*

## **WHEN EMOTIONS TAKE OVER: PLANNING A FD FUNERAL**

This is an uncomfortable subject to write about, and it will be uncomfortable for you to read. I have thought about this for a long time, and it is a subject that doesn't get discussed but should be. It should be thought out and talked about, especially before you find yourself—or your department—in the awful position of planning a fire department funeral. I am not talking about a funeral for a line-of-duty death. I am talking about the terrible situation where a member of your department dies or is killed off duty, and there is a push to provide for a traditional fire department funeral.

I have faced that situation more than once, not only within my own department, but also in departments of colleagues, when an active firefighter or fire officer passes away after a brief illness or an accident. Everyone in the department is totally shocked and caught off guard. We respond to situations all the time that involve tragic or untimely deaths and think we are steeled against it, but when it is one of our own, we react with shock and grief like any normal human being. It is especially hard if the death was totally unexpected or happened to a person of youth or someone in his prime. The natural reaction is to want to do all you can to show your respect for that colleague and to honor his family. We have many traditions in the fire service, and funerals rich with ceremony, honor and memorable symbolism are one of the strongest.

The traditions of fire department funerals have many elements and individual acts of honor. The more recognizable traditions include uniformed pallbearers and honor guards; Maltese cross floral arrangements; ringing or sounding of final alarms; presentation of badges, helmets or flags to family members; fire trucks in the funeral procession; rows of uniformed firefighters lining the walk for the family at the funeral; a black-draped fire truck to bear the casket in the procession; bagpipes; crossed aerials over the funeral procession route; and several others. All of these elements are intended to show honor and respect to a fallen colleague. Fire department funerals, whether line-of-duty or not, are always emotional and leave lasting impressions on everyone who attends and even those who see it passing by.

Thank God most fire departments will never have to contend with a line-of-duty death and the subsequent funeral ceremony. This is absolutely the most horrible event for any department and has ramifications, both short- and long-term, that only those who have experienced it can fully understand. However, the Fire Service has a strange fascination with the traditions of funerals, and the emotional pressure to provide such a funeral for a lost member—even when it doesn't come in the line of duty—can be great both within the department and from the family. This situation can create a very uncomfortable dilemma for a department and its leaders.

The question I pose is this:

***If you provide a full-honors fire department funeral for a member who is lost off duty, and you use all of the traditions that you know of and can provide, what will you do should a member of the department be lost in the line of duty at a later time?***

You have inadvertently created a situation whereby you have nothing extra to provide. I have seen this occur, and it is a very difficult situation that would have been avoided if some restraint had been exercised during a difficult and emotional time. I think there is a greater potential for this problem in smaller departments that have never, or only very rarely, experienced the loss of a member. When it does happen, emotions take over and everyone wants to do all they can, and before anyone thinks about it, a full-honors fire department funeral is provided in a situation that didn't really warrant it, which in turn may take away from a future loss.

Don't get me wrong. The loss of any member of a department is tough, and anyone who serves in this noble service should be honored for that service. I lost a member of my department several years ago in an off-duty accident. It was very emotional and we wanted to honor his service. But, with the full understanding of his family, we did not provide a full-honors type of service. I believe that several traditions should always be reserved for a line-of-duty death service. By holding some traditions back only for this purpose, the recognition of line-of-duty sacrifice is preserved. For example, I believe the tradition of bearing the casket on the hose bed of a fire engine and sounding the last alarm should be used only in a line-of-duty service. That is only my belief and yours may differ, but my point is that we need to keep some of the traditions more sacred.

It is both OK and advisable to include some fire department traditions and ceremonies of honor in the funeral of a lost colleague, even if the nature of loss was unrelated to the fire service. Just don't use all the traditions. Save some of the ceremonies and symbols. The greatest of your traditions, whatever you decide those are, should be reserved for a line-of-duty-death funeral. The other part to consider is the wishes of the family, along with their religious beliefs and stipulations. These are two important parts of the process that must be considered before suggesting the use of elements from fire service traditions.

## PURPOSE

Fire Departments throughout the State of Missouri have had to, or may face the difficult task of being involved in an official funeral for one or more of its members. One of the more difficult questions the department must decide upon is what types of funeral honors are appropriate for the deceased.

In making a decision, primary consideration must be given to the family's feelings and desires, as well as past or future practices of the department.

## SCOPE

This guideline defines different levels of honor with corresponding suggested arrangement options.

To establish consistency, it is recommended that departments adopt a funeral protocol plan prior to its need.

*During the entire funeral process, the department must highly consider the deceased member's family's wishes.* Before any plan is instituted, the deceased member's family must agree with the department's intended participation. The family may choose to forgo some suggested and appropriate level of honor services, however, family should not influence an inappropriate increase of the level of honor services.

## ASSISTANCE

The Missouri Fire Service Funeral Assistance Team is available at all times to answer questions or assist in funeral matters. This committee has members who have been trained on funeral matters and people with extensive funeral experience. We can assist you in many ways. We will respond to your Line of Duty incidents bringing necessary supplies and knowledge of the benefits processes. We will also provide guidance for non line of duty incidents as well as offering our supplies for use. The supplies are offered on a first request basis with priority given to Line of Duty incidents.

The team can be reached for immediate activation by calling 1-888-4911HELP, or for general questions, via email at [info@mofirefuneral.org](mailto:info@mofirefuneral.org), or through our website at [www.mofirefuneral.org](http://www.mofirefuneral.org).

Our website offers downloadable ceremony protocols and links to online information that may be of assistance, as well as postings of funeral notices.

## LEVEL OF SERVICES

### LEVEL ONE (1) – SERVICE & SACRIFICE HONORS

This is the **HIGHEST** level of ceremony. It is reserved for firefighters who die as a result of **line of duty incident or direct job related event**. This may include members whose death has stemmed from injuries or illness directly sustained during active duty. This *may* include heart attack, stroke, and vascular rupture. This level honors both the **SERVICE AND SACRIFICE** of our fire service member. THIS IS ONLY FOR LINE OF DUTY DEATHS. MANY AGENCIES LIQUIDATE THE VALUE OF THESE HONORS BY APPLYING THEM IN NON-LINE OF DUTY INSTANCES.

American Flag (or if military veteran of war)	Full Fire Apparatus Procession
Badge Shrouds	Firefighter Funeral Flag
Bagpipers	Firefighters Visitation Walk Through
Bell Ceremony	Flags ½ mast * (only by order of Governor)
Bugler (or if Military Veteran)	Honor Guards – Color Guards
Casket Vigil	Ladders – Crossed or with Large Flag
Eulogy	Last Alarm Ceremony
Fire Apparatus Caisson (used in place of hearse)	Sea of Blue (firefighters march)
Fire Apparatus used as Flower transport unit	Station Bunting Fire
	Vehicle Bunting

### LEVEL TWO (2) – SERVICE HONORS

This level of service is available to firefighters who die while an active member, but the death was not directly job or duty related. This level honors the **SERVICE** of our fire service member.

Badge Shrouds	Firefighter Funeral Flag
Bagpipers	Firefighter Visitation Walk Through
Bell Ceremony	Hearse
Bugler (If Military Veteran)	Ladders-Crossed or with Large Flag
Casket Vigil (Single or Double Member)	Last Alarm Ceremony
Department Apparatus in Procession	Station Bunting
Eulogy	Vehicle Bunting Fire
Fire Apparatus as Flower transport unit	

### LEVEL THREE (3) – SERVICE HONORS

This level of service is available to inactive members that is not job or duty related or for the death of an affiliate member. This level honors the **SERVICE** of our fire service member.

Badge Shrouds	Firefighter Funeral Flag
Bell Ceremony	Hearse
Bugler (If Military Veteran)	Station Bunting
Casket Vigil – (Single Member)	

## DEFINITIONS

**Line of Duty:** A death that is the result of traumatic injury or illness directly sustained while performing duties.

**Active Member:** A full-time or volunteer member of an agency serving in an active capacity.

**Inactive Member:** A retired or former member of an agency who remains in good standing.

**Affiliate Member:** An individual that has served in some other capacity with the agency.  
(i.e.: Director, Commissioner, Trustee)

**Non-Duty Related Death:** Death that results from injury or illness that is not directly related in the performance of their duties.

**Fire Apparatus Caisson:** Fire Department Apparatus used to carry the casket for line of duty related deaths.

**Fire Apparatus Flower Unit:** Fire Department Apparatus that transport flowers during the procession.

**Casket Vigil:** One or Two Uniformed Fire Service Members standing guard at casket during the visitation.

**Color Guard - Honor Guard:** A formal - trained unit of fire service staff that carry ceremonial flags and other implements that participate in marching and other formalized drill procedures.

**Badge Shroud:** Black elastic, horizontally covering the uniform badge. Also known as a "mourning band".

**Funeral Bunting:**

**Station:** Mourning drapes that are placed on the outside of the fire station.

**Vehicle:** Mourning drapes that are used to adorn the Fire Apparatus participating in the caisson or flower unit.

**Firefighters Visitation Walk Through:** A predetermined time during the visitation when uniformed members and dignitaries enter for a unified tribute.

**Sea of Blue (Firefighters March):** Non detailed uniformed members and visiting department members' procession. Members may walk in a procession or create a corridor that the casket passes through, or both.

**Bell Ceremony:** Portable Fire Service Bell that is tolled at the conclusion of the bell ceremony reading.

**Last Alarm:** Dispatch tones out agency and reads last alarm information, which includes demographic and career information.

**Flag:**

**American:** Provided to honorable discharged Military Veterans by the Federal Government. Can be used to drape the casket of a Veteran

**Fire Service:** A flag that may be purchased from our group used to adorn the casket of non-military firefighters.

February 2016

## Honoring fire service personnel who make the ultimate sacrifice

By Brian Zinanni



By implementing a funeral guideline that outlines honors that will be afforded to a member in relation to the manner of death, you will be consistent in your application of those honors.

Working in public safety, we all know that, to a degree, we must distance ourselves from the events to which we respond. It's not our emergency but someone else's, and they call on us to assist them. By depersonalizing the incident, we have the ability to maintain an objective perspective so we can make appropriate decisions

based on facts, standards, and guidelines vs. emotion.

Today, I want to talk to you about a very difficult topic: honoring our public safety officers. When a tragedy occurs within our own organization, maintaining objective decision-making abilities is extremely difficult because this is now *our* emergency. We often act on emotion vs. those facts, standards, and guidelines we employ when making objective decisions for someone else's emergency.

### ULTIMATE HONORS

Before we get too much further into this topic, I want to ask you a few questions: Have you ever seen a military honors funeral ceremony? Have you had the opportunity to see honors provided to a hero who was killed in action while actively serving this nation? How about the veterans who faithfully served but then died later on in life from a cause that was not related to their service? Are the honors in these examples the same honors? The answer is no, they are not. The military takes great pride in honoring all who have honorably served, but those who make the ultimate sacrifice are given ultimate honors.

Why have we had such a hard time grasping this concept and applying it to public safety? Within the military, specific guidelines outline what honors are appropriate for the type of incident being considered. These honors are provided by specialty teams that, other than through the brotherhood of service, generally do not have a direct personal connection. Organizations exist in public safety that can assist you with planning a service for one of your members. But, in general, it is the department that has faced a loss that is directly involved in the planning process. It is personal, and it hurts! This is the point where I feel we in public safety derail.

## **TRAGEDY PREPLANNING**

Preplanning our response to incidents in our communities is very common. We evaluate certain target hazards that we face and come up with a coordinated plan to address them. Preplanning these incidents affords the opportunity to objectively evaluate our resources, identify our needs, and outline a standardized response. This gives us the ability to apply our plan consistently every time we face this target hazard.

How many of you have a plan in place that guides your response to the loss of a member of your organization? It is important that every organization develop a funeral guideline for its respective organization. For the same reasons that we preplan our target hazards, consistent application of a funeral plan is vital to your department. This may seem a little farfetched, but how your organization responds to the death of one of its members will become an expectation for families in the future as well as scrutinized by families in the past.

Without a formalized preplan to guide your actions, many agencies react out of shock and emotion vs. the objective perspective we strive to maintain for everyone else's emergencies. Many agencies work very hard to justify why every honor should be afforded to a member, regardless of whether the member died a hero in the line of duty or not. I fielded a call from an organization's member asking us to provide full honors to a member who died in an off-duty accident, stating, "Well, he was special to us and he deserves it." When asked to identify which members of the organization were not special and should not be afforded full line-of-duty honors if they die off duty, the member was silent on the phone as the realization set in.

## **FUNERAL GUIDELINES**

One of the best articles I have ever read that relates to this topic was written by Chief Dan Jones, titled "When Emotions Take Over: Planning a Fire Department Funeral." The most compelling quote in the article states: "If you provide a full-honors fire department funeral for a member who is lost off duty, and you use all of the traditions that you know of and can provide, what will you do should a member of your department be lost in the line of duty at a later time?"

I encourage you to think about this message. Think about how the military provides honors to all members and how those honors are appropriately scaled to preserve the sanctity of the honors so as to not dilute their value. If we place every firefighter on top of the fire truck for a procession to the cemetery, no longer will there be any power in that tradition for those who pay the ultimate sacrifice.

By implementing a funeral guideline that outlines honors that will be afforded to a member in relation to the manner of death (line of duty, active duty, retiree), you will be consistent in your application of those honors, serve as good stewards protecting the value of certain line-of-duty death honors, and reduce some of the stressors you will face because of the loss of a member of your organization. Remember: What you do today becomes an expectation for tomorrow.

**Brian Zinanni** is a 31-year veteran of emergency services and lieutenant medical officer with the Clayton (MO) Fire Department. He serves as the state Coordinator for the [National Fallen Firefighters Foundation \(NFFF\) Local Assistance State Team](#) program and state coordinator for the [Missouri Fire Service Funeral Assistance Team](#). Zinanni is a member of IAFF Local 2665, volunteers with several NFFF programs including Survivors Conference and Hal Bruno Kids Camp, participates in Memorial Weekend events, and is the Missouri State Coordinators for the [Supporting Heroes](#) organization.