



## OFFICER-DOWN CRISIS RESPONSE



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### LESSONS FROM A LIFETIME OF SERVICE

## Funeral Protocols – Style and Content

By: John Cooley

I have reviewed many police funeral protocols and I am always looking for more because they are all so different. As a professional funeral coordinator I'm always interested in learning how I can do my job better and help an agency in crisis be able to plan the best funeral possible. I learn something new at every funeral I help with and from every protocol I read. I am amazed at the differences and what topics agencies prioritize.

Every protocol I have reviewed has a section on death notifications and benefits and they should because these are two critically important topics. When I was the funeral coordinator for the Los Angeles Police Department I was on the immediate notification list and got involved in many death notifications. My responsibilities also included insuring that the surviving family received every benefit they were entitled too. This is vital information for any protocol. I think that the best information about notifications and benefits is from the Concerns of Police Survivors (COPS) guidelines titled The Trauma of Law Enforcement Death.

However, as a person who has just been made responsible for planning a police funeral, especially a line-of-duty funeral, I need a protocol that will tell me everything I need to know about planning a funeral, right now. These are hard to find.

The primary responsibilities involved in planning a funeral are personnel, logistics, traffic, church, and memorial park. The notifications have already been made and the benefits won't become important until after the funeral.

As a coordinator I only have a few days to make all the arrangements. I've read protocols that spend 3 pages on the actual funeral planning and some that have 28 pages devoted to this topic. I assume that those who only allocate a few pages to planning details don't think the planning is that difficult or complicated or have nothing to offer. Thankfully, others do. My personal check- list is over 130 items and it's all about funeral planning.

Some of the important issues an agency should be prepared for by having a protocol include:

1. Personnel. The Los Angeles Police Department has over 9,500 officers and it has a plan on how officers will be allocated to staff a funeral and cover the field duties of the division involved. I know of one four person agency that had an officer killed in the line-of-duty. Every personnel need for the funeral was going to have to come from other agencies. A protocol would be critical to help explain how this was going to happen.
2. Logistics. A lot of material support will be needed and much of it will need to come from other government entities. Barricades, cones, portable toilets, water, signs, are just of a few of the things needed. Knowing ahead of time what will be needed and how to get it will save a lot of frustration and time if the need rises.
3. Traffic. Church parking, the motorcade formation and route, and interment parking are the major traffic related tasks. Detailed plans are important and can be preplanned.
4. The church demands a seating plan, an entrance and exit plan, and details about the services. The protocol should provide guidelines as to how to do these tasks.
5. The interment ceremonies mandate an efficient plan to get everyone parked and in formation so that the services and honors ceremonies can begin in a timely manner. It's unacceptable, as one funeral I attended, to have officers still walking up to the ceremonies and having them meet people who are leaving because it's over. A comprehensive protocol will reduce the potential for this occurring.

A funeral planning protocol shouldn't be a lengthy narrative explanation of what to do, why to do it and how to do it. It's a list of what to do, when to do it and how to do it. Bullet points work great. Any critical explanations can be included but must be brief. Detailed explanations or rational or supporting material can be included in the addenda. The universal A, B, C's of police report writing apply to a protocol also, Accurate, Brief, Complete.

Planning for a police funeral, the unthinkable, is difficult for many agencies. But, like all law enforcement contingency plans, it is one protocol that should be on file but hopefully will never be implemented. Planning for the death of an officer is not a morbid exercise in being prepared for the unknown or the unlikely. It is being prepared for the unexpected. Agencies should prepare for the unexpected even though it is the unthinkable.

I would appreciate copies of agency protocols. I share information I have with any agency if it will help them and I incorporate new information and ideas into my planning guideline so that I can offer the best services possible to an agency. I can be contacted through my website at [www.Policefunerals.com](http://www.Policefunerals.com).

ABOUT THE AUTHOR: A 30 year veteran of the Los Angeles Police Department, John Cooley has coordinated over 80 police funeral and memorial services. Throughout his career and into retirement, John has dedicated himself to raising the professional standards by which departments honor and lay to rest our fallen heroes.