



Responding to a Death in the Virginia Tech Community

The death of a campus member calls for a sensitive response, but sometime people are uncertain about what should be done for family, friends, and colleagues. In addition, academic and business functions of the university must continue to run smoothly.

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The following guidelines can support supervisors and co-workers in reacting carefully and consistently to an employee death, allowing students and employees to return to normalcy as soon as possible. Of course, each situation is unique, and individual judgment is always necessary.

If you hear of a VT employee death, please contact the department in which the person worked and [VT Human Resources](#). The department and Human Resources will work together to follow the proper protocol, including confirmation of the death, and appointment of a Coordinator.

For advice regarding the death of a Virginia Tech student, contact the [Student Life Office](#) at 540-231-3787.

This website is designed primarily to address the business side of an employee death. However, co-workers are likely to have strong emotional reactions that need to be acknowledged as well. Information regarding University and community supports can be found at Virginia Tech Work/Life Resources (<http://www.ucc.vt.edu> or 540-231-3213), or Employee Relations (www.hr.vt.edu/employeescorner/eap/ or 540-231-5303).



Confirmation of Death

- to be completed by VT Human Resources -

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You may hear of a death through a variety of sources: newspaper obituary, television or radio, law enforcement, friend, family, another employee, etc. Please contact VT Human Resources (HR) regarding any such information. An erroneous report of death could be damaging to Virginia Tech as well as to anyone involved. HR will proceed with the proper protocol, including confirmation of the death, and appointment of a coordinator within the individual's department.

Acceptable Sources for Confirmation of Death

- i) Newspaper obituaries
- ii) Funeral homes
- iii) Law enforcement officials
- iv) Hospitals
- v) County Bureau of Vital Statistics

- In case of an on-campus death call the [Virginia Tech Police Department](#) immediately at 9-1-1 on campus.
- If the cause of death may be work related, call [Environmental, Health & Safety Services](#) at 540-231-5895 for reporting and investigation.
- Keep in mind that people frequently have the same name. Be absolutely sure that you have the right person.

Once the death has been positively confirmed, the department should appoint the Coordinator who will assume responsibility for the following:

- Completing the death notification form
- Submitting the form to appropriate divisions of the university
- Submitting the Virginia Tech [Separation Notice](#) (P4A)
- Notifying colleagues outside Virginia Tech
- Managing personal and professional possessions
- Providing referrals to options for emotional support
- Referring media contacts to [University Relations](#)



Appointment of a Coordinator

The Coordinator acts as a link between the department in which the deceased was employed and the rest of the university to assure proper communication and maintain optimal business functioning. The employee's department should appoint the Coordinator. The ideal Coordinator has the necessary authority to accomplish the tasks, along with good interpersonal and communication skills.

Coordinator responsibilities include:

- Completion and submission of the death report which automatically goes to departments within the university who may need to be aware.
- Contacting the family regarding
 - Condolences ([link to descriptor](#))
 - Employee services such as [Benefits](#)
 - Personal possessions
- Assuring the continuity of critical work normally performed by the deceased employee included such activities as research, course instruction, care of animals, etc.
- Contacting colleagues from other departments or universities who were working with the deceased on joint projects
- Discussing any issues regarding publicity with [University Relations](#)
- Arranging for inventory of personal and professional possessions
- Informing the Office of the President to assure that condolences be sent
- Consulting with [Work/Life Resources](#), [Employee Relations](#), and/or [Dean of Students Office](#) regarding emotional support for co-workers and/or students

To assist the Coordinator, this web site contains a checklist of necessary tasks (8). While this campus death protocol is comprehensive, each death is unique and requires judgment to ensure a compassionate and supportive response from the campus.

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Virginia Tech Employee Death Notification

Directions for Completion and Submission

Do not forward until death has been confirmed with
Virginia Tech Human Resources

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This notification report is to be completed in reference to the death of an employee of Virginia Tech. Please complete to the best of your knowledge, leaving blank any fields for which you do not have accurate information.

Please forward to departments which should be aware of the death within 24 to 48 hours, using your discretion as to which are appropriate. [Click here](#) to review a list of suggested departments.

The notification form is not yet available electronically. Please print and copy as needed.

Also, please be sure to submit the [VT Separation Notice](#) (P4 A) and follow indicated guidelines

Virginia Tech Employee Death Notification

- CONFIDENTIAL -

INFORMATION ABOUT THE DECEASED EMPLOYEE			
Last Name	First Name	Middle Initial (if available)	Gender <input type="checkbox"/> Male <input type="checkbox"/> Female
Date of Birth		Date of Death	
Location of Death (off campus, on campus, in the field, in another country)			
The Deceased was (check all that apply): <div style="text-align: center; margin-top: 10px;"> <input type="checkbox"/> Staff <input type="checkbox"/> Retiree still working on campus <input type="checkbox"/> Wage Employee <input type="checkbox"/> Teaching Faculty <input type="checkbox"/> Research Faculty <input type="checkbox"/> A/P Faculty <input type="checkbox"/> Post Doc/Visiting Scholar <input type="checkbox"/> Volunteer <input type="checkbox"/> Alumnus </div>			
Unit/Department and address			
Job Title and/or Working Title (if applicable)		Employee ID #	
Date of initial employment with Virginia Tech. (month /year)	Was the deceased currently officially employed? <input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No	If not currently employed, when did s/he leave the university? (month /year)	
Name of Supervisor or Department Chair	Supervisor/Chair's phone	Supervisor/Chair's email	
DEPARTMENT COORDINATOR			
Name		Department/Office	
Email		Phone	

PLEASE CONFIRM YOUR RECEIPT OF THIS NOTIFICATION WITH THE DEPARTMENT COORDINATOR AS SOON AS POSSIBLE



Departments to Which Notification May Be Submitted by Department Coordinator

(Refer to Department Responsibilities referenced on [Separation Notice](#) as well)
As appropriate, the following offices may need to be notified.

- Human Resources (*always notified*)
 - [Benefits](#)
- [Employee Relations](#)
- [VT Police Department](#)
- [Psychological Services Center \(they may expect calls regarding counseling\)](#)
- [Marriage and Family Therapy \(they may expect calls regarding counseling\)](#)
- [Parking Services](#)
- [University Relations](#)
- [Communications Network Services](#) (CNS)
- [Development and Giving](#)
- [Risk Management](#)
- [University Libraries](#)
- [Faculty](#) or [Staff](#) Senates
- [Hokie Passport Office](#)
- [Office of the Provost](#) or [Executive VP/Chief Operating Office](#), as appropriate
- [Alumni Relations](#)
- [Environmental Health and Safety](#)
- [Information Resource Management](#) (IRM)
- [Controller's Office](#)

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Guidelines for Managing Information Requests From External Media

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1. Should the Coordinator determine that the situation may have implications for public relations or media coverage, s/he must make immediate contact with the appropriate higher-level staff and University Relations staff.
2. Direct requests for information from the media must be directed immediately to University Relations at (540) 231-5396. This referral allows the Coordinator to focus on management of the current situation and the University Relations staff to focus on external communication.
3. Typically, representatives of the external media communicate with University Relations staff as a courtesy if they desire to be on campus. Should the Coordinator become aware that representatives of the media are present on the scene of an incident, s/he must make immediate contact with appropriate higher-level staff and University Relations staff. Contact the VTPD for escort from the scene if necessary.
4. The same guidelines apply to the release of information for the deceased as for the living. The relevant offices will determine, which, if any, information should be released considering the interests of the deceased's family and the interests of the university.



Personal and Professional Possessions

Personal Possessions

Personal possessions should be inventoried, packed, and safely stored until the family is ready to retrieve them. Two people should pack and document the items for security reasons.

Discuss arrangements for retrieval with a family representative at an appropriate time. Be sensitive to the family's emotions, keeping in mind that they may not want the items immediately, but be ready to accept them after a period of time has passed.

Professional and Academic Possessions

For information regarding university owned equipment, see policies on the Controller's Office website at <http://www.controller.vt.edu/index.html>

In addition to personal items, there may be extensive academic and professional possessions including libraries, books and articles in progress, artifacts, collections, etc. When this is the case, someone from the department who is familiar with the subject matter should act as a departmental liaison with the family to assist with communication and decision-making concerning the possessions.

Department heads, liaisons, and involved staff should work closely with the family to arrive at a humane and workable method and schedule for the cataloguing, storage and/or distribution of professional and academic possessions.

As family members may feel overwhelmed by these and related activities, anyone working with the family should be particularly sensitive to the timing and depth of discussions and actions. In addition, there may be legal issues regarding ownership and use of the materials that need to be addressed. Such situations can be particularly sensitive, and may cause delays in the distribution of the deceased person's possessions.

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CONDOLENCES FROM THE UNIVERSITY

If the employee death was sudden or unexpected, the supervisor or designee should call the family immediately. Remember that a family is already overwhelmed, and may not want to receive too many calls, so any calls should be brief. The bereaved will remember the intent of the call, not necessarily the words spoken.

Family members generally find comfort in condolences from friends and colleagues of the deceased. However, it is important to keep in mind that reactions and response to death vary dramatically among cultures. Therefore, the Coordinator should ask family members if they would like cards sent or to receive phone calls from those on campus who knew the deceased. Some families may prefer privacy.

Condolence notes can be brief, but personal. Expression of condolences should be sensitive to the individual's and her/his family's beliefs. Mention something special you will miss about the person or something s/he contributed to the campus.



CHECKLIST

(Take a minute to see that you have completed all necessary tasks.)

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- Have you established contact with the family and put them in touch with campus services such as Benefits?
- Have you informed the department in which the individual worked?
- Have you completed the death notification and submitted it to relevant departments?
- Are you confident that any lab research is being properly maintained?
- Have you contacted colleagues from other schools who were working with the deceased on joint projects?
- Have you informed co-workers about proper response to the media?
- Did you work with University Relations on the obituary and appropriate release of information?
- Did you consult with Employee Relations, Work/Life Resources, and/or Student Life about emotional support services?
- Did you inform co-workers and/or students about options for dealing with grief?
- Have you arranged to have personal and professional possessions inventoried, and advised the family? Use your personal judgment as to the appropriate timing of this task.