**How Arizona First Responders Can Assist Arizona Families**

**to Care for Their Own Dead**

Arizona families have the legal right to custody and control of their own dead. Whether the death was anticipated or unanticipated, once time and cause of death are established, the family may choose to care for and transport the body, file the death certificate, arrange for burial, and conduct any other aspect of after-death care without the assistance of a funeral director, or using one for some but not all of these tasks.

**Legal Authority of Families**

In Arizona, the legislative authority for families to act as unpaid funeral services practitioners is found in **Arizona Statute § 36-326** where the law declares that a body disposition permit may be issued to “a funeral director or other responsible person.” The responsible person is described additionally as the “Authoring agent” in ARS 36-831, starting with the spouse or designated agent.

**Ways You Are Empowered to Assist Families**

Many families don’t know that an anticipated death for someone on hospice care or under other medical supervision is not generally cause to call 911. As a first responder, you may be the first person in cases not requiring medical or legal intervention, to assure families that it is okay to slow things down. You or a chaplain or clergyperson associated with your service can assist families in understanding their options:

1. The prevailing practice when a death has occurred, or in anticipation of a death, is to ask families, “*What funeral home do you want us to call?”* Typically, this question is accompanied by an information sheet listing all area funeral homes. Both the question and the information sheet imply that the family is required to purchase the services of a funeral director or mortuary when this is not, in fact, the case. Instead ask families, “*What plans can we assist you in making?”*
2. Provide the following information: “Under Arizona law, families may conduct tasks commonly performed by a funeral home, except embalming (which is not required by Arizona law). This may include:
   * caring for the deceased (for example, bathing and dressing);
   * sheltering the deceased at home;
   * filing death notice, handling death certificate/transportation/disposition permit;
   * transporting the body home or to another location for care and viewing (sometimes called a wake or vigil), and to place of final disposition;
   * making arrangements for any ceremony and for final disposition (for example, with a cemetery or crematory, or obtaining county planning commission permission for a home burial).”
3. Familiarize yourself with the additional resources below.

**Additional Information**

Arizona Funeral Resources & Education www.AZfuneral.org

National End-of-Life Doula Alliance www.nedalliance.org

National Home Funeral Alliance www.homefuneralalliance.org

Funeral Consumers Alliance www.funerals.org