

After a Suicide:

A Guide for Firearms Retailers
and Range Owners



American
Foundation
for Suicide
Prevention

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The Immediate Aftermath

Suicide on the firing range or where guns are sold is a rare but devastating event you need to be prepared to face.

It's natural to be uncertain what to do if a suicide occurs at the facility. There are certain things you will need to handle immediately, such as notifying law enforcement and securing the premises for investigation. You may also want to notify your insurer about the death, and close for the remainder of the day.

Once you've handled these immediate concerns, you can start looking ahead to helping those who have been affected by the death.



Addressing Your Staff

Cooperate with law enforcement, and find out what is known. Soon after the incident, meet with your staff to let them know a suicide death has occurred. Be sure to call staff unable to be present.

Let them know that suicide isn't the result of just one cause, but is the result of multiple health-related and life pressures that pile up like a perfect storm.

Share only facts about the death itself. Avoid speculation about any particular circumstances that may come to light.

Answering Questions

Prepare staff for how you would like them to answer potential questions about the death asked by customers/others. You might provide a sample statement, such as:

"We had a death on site yesterday, which is why we were closed. There is an ongoing investigation, but early reports suggest it may have been a suicide. We are all very affected by what has happened. Customer safety is our number one priority. We have information about suicide prevention here if you are interested."

Keep any information shared to a minimum, and only the facts. You may want to consult an attorney and have one person be the point of contact for legal inquiries.

It may also be best to appoint one person, such as the owner or a manager, to handle media inquiries.

Notifying Your Customers and Members

Be prepared for incoming calls inquiring about the incident, and decide if there is a need to reach out to customers, or anyone in your community, who may be affected by the death.

Sample notification:

*We are writing to inform you that on **[DATE]** we had an incident at the range that resulted in the death of one of our customers and/or members. While there is currently an investigation and the cause of death has yet to be determined, early reports suggest this may have been a suicide death.*

We want to express our condolences to the family of the person who died, as well as to express concern for our customers who may have been affected by this incident.

Please know that the safety of our customers is of utmost importance to us. If you have questions or concerns related to mental health and suicide prevention, please reach out to your local AFSP chapter at afsp.org/chapters.



Supporting Your Staff

In the days following the incident, staff may want to discuss their reactions to the death with you and/or a mental health professional. Sometimes, people are impacted by a suicide death because they have a personal connection to the issue of suicide: they may have lost a family member in the past, or they themselves may have struggled with suicidal thoughts. They may not feel comfortable sharing this information now, yet it is important to be aware that there may be past experiences contributing to their reaction.

Let them know help is available and that you are concerned about their well-being. Encourage them to be open about what they might need to help them cope, such as time off, or a change in responsibilities. You may provide your staff with resources for local health professionals.

Some common reactions include:

- Asking “why?”
- Feeling numb, or more intense emotions than usual
- Feeling angry, sad, or a sense of responsibility or guilt
- Worrying for one’s own safety, fearing the death of others, or that a similar incident will occur
- Avoiding reminders of the death, including not wanting to come to work

Some activities you and your staff might find helpful at this time include:

- Making sure you are getting enough sleep, eating healthily, and getting regular exercise
- Spending time with family and friends
- Taking time away from your daily routine – engaging in activities that are enjoyable and relaxing
- You can find more self-care activities at afsp.org/firearms



As Time Goes On

For many, the intensity of reactions to the death will lessen as time passes. It is important to be sensitive and give individuals who are deeply affected time, perhaps away from work, as needed.

If you notice someone's reaction is long-lasting or particularly intense, encourage them to talk to a mental health professional.

Let the person know there are resources available, including the Crisis Text Line (text TALK to 741741) or the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline (1-800-273-8255). AFSP offers resources, such as the Survivor Outreach Program. For more information, go to afsp.org/sop.

After a Suicide: A Checklist for Firearms Retailers and/or Ranges

You can use the blank spaces below to list relevant names and contact information.

Immediately Following the Incident

- ___ Notify law enforcement, if applicable
- ___ Secure facility (if range: may have to close facility)
- ___ Contact biohazard cleanup company
- ___ Meet with staff member(s) present at the time of the incident or firearms sale to gather information and debrief
- ___ Determine if the deceased was known to facility (regular customer, for example)
- ___ Notify insurer of incident _____
- ___ Notify staff on site and make plans for staff meeting
- ___ Decide if mental health professional is needed for staff meeting and if so, schedule time for the person to attend
- ___ Decide who will be primary contact for outside (customer/media) inquiries
- ___ Notify legal counsel and media counsel _____

Within 24-48 Hours of the Incident

- ___ Call staff meeting to share information about the incident (if having mental health professional, could occur here or at follow-up meeting)

Staff meeting to-dos:

- ___ Share facts known about the death and allow staff to share reactions
- ___ Provide general information about suicide

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- ___ Share support resources related to suicide/mental health
 - ___ Stress the importance of safe firearms storage among staff
 - ___ Inform staff of contact person and how to handle customer/ media inquiries about the incident (discuss sample statement)
 - ___ Inform staff of procedures if family of deceased contacts facility
 - ___ Remind staff not to share information publicly about incident (including not sharing on social media)
 - ___ Call staff unable to attend meeting to notify of incident and procedures
 - ___ Decide if there is a need to notify customers and/or members that were present the day of the incident (i.e., the incident occurred on site) and mechanism for notification (email)
 - ___ Draft notification (see sample on page 6) for customers and/or members, if applicable
 - ___ Determine if anyone from the deceased's family has contacted facility or if contact with family of deceased will occur (recommended to consult legal)

Within 1-2 Weeks of the Incident

- ___ Follow up with staff (either follow-up meeting or individually) to check in, answer questions, provide more information/resources
 - ___ Review facility policies and procedures to determine if revisions are needed
 - ___ If yes, communicate those to staff
 - ___ Monitor reactions of staff and meet one-on-one with anyone who shows signs of distress and provide resources
 - ___ If you had planned to notify your customers and/or members, make sure notification has occurred
 - ___ Decide if additional/ongoing consultation (legal, insurer, mental health) is needed
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Find your local AFSP chapter today.

Visit afsp.org/chapters to learn
how you can help fight suicide.



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