

San Francisco Fire Department

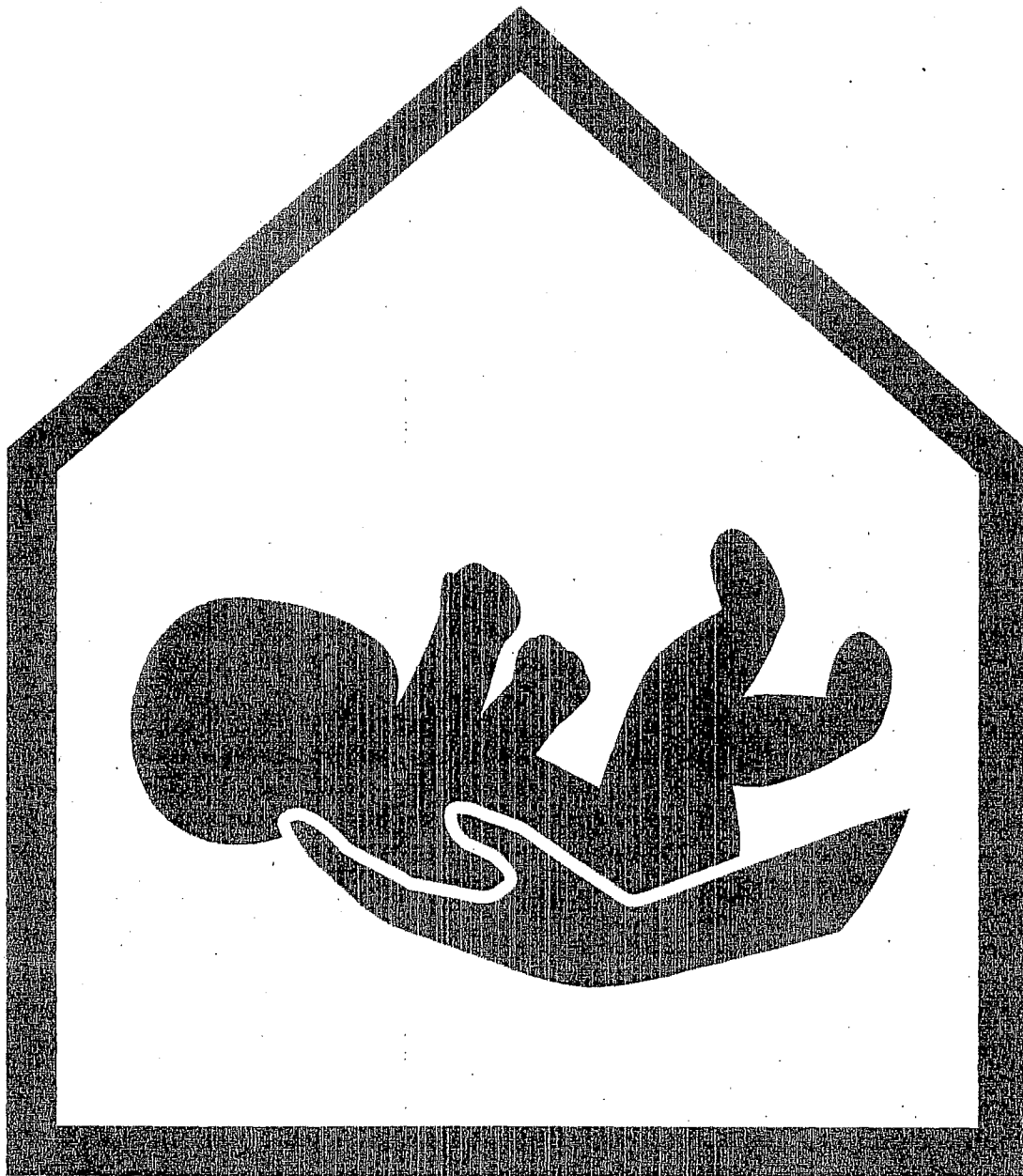
EMS Division

Training Bulletin 04-2



Safe Haven for Newborns Program

October 2004



Safe Surrender Site

I. BACKGROUND

Senate Bill 1368, also known as the Safely Surrendered Baby Law, went into effect on January 1, 2001, and allows a mother or person with lawful custody to bring an unwanted baby three days old or younger to a hospital without prosecution for child abandonment. The purpose of the law is to protect infants from abandonment, which places the child in extreme danger and is also illegal. By protecting the parent from prosecution, the new law provides a human and responsible way for a fearful or desperate mother to relinquish her infant. Babies who are safely surrendered are given medical treatment and placed in a foster home or pre-adoptive home. The law allows for a 14-day grace period in which the mother may change her mind and reclaim her baby.

On August 22, 2002, the San Francisco Board of Supervisors passed a resolution authorizing creation of a Safe Haven for Newborns Task Force to determine how to implement Senate Bill 1368. The Task Force was comprised of one representative from each of the following agencies or organizations: the Department of Public Health, the District Attorney's Office, the Fire Department, the Department of Children, Youth, and their Families, the Juvenile Probation Department, the Youth Commission, the San Francisco Unified School District, the Mental Health Board, the Department of Human Services, the Police Department, and a member of the community with expertise in the area of domestic violence. The Task Force was to identify the most effective manner in which to educate the public and provide outreach to women and families in crisis.

II. TASK FORCE ACTIVITIES

The original legislation specified public and private hospitals as drop-off points, but it was otherwise under each local municipality's jurisdiction to determine locations for the safe surrender of babies. To determine what would be the optimal drop-off points in San Francisco, a subcommittee with representatives from San Francisco's Department of Human Services (SF-DHS), the Police and Fire Departments, and the Department of Public Health was formed.

The subcommittee identified five hospitals to act as Safe Havens, including:

1. San Francisco General Hospital
2. University of California at San Francisco Medical Center
3. St. Luke's Hospital
4. California Pacific Medical Center
5. Kaiser Permanente

The Task Force also identified Fire Stations as beneficial drop-off sites. On May 30, 2003, the Board of Supervisors adopted Resolution 347-03, designating San Francisco Fire Stations as permissible locations to safely surrender a child 72 hours old or less without criminal prosecution for child abandonment.

III. POLICY

All members of the San Francisco Fire Department shall be aware of the "Safe Haven for Newborns Program" which designates all Fire Stations as designated locations for the surrender of infant children. All uniformed members of the Fire Department will assume full responsibility for the safety and medical treatment of infants surrendered to them until the newborn is transferred to the care of the Department of Human Services.

IV. PROCEDURE (refer to SFFD Safe Surrender Kit)

When an infant is surrendered at a SFFD location members shall proceed as follows:

1. Immediately assume custody of the surrendered child and initiate medical assessment and care. The care of the infant shall be delegated to the member with the highest level of medical training or experience. If ALS personnel are not present, the nearest ALS resources, including an ambulance, should be requested through the Communications Center (ECD).
2. The care of the infant should focus on airway, breathing, and circulation and include all treatments consistent with SFFD medical training. All infants should be handled in a safe fashion, monitored continuously, and kept warm.
3. If the mother requests care, she shall also be provided with medical care consistent with her needs.
4. If possible, determine the infants and/or mother's medical history in a NON-THREATENING manner. Be advised that the mother or guardian have the right to leave the scene and to refuse information. It is important, however, to obtain as much information as possible about the infant's and the mother's health, pregnancy, and other personal information including name and address. Advise the mother or guardian that the information is necessary for the optimal outcome of the infant.
5. Transport the infant and/or mother to the appropriate pediatrics receiving hospital depending on the baby's condition. A complete Patient Care Report shall be completed. All available information about the infant (including indications or signs of abuse), and the mother or guardian shall be passed onto hospital personnel who are assuming medical care. **As always, patient information is strictly confidential.** Hospital personnel should be told that the infant was surrendered consistent with the "Safe Haven for Newborns Program."

6. Notifications: The Company Officer must immediately notify the Battalion Chief to provide a briefing. A follow up General Form report shall also be completed and forwarded through channels. Additionally, the San Francisco Department of Human Services, Family and Children's Services / Child Protective Services (FCS/CPS) shall be notified. Contact information is as follows:

Child Protective Services Hotline: (415) 558-2650

7. The Department is committed to participate and assist in this worthwhile program.



California's Safely
Surrendered Baby Law

no shame. no blame. no names.

Fast Facts

- The Safely Surrendered Baby (SSB) law was signed into law by Governor Davis in September 2000 and went into effect on January 1, 2001.
- The SSB law allows a mother or person with lawful custody to bring an unharmed baby three days old or younger to a hospital without prosecution for child abandonment.
- Los Angeles and Sacramento Counties allow a mother or person with lawful custody to safely surrender a baby three days old or younger at their county fire stations without prosecution for child abandonment.
- The mother or person with lawful custody will not be required to answer questions or fill out any forms. However, hospital or fire station personnel will give the parent a medical information questionnaire that is designed to gather family medical history. It is up to the parent whether he/or she wants to comply.
- A bracelet will be placed on the baby for identification. A matching bracelet will be given to the parent. The bracelet will help connect the parent to the baby if the parent wants the baby back.
- The SSB law allows for at least 14 days during which the mother may change her mind and reclaim her baby.
- Babies who are safely surrendered at hospitals or fire stations designated as safe haven sites are given medical treatment and placed in a foster home or pre-adoptive home.
- Since the law went into effect in 2001, 22 babies have been safely surrendered in California.
- There is no profile of women most likely to abandon their infants. The cases of abandonment show teens and women of all socio-economic groups, race and ethnicity, and educational attainment levels. The age range of females is anywhere from 14-to-38-years-old.
- To date, 42 states have passed "safe haven" laws, including California. But beyond California, very few have earmarked funds for public awareness campaigns to educate teens and women of childbearing age about the safe options available to them.

**CITY & COUNTY OF SAN FRANCISCO
FIRE DEPARTMENT PROCEDURES FOR
ACCEPTING A NEWBORN UNDER THE
CALIFORNIA SAFELY SURRENDERED BABY LAW**

The California Safely Surrendered baby law, as amended, allows a person to surrender a minor child (72 hours or younger) to any firefighter on duty at any one of our fire stations. Under certain circumstances, they may do so discreetly without fear of being prosecuted for child abandonment.

PROCEDURES

1. Welcome the parent or person surrendering the infant. Do not be judgmental (this is an emotional and difficult time for the person).
2. Ascertain that the infant is under 72 hours or younger. Accept the infant even if it appears older than 72 hours) and begin to assess for any medical needs.
3. Notify the Emergency Communications Department of a still alarm at the station and request an ambulance to respond. If one is not in quarters, initiate a Patient Care Report (PCR) on the infant.
4. Locate and open the Newborn Safe Surrender Kit. Hand the surrendering person the inner business reply mail envelope containing the Newborn Medical History questionnaire, a fact sheet and a copy of the coded, confidential bracelet. Place the smaller coded, confidential ankle bracelet on the infant and record the code on the Patient Care Report (PCR).
5. Once on scene, paramedics shall assume custody of the infant, initiate base hospital contact, and continue to assess and provide for any medical needs of the infant.
6. Paramedics shall accompany the infant to the receiving hospital and transfer custody to a designated hospital employee. Paramedics will notify The San Francisco Department of Human Services, Family & Children's Services/Child Protective Services (FCS/CPS) while at the receiving hospital. The paramedics will call the CPS 24-Hour Hotline at (415)-558-2650. The paramedics will request the CPS fax number and then fax the Patient Care Report to FCS/CPS. The receiving hospital will call the FCS/CFS hotline to inform them that the baby is in their custody.
7. The Company Officer shall notify and provide a briefing to the Battalion Chief. A General Form report shall also be completed related to the incident and forwarded through channels.



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Questions and Answers

Q: What is the Safely Surrendered Baby (SSB) law?

A: The Safely Surrendered Baby Law was signed into law by Gov. Davis on September 2000 and went into effect on January 1, 2001. The SSB law allows a mother or person with lawful custody to surrender an unwanted baby three days old or younger confidentially. As long as the baby has not been abused or neglected, the person may do so without fear of arrest or prosecution.

Q: How does the law work?

A: A distressed parent or person with legal custody of a baby three days old or younger can bring the baby to any California hospital emergency room or other (designated Safe Haven) locations such as fire stations. As long as the child shows no signs of abuse or neglect, no name or other information is required. A bracelet will be placed on the baby for identification. A matching bracelet will be given to the parent. The bracelet will help connect the parent to the baby if the parent wants the baby back.

Q: Can parents reclaim their baby if they change their mind?

A: Yes. Under the SSB law, a parent has at least 14 days to claim the baby. The parent(s) may take the bracelet back to the hospital. Hospital personnel will provide information about the baby.

Q: Can only a parent bring in the baby?

A: In most cases, a parent will bring in the baby. The law allows another person to bring in the baby if they have lawful custody.

Q: Does the parent have to call before bringing in the baby?

A: No. A baby may be brought in anytime, 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.

Q: Does a parent have to tell anything to the people taking the baby?

A: No. Nothing is required. However, hospital personnel will give the parent a medical information questionnaire that is designed to gather family medical history. This could be very useful in caring for the child but it is up to the parent to complete it.

Q: What happens to the baby?

A: The baby will be examined and given medical treatment, if needed. Then the baby will be placed in a foster or pre-adoptive home.

Q: What happens to the parent?

A: Once the parent(s) has turned over the baby and there are no signs of abuse or neglect to the infant, they are free to go.

Q: Why is California doing this?

A: The purpose of the Safely Surrendered Baby Law is to protect babies from being hurt or killed because they were abandoned.

You may have heard tragic stories of babies left in dumpsters or public toilets. The person who committed these acts may have been under severe emotional distress. The mothers may have hidden their pregnancies, fearful of what would happen if their families found out. Because they were afraid and had nowhere to turn for help, they abandoned their infants.

Abandoning a baby puts the child in extreme danger. It is also illegal. Too often, it results in the baby's death. Because of the Safely Surrendered Baby Law, this tragedy doesn't ever have to happen again in California.

Q: How many babies have been saved as a result of the (SSB) law?

A: Since Gov. Davis signed the SSB law on January 1, 2001, 22 babies have been safely surrendered in California.

Q: What is California doing to publicize this law?

A: A new phase of a major public awareness campaign was launched on May 20, 2003. Television and radio spots were aired in five California media markets: Los Angeles, Sacramento, San Francisco, San Diego and Fresno. The campaign includes (messages in) both English and Spanish languages. The ads are being reinforced by a public outreach effort that will include educating women of childbearing age about the law via statewide media, school (curriculum), community-based organizations and businesses.

The first phase of the campaign to publicize the law began in October of 2002 when funding became available for limited promotion in two markets: Los Angeles and San Francisco.

Q: How is this new campaign being funded?

A: The First Five/California Children and Families Commission and the Children's Trust Fund are funding the campaign.