|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | **Title**: | DEATH SCENE INVESTIGATION | | **Policy #** | | I.2.01 |
| **Division:** | Investigation | | **Page:** | | 1 of 7 |
| **Coroner Signature:** | |  | **NAME Reference:** | | B1g,B2a,B2b,B2e,B3a,B3b, B3d,B3e,B3f,B3h,b3j,B4a, C1a,C1g,C1h,F3d,F3e,F3f,F3g | |
| **Approved/Revised Date:** | | **02-20-2024** | **IACME Reference:** | | A5c,A6e,A6h,A8k,A9i,B1b,B1k, B1m,B1n,B1o,B1p,B1v,B1w, B2a,B3b,B3c,B3f,B3g,B3h, B4a,B4d,B4e,B4f,B4g,B4h, C1a,C1b,C1c,C1d,C5m | |



**PURPOSE:**

To provide guidelines for conducting death scene investigation in a safe, professional, and thorough manner.

Investigations conducted by the Ada County Coroner’s office shall be independent from law enforcement or other investigative agencies.

**POLICY**:

All deaths reported to the Ada County Coroner’s Office (ACCO) shall be thoroughly investigated by a medicolegal death investigator to determine jurisdiction, and response procedures; and for those deaths which fall under the jurisdiction of the Ada County Coroner, to aid in the certification of the cause and manner of death. Cases deemed Ada County Coroner cases, and which require investigation, are defined in accordance with Idaho Code §19-4301.

All death scene investigations shall include the preparation of a written investigation report.

**PROCEDURE**:

1. **Scene Safety**

Scene hazards may include unstable structures, bodily fluids, hostile family/bystanders, traffic, animals, insects, environmental extremes, chemical exposures, etc.

* 1. Clearance from the appropriate agency establishing scene safety, shall be obtained prior to entry.
  2. Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) shall be utilized, complying with recommended standard precautions, national bloodborne pathogen exposure safety guidelines, and ACCO standard operating procedures.
  3. A law enforcement escort shall be requested when interviewing family/bystanders or entering a private residence.

1. **Scene Arrival**
   1. The responding law enforcement agency and the ACCO Investigation Division will promptly notify one another of a death scene upon arrival, whichever occurs first.
   2. Upon arrival, the Investigator will:
      1. Record the time of arrival.
      2. Confirm scene safety.
      3. Identify themselves, and those accompanying, to law enforcement.
      4. Identify and document those present at the scene.
      5. Establish scene circumstances.
      6. Gather information jointly with law enforcement, communicating investigative findings as appropriate.
      7. Document the lead officer’s contact information and agency’s report (DR) number.
   3. Upon determination that a detective is required, the Investigator shall notify the law enforcement officer on scene, and the Investigation Supervisor/on-call Senior Deputy*.*
   4. Formal requests for records, reports, and information shall be submitted by the Investigation Division, and retained within the ACCO case management system.
   5. The Investigator shall verify if a law enforcement representative requests to be present at the time of autopsy, obtaining their contact information if a request is made.
2. **Confirmation or Pronouncement of Death**
   1. On scene, the Investigator (forensic pathologist, Coroner, or Chief Deputy Coroner) shall pronounce the death upon conducting an external examination of the decedent.
   2. For institutional deaths, a licensed physician, physician’s assistant, or nurse practitioner may provide a pronouncement of death.
   3. EMS may provide a confirmation/declaration time of death, as appropriate.
3. **Chain of Custody**
   1. The Investigator shall (in accordance with ACCO standard operating procedure):
      1. Document scene location, and potential items of evidence.
      2. Determine the agency(ies), other than the ACCO, to be the lawful custodian(s) of evidence.
      3. Identify, secure, and preserve items of evidence utilizing proper containers, and labels.
      4. Transport items of evidence to the ACCO.
4. **Scene Documentation**
   1. Photography

Photographing the scene and the decedent shall create a permanent historical record and provide corroborating evidence that constructs a system of redundancy should questions arise.

* + 1. All photographs taken by ACCO staff are the property of the ACCO and shall be retained indefinitely in the ACCO case management system.
    2. Photographs taken on scene shall be in accordance with ACCO standard operating procedure, to include:
       1. A close-up (identification) photograph of all decedents.
       2. Intermediate (orientation) photographs of scene.
       3. Distant photographs of scene.
       4. As needed, photographs with frame of reference.
  1. Notation
     1. Upon photographing the scene, the Investigator shall:
        1. Notate items of evidence and their position in relation to the body.
        2. Notate blood and bodily fluid evidence, to include volume, patterns, spatters, etc.
        3. When evidence has been moved prior to initial documentation, the Investigator shall notate what was moved, where, by whom, and why it was moved.
        4. In the event the decedent’s body has been moved from the location of discovery, the Investigator shall document why and who moved it.
  2. Postmortem Changes
     1. Prior to removal of decedent from scene, the Investigator shall notate:
        1. Livor, rigor, and degree of decomposition.
        2. Insect and animal activity.
        3. Scene temperature and a description of body temperature.
        4. Environmental conditions.

1. **Forensic Pathologist**
   1. A forensic pathologist may respond to the scene as appropriate, or when requested by the Investigator.
      1. Upon determination that a forensic pathologist is required, the Investigator shall notify the Investigation Supervisor/on-call Senior Deputy and the Coroner/Chief Deputy Coroner*.*
      2. The Investigation Supervisor/on-call Senior Deputy or Coroner/Chief Deputy Coroner will notify the forensic pathologist.
2. **Reporting**
   1. In accordance with Idaho Code § 39-605, and Idaho Administrative Code § 16.02.10, suspected Idaho Reportable Diseases shall be reported to the Idaho Department of Health and Welfare.
   2. The Investigation Division shall contact the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) or Consumer Product Safety Commission (CPSC) as deemed appropriate.
3. **Witness/Family Member Interview**
   1. The Investigator shall document name, contact information, and relation to incident for witnesses and/or family members.
   2. The Investigator shall obtain:
      1. Recent history
      2. Description of events immediately leading to the death
      3. Discovery of the body and circumstances surrounding the discovery
      4. Witness statements
      5. Corroboration statements
      6. Contact information for primary medical doctor and treating physician(s)
      7. Social history
4. **Medical, Mental Health, and Social History** 
   1. The Investigator shall obtain medical history from:
      1. Family members and treating physicians.
      2. Available medical records and Idaho Board of Pharmacy reports.
   2. Mental health history shall include witness/family member statements, prescription medications, mental health records, and ACCO form: *Suicide Checklist*.
   3. The social history obtained by the Investigator shall consider the relationships, habits, and relevant social information of the decedent.
5. **Human Remains Security**
   1. The Investigator shall:
      1. Oversee the security of the body and any evidence or property at the scene.
      2. Ensure that the body is protected from further trauma or contamination and prevent the unauthorized removal of therapeutic and resuscitative equipment.
      3. Secure clothing and personal effects that are on the body.
      4. Place an identification ankle band on the body.
      5. Ensure a safe and secure removal of the body from the scene, for transportation to the ACCO.
      6. Conduct a walk through at the scene before leaving, ensuring that all coroner equipment and protective gear has been removed.
6. **Evidence, Medication, Illicit substances, and Property Collection**
   1. All evidence shall be collected and processed per ACCO Policy: *On Scene Evidence and Property Collection.*
   2. All medications belonging to the decedent will be collected and processed per ACCO Policy: *Medication Collection.*
   3. All illicit substances shall be processed per ACCO Policy: *On Scene Evidence and Property Collection.*
   4. Personal property identified and/or collected shall be in accordance with ACCO Policy: *On Scene Evidence and Property Collection.*
7. **Weapons**
   1. Weapons discovered at the scene shall be rendered safe, photographed, and documented.
      1. Original location and condition of the weapon shall be identified and notated.
      2. Original location of the weapon, if moved, shall be notated.
   2. Firearms shall be left in the custody of the investigating law enforcement agency and shall not be transported to the ACCO.
      1. Any expended and unexpended rounds shall be photographed and documented, identifying the location and condition of the round.
8. **Identification**
   1. If decedent is visually identifiable, identification shall be accomplished at the scene, with an identification ankle band placed on the body to include decedent’s name and date pronounced.
   2. If unable to accurately verify decedent’s identity, the body shall be transported to the ACCO for identity confirmation.
9. **Body Disposition**
   1. The Investigator shall:
      1. Determine if the body can be released directly to a funeral home or if the decedent requires transport to the ACCO.
      2. Consult with the Investigation Supervisor/on-call Senior Deputy for any questions regarding jurisdiction/body disposition.
10. **Primary Care Physician**
    1. If death from natural causes is suspected, and the decedent is currently under the care of a primary care physician, the Investigator shall advise the physician and explain the circumstances. It will be requested that the physician sign the Death Certificate.
       1. Upon confirmation that the physician will sign the Death Certificate, the Investigator shall document the reported cause of death in the ACCO case management system.
       2. Upon confirmation that no physician will sign the Death Certificate, the signing responsibility shall transfer to the forensic pathologist.
          1. The Investigator shall request those medical records required by the forensic pathologist.
11. **Body Transport**
    1. Proper Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) shall be utilized, potential risks shall be avoided, and appropriate lifting techniques shall be applied, during the handling and transportation of the decedent, complying with recommended standard precautions, national bloodborne pathogen exposure safety guidelines, and ACCO standard operating procedures.
    2. The decedent’s hands shall be placed in handbags to retain possible trace evidence in accordance with ACCO standard operating procedures.
    3. Body shall be placed into a clean body bag in a supine position.
    4. The body bag will be appropriately sealed to ensure the integrity of all evidence on/around the body, in accordance with ACCO standard operating procedures.
       1. Based on the circumstances surrounding the death, the Investigator shall determine if a lock shall be placed on the body bag. Each lock will be numbered, photographed, and documented. Prior to removal of the lock, the number will be verified, and photographed.
    5. Decedent may be transported from the scene by:
       1. The Investigator to the ACCO
       2. A licensed funeral home, for Non-Jurisdictional Releases
    6. Next-of-kin, if available, shall designate a funeral home of their choice.
       1. If unavailable, the Investigator may designate the funeral home using the ACCO Funeral Home Rotation List.
       2. If the next-of-kin is unknown, the decedent may be retained at the ACCO.
    7. The Investigator shall remain on scene to assist the funeral home if the family wishes.
       1. As Investigator availability allows.
    8. The Investigator shall fax all required information to the designated funeral home utilizing the ACCO form: *Coroner Death Information Sheet.*
12. **Jurisdiction**

The ACCO shall maintain jurisdiction over a body in which the death occurred in a manner that requires investigation by the ACCO, allowing for the safeguard of chain of custody.

Jurisdiction of a body may be released after the following has occurred:

* 1. Determination is made as to who will sign the Death Certificate.
  2. All necessary case documentation has been completed.
  3. Specimens have been collected, if required.
  4. All necessary investigation has been completed.
  5. When a body is requested to be held at the ACCO for a period longer than twenty-four (24) hours, a court order may be requested by the Ada County Coroner.