|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Policy: Scene Investigation Protocol | UNION COUNTY CORONER OFFICE |

Contact the Coroner of Union County:

The responding investigator is to contact the Union County Coroner before the scene investigation whenever:

* The Investigator has been notified of a single incident resulting in 3 or more deaths.
* The Investigator has been notified the death is an apparent homicide.
* The Investigator has been notified the death is of an infant.
* The Investigator has been notified the death is of a high-profile individual.
* High risk scene safety.
* Extraordinary circumstances.
* Inadequate resources.

The responding Investigator is to contact the Union County Coroner with information gathered from their investigation whenever:

* The Union County Prosecutors Office is requested to the scene of an investigation.
* There is a doubt about whether the decedent should be sent for a postmortem examination.
* The Investigator needs assistance, additional resources or guidance at a scene

Procedures:

1. Receiving a Call
   1. The Investigator should respond to a call of a reported death within 15 minutes of receiving the notification. (If circumstances arrive that a response time will be greater than 15 minutes notify Dispatch so they can inform Law Enforcement/EMS on the scene.)
   2. The Investigator should arrive on-scene within 60 minutes of being contacted.
   3. The Investigator appearance should be professional.
2. Arriving at the Scene
   1. Document location of the scene and time of arrival on the Investigative Notes form.
   2. Introduce and identify yourself and role.
   3. Exercise scene safety.
      1. Assess and/or establish physical boundaries.
      2. Identify incident command and obtain all information pertaining to the case.
      3. Obtain clearance/authorization to enter the scene from the individual responsible for scene security.
   4. Confirm that death has been pronounced.
      1. Pronouncement of death must take place by an appropriate medical practitioner.
   5. Participate in scene briefing.
   6. Conduct a scene “walk through”.
      1. Reassess scene boundaries and adjust as appropriate.
      2. Establish a path of entry and exit.
      3. Locate and view the decedent in collaboration with law enforcement.
      4. Inform the officer in charge of the presiding Law Enforcement agency that the Investigator must conduct and document the body exam before movement of the body.
3. Obtain permission to investigate or secure scene along with obtaining a search warrant if needed.
4. Establish decedent identification
   * 1. Provide for the direct visual or photographic identification of the decedent at the scene if visually recognizable.
     2. In cases of no identification or questionable identification, collect and report source information relevant to scientific methods of identification, i.e., known fingerprint records, dental and skeletal radiographs.
     3. Document additional information that may support identification, such as (but not limited to) personal effects, circumstances, physical characteristics, and tattoos.
5. Documenting and Evaluating the Scene
   1. Photograph the Scene.
      1. Obtain an overall view of the scene to establish the position of the decedent(s) relative to other features of the surrounding area.
      2. Photograph specific areas of the scene to provide more detailed view of objects, or scene conditions of potential importance.
      3. Photograph the scene from different angles to provide various perspectives that may prove to be beneficial.
      4. Obtain photographs even if the body or evidence has been moved.
   2. Develop a written description of the scene.
      1. Document and describe location, conditions, position of body within the overall scene, presence and location of any objects of potential relevance, and location, estimated volume and presence of patterns/spatter of any blood or body fluids.
      2. Describe the scene environment including odors, lighting, temperatures and other characteristics or fragile evidence.
   3. Establish probable location of injury or illness.
      1. Document location where death was confirmed and GPS Corrodents if possible.
      2. Identify and record discrepancies in rigor mortis, livor mortis and body temperature.
      3. Check body, clothing and scene for consistency/inconsistency of trace evidence and indicate location where artifacts are found.
      4. Obtain dispatch records, i.e., police, EMS.
   4. Locate, photograph and describe evidence within the scene, including weapons, ligatures and other items that may have caused or contributed to death.
      1. NOTE: Evidence collection for the Investigator is generally limited to evidence that is on or attached to the body, or that may have played a role in the individual’s death. The role of collecting and preserving other evidence at the scene is generally the function of the presiding Law Enforcement jurisdiction.
      2. Inventory and document prescription and over-the-counter medication at the scene
         1. Including name and dosage of medication, quantity prescribed, quantity remaining, prescribed schedule of administration, when prescribed, and the prescribing physician.
         2. Controlled substances prescribed to a decedent should be counted and collected. Advise on-scene Law Enforcement officers of their presence, they may elect to collect and/or dispose of these medications per local policies.
      3. Inventory and document personal valuables attached to the body. Clothing and personal items (including jewelry, wallets and identification cards) found on the body should be taken into evidence if the responsible next of kin is not able to accept these items now. Once the next of kin has been notified the items may be returned to them after signing the property release form.
   5. Interview witnesses at the scene. Document interviews of emergency medical technicians where appropriate.
      1. Collect all available identifying data on witnesses.
      2. Establish witness relationship/association to the deceased.
      3. Obtain information from each witness.
      4. Note discrepancies of statements.
   6. Document the time of the event, time of pronouncement and response time of the scene investigator on the Investigative Notes form.
6. Establishing and Recording Decedent Profile Information
   1. Document the discovery history.
      1. Establish and record person(s) who discovered the body and when (names, relationships).
      2. Document the circumstances surrounding the discovery (who, what, where, when, how).
   2. Determine terminal episode history.
      1. Document when, where, how and by whom the decedent was last known to be alive.
      2. Document the incident or circumstances before the death.
      3. Document complaints/symptoms before the death.
      4. Obtain relevant medical records to the decedent (copies).
   3. Obtain decedent medical history (As appropriate)
      1. Obtain medical history, including medications taken, alcohol and drug use, and family medical history from family members and witnesses.
      2. Obtain information from treating physicians and/or hospitals to confirm history and treatment.
      3. Document the name, address and telephone number of a dentist as appropriate for forensic identification.
      4. Document physical characteristics and traits (i.e., left/right handed, missing appendages, tattoos, etc.).
   4. Obtain decedent mental health history. (As appropriate)
      1. Document the decedent’s mental health history, including hospitalization and medications.
      2. Document any history of suicidal ideation, gestures, and/or attempts.
      3. Document mental health professionals (i.e., psychiatrists, psychologists, counselors, etc.) who treated the decedent.
      4. Document family health history.
   5. Document social history. (As appropriate)
      1. Marital/domestic history and status.
      2. Family history (similar deaths, significant dates).
      3. Employment history if work related injuries.
      4. Daily routines, habits and activities.
      5. Relationships, friends and associates.
      6. Religious, ethnic or other pertinent information (i.e., objection to autopsy).
      7. Criminal history.
7. Documenting and Evaluating the Body.
   1. Photograph the body.
      1. Photograph the body and the scene.
      2. Photograph the decedent’s face along with a profile of each side.
      3. Take additional photographs after removal of objects/items that interfere with photographic documentation of the decedent.
      4. Photograph the surface beneath the body after the body has been removed, as appropriate.
      5. Consider photographs of other individual’s that are involved with the incident if they have injuries or evidence on them.
      6. Never clean the face, do not change condition.
   2. Conduct external body examination. (As scene allows: i.e. safety and appropriate for location)
      1. Document the decedent’s position with and without measurements as appropriate.
      2. Document the physical characteristics of the decedent.
      3. Document the presence of clothing and personal effect and their locations.
      4. Document the presence or absence of any items/objects that may be relevant.
      5. Document the presence or absence of marks, scars and tattoos.
      6. Document the presence or absence of injury/trauma.
      7. Document the presence or methods of resuscitative efforts.
      8. Document postmortem changes
         1. Livor mortis (color/intensity, location, fixed) consistent/inconsistent with position of the body.
         2. Rigor mortis (stage/intensity, location on the body, broken, inconsistent with the scene).
         3. Degree of decomposition (putrefaction, adipocere, mummification, skeletonization, as appropriate).
         4. Insect and animal activity.
         5. Inside thermostat temperature(s)/Outside Temperature(s).
         6. Description of body temperature, i.e., warm, cold or frozen; or measurement of body temperature (document method used and time of measurement).
   3. Preserve evidence (on body)
      1. Photograph the evidence.
      2. Document blood/body fluid on the body (froth/purge, substances from orifices), location and pattern before transporting.
      3. Assist Law Enforcement with the placement of unused paper bags around the hands and/or feet of the decedent if appropriate as determined by scene and circumstances. (Examples: suspected homicides, potential evidence on hands that may otherwise be lost when moving or transporting the body)
         1. In cases where evidence might be compromised, obliterated, or lost during transport, evidence may be collected from the body at the scene in collaboration with the responsible Law Enforcement agency. In such cases:
            1. Establish chain of custody.
            2. Determine custodian(s) of evidence, determine which agency is responsible for collection of specific types of evidence.
            3. Identify, secure and preserve evidence with proper containers, labels and preservatives in cooperation with presiding Law Enforcement.
            4. Document the collection of evidence by recording its location on the body, time of collection and time and location of disposition.
         2. When appropriate, ensure the presiding Law Enforcement agency has collected trace evidence before transportation of the body.
   4. Preserve the Body as Evidence
      1. Upon determination, a death is within the jurisdiction of the Coroners Office the body and all personal effects on the body become evidentiary material for the investigation.
      2. Tag the Body
         1. Place an identification tag on the body
            1. The great toe (Do NOT remove a sock and/or shoe to reach the toe.)
            2. Around an ankle or wrist if available.
         2. Identification tags must include the following if known:
            1. First and last name of the deceased
            2. Date of pronouncement
            3. Time of pronouncement
            4. SSN #
            5. Birth Date
         3. If the identification is not known, (unidentified body) indicate as:
         4. Unidentified Male “John Doe”
         5. Unidentified Female” Jane Doe”
         6. Or simply Unidentified remains
   5. Package the Body in an Appropriate Body Bag.
      1. Secure the tagged body in a body bag with a dual zipper closure.
      2. Secure the personal effects/or evidence being sent with the body near the chest area within the body bag and notify the receiving agency.
      3. Package the body in the bag so the zipper closure is at the head of the bag.
   6. Tag the body bag
      1. First and last name of the decedent if known
      2. Date of pronouncement
      3. Time of pronouncement
      4. SSN #.
      5. Birth Date.
   7. Seal the Bag
      1. Seal the body bag with a tamper proof seal at the head end of the bag if chain of custody is required.
      2. A numbered plastic seal should be secured through the dual zipper closure and recorded on the Investigative Notes form if required.
      3. Inform the receiving agency that the bag has been sealed.
   8. Determine Notification Procedures in Collaboration with Law Enforcement
      1. Identify next of kin.
      2. Locate next of kin.
      3. Ensure notification to next of kin.
         1. If a postmortem examination is to occur, provide the next-of-kin with a timeline describing what may occur and try to answer any questions they may have. (religious beliefs, release of body, funeral arrangements)
         2. If task is delegated to another agency, gain confirmation when notification is made.
      4. Notify concerned agencies of status of the notification.
   9. Ensure Security of Remains
      1. Ensure that the body is protected from further trauma or contamination and unauthorized removal of therapeutic and resuscitative equipment.
      2. Ensure/supervise the removal of the body from the scene.
      3. Facilitate the transportation of the body from the scene.
      4. Report the death to the autopsy facility as appropriate and provide appropriate information that pertains to the case.