

## Mass Fatality

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### Policy:

A Mass Fatality Disaster is defined as an occurrence of multiple deaths that overwhelms the usual routine capabilities of the community.

The Skagit County Coroner's Office will not access the scene until authorized by the investigating agency and search and rescue has performed their duties in recovering all survivors.

Every mass fatality site shall be treated as a crime scene until the Coroner and local law enforcement state differently.

In the event of a Mass Fatality within Skagit County, the Skagit County Coroner shall be immediately notified and a Coroner Response Team will be activated.

- The team will consist of the Coroner, all Medicolegal Death Investigator staff, and possible assistance from another Coroner or Medical Examiner's Office adjacent to Skagit County.

The Coroner Response Team will assist in

- Determining the safety of the mass fatality scene
- Estimating the number of fatalities
- Determining accessibility of the scene and necessary equipment for the recovery of fatalities
- Assisting in arranging for delivery of supplies and equipment to mass fatality scene
- Assisting in setting up staging area, the Family Assistance Center and incident morgue
- Evaluating the need for available resource utilization

Definable Mass Fatality Events may include but are not limited to:

- Natural disasters: Floods, Landslides, Earthquakes, Snowstorms, Communicable Infectious Diseases, Epidemic, Pandemic, Dam failure
- Man Made disasters: Biological Warfare, Chemical Warfare, Conventional Warfare, Nuclear, School Related Incidents, Mass Suicide, Mass Murder.
- Accident related disasters: Aircraft, Train, Bus, Boat, Motor Vehicle Accidents, Drowning, Building Collapse, Fire, Explosion, Chemical and Dam failure.

Responsibilities of the Coroner's Office with regards to a Mass Casualty Event:

- Victim Identification:
  - The Skagit County Coroner's Office is responsible for establishing the cause and manner of death for the purposes of identifying the deceased.
  - The Skagit County Coroner's Office will provide oversight and coordination of resources to accomplish the recovery and identification of the deceased.
- Notification:
  - The Skagit County Coroner's Office with the assistance from local law enforcement and/or outside agencies, will notify next of kin.

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- Forensics:
  - The Skagit County Coroner's Office will determine the need for expert forensic assistance in a mass casualty event (forensic pathologist, forensic odontologist, and forensic anthropologist etc.).
- Security:
  - The Skagit County Coroner's Office will rely upon local law enforcement for mass casualty scene security, incident morgue security, and family assistance center security.
- Staging Area:
  - The Skagit County Coroner's Office will assist in the coordination of a staging area with the local law enforcement agency (agencies) and Department of Emergency Management (DEM).
- Transportation:
  - In the event of a remote mass casualty event, the Skagit County Coroner's Office will request assistance from the Department of Emergency Management and local law enforcement for transport to the scene.
  - If there exist the need for a refrigeration trailer for cold body storage at the designated mass casualty staging area, then the Skagit County Coroner's Office will work with the Department of Emergency Management for assistance with transportation of a refrigerated trailer.

The Skagit County Coroner Response Team will systematically search and mark where bodies, body parts, and personal effects are located with pin flags and document findings. Each finding will be photographed and logged. Pin flags shall be color coordinated for bodies, body parts, and personal effects. Each pin flag will be assigned a number and each pin flag will remain in place after recovery is made.

Bodies and body parts will be treated with dignity and respect.

Each finding will be tagged with a number assigned by the Coroner Response Team. Bodies and body parts will be placed into a body bag. The same identifying number as the contents contained within the bag will be written on the outside of the bag. The bag will be sealed using an integrity seal.

Personal effects found on the body should not be removed from the body. Personal effects not found on the body shall be numbered and placed in appropriate sized plastic property sealed bags.

If transporting to staging area, transport all bodies, body parts and personal effects together and place together at staging area.

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### Incident Morgue Operations

The Incident Morgue Site will be determined based upon the size and nature of the mass fatality event.

The main purposes of the Incident Morgue are to:

- Determine cause and manner of death.
- Identify victims.
- Secure and identify personal effects.

Postmortem records will be completed for all remains as they are processed. These records include: personal effects, photography, radiographs, anthropology, fingerprints, DNA, dental, and pathology reports.

Postmortem records will be compared to ante mortem records obtained from the victim's family and other sources such as fingerprint repositories and hospital records.

Personal effects such as driver's licenses found on the victim or statements of recognition should not be used as positive identification, but rather as tentative identification.

Positive Identification will be the responsibility of the Coroner.

After identification is established and coroner investigation is completed, the coroner will release the body, and or body parts based on the desires of the legal next of kin.

Victim identification will be established using the following methods:

Presumptive Identification:

- If visually recognizable, direct visual or photographic identification of the deceased will be made. Also personal effects, circumstances, physical characteristics, and tattoos will be used in the identification process.

Confirmatory Identification:

- Fingerprints, Forensic Odontology, Radiology, DNA analysis, and Forensic Anthropology

### Clothing and Personal Effects Description and Removal

1. Photographs should be made of the clothing and personal effects on the body.
2. A complete description of each article of clothing should be made to include the following:
  - a. Type of Clothing
  - b. Color
  - c. Size
  - d. Labels
  - e. Monograms
  - f. Any other identifying characteristics
3. Mild soap and water may be used to wash clothing to reveal identification information.
4. Any identifying characteristics of clothing should be photographed.

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5. Removal all items found in the pockets of the clothing. Document the following:
  - a. What pocket the item(s) was found in.
  - b. A description of the item(s)
6. Photographs should be made of any personal effect that will be used in assisting with the identification of the body.
7. All items in wallets and purses should be documented to include:
  - a. A complete list of money.
  - b. A list of all credit cards and the card numbers (last 4 numbers and card type)
  - c. List of any other items that may be useful in establishing identity.
8. Mild soap and water may be used to wash the personal effects to assist with the documentation process.
9. All personal effects should be placed in property bags and tagged with the appropriate body number.

### Documenting the body

1. After the clothing and personal effects have been removed, the body should be carefully examined, and all characteristics deemed important to assist with the identification listed to include:
  - a. Race
  - b. Sex
  - c. Height
  - d. Weight
  - e. Hair color and length
  - f. Eye color
  - g. Glasses or contacts
  - h. Birth marks
  - i. Operation scars
  - j. Tattoos
  - k. Any other identifying characteristics
2. Photographs of birth marks, operation scars, tattoos, or any other identifying characteristics should incorporate the use of a grey board to assist with the background.
3. If possible, the face should be washed with soap and water and photographs of the face taken with blue towel under the head. These photographs may be used for family members for possible recognition of the decedent.

### Processing the body

1. **Radiology**
  - a. Head-to-toe x-rays should be taken of all the deceased. These x-rays will be useful to assist with the identification process and with determining the extent of the injuries that may have occurred.
  - b. Upload all images into MDI log and Coroner Shared folder
    - i. See Postmortem Radiology Policy regarding use of x-ray machine.

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2. **Dental Charting and Examination**
  - a. Contact a board certified Forensic Odontologist to perform dental charting and examination on the decedent.
  - b. All ante-mortem dental records will be provided to the Forensic Odontologist for comparison and potential identification confirmation.
3. **Fingerprinting**
  - a. All bodies should be fingerprinted unless unobtainable.
  - b. Fingerprints will be submitted to the FBI latent print office for possible identification.
4. **Toxicology**
  - a. If possible, blood, urine, vitreous fluid and tissue samples (spleen or liver) should be obtained from all bodies and submitted for toxicological analysis.
    - i. Only trained and qualified personnel should procure toxicology samples.
  - b. All toxicology samples should be placed in proper containers, properly labeled and documented, and submitted for toxicology analysis.

### Victim Information and Identification Center

The Victim Information and Identification Center (VIC) is where information on the missing and deceased will be obtained and managed to assist in the identification of decedents and in family reunification. It is an operation that connects the Family Assistance Center (FAC) and morgue. It includes the gathering of antemortem data, the tracking of missing persons and creation of an unaccounted for person list, and the management of all the components that are necessary for identification, including the missing person data entry. It will coordinate all information gathering and reconciliation concerning unaccounted for persons, potential victims, and unidentified patients.

### Family Assistance Center (FAC)

A Family Assistance Center will be established with the assistance of the Skagit County Coroner's Office. The FAC will be located away from the site of the mass fatality event and staging area.

The FAC provides the following purposes:

- Provides the relatives of victims with information, counseling and access to services they may need in the days following the incident
- Protects families from the media and curiosity seekers
- Allows the Coroner's Office to access families so that they can obtain ante mortem information more efficiently.