

**SECTION 13 – EMERGENCY MEDICAL SERVICES AT OBVIOUS DEATH SCENES****I. EMERGENCY MEDICAL SERVICES AT OBVIOUS DEATH SCENES - GENERAL**

Emergency Medical Service (EMS) agencies in Shelby County are requested to adopt the following Standard Operating Guideline in regards to obvious death scenes in Shelby County. This Standard Operating Guideline, in no way, is meant to interfere with life-saving measures implemented by EMS personnel and applies to obviously dead individuals only.

**II. DEATH SCENES CONSIDERED HOMICIDE SCENES**

All death scenes are considered homicide scenes until proven otherwise. Therefore, great care must be applied when operating in these scenes. However, EMS agencies should adopt a reasonable Dead-On-Scene protocol that limits introducing any possible artifact into an obvious-death scene and limits the number of personnel entering an obvious-death scene. Placing defibrillator pads or EKG electrodes on an obviously dead body is one such way a scene can be disturbed.

**III. SUGGESTED DEAD-ON-SCENE PROTOCOL**

The following is a suggested Dead-On-Scene protocol (in bold italics):

***DEAD AT SCENE***

***Upon arrival at a scene in which the patient is obviously dead and resuscitation efforts would be to no avail, resuscitation efforts of any kind may be withheld on the decedent and usually no cardiac monitoring is required. The following criteria should be used to determine obvious death:***

- ***Presence of rigor mortis***
- ***Presence of livor mortis***
- ***Obvious external exsanguination***
- ***Decapitation***
- ***Decomposition***
- ***Visible brain contents***
- ***Blunt traumatic arrests (after consideration of potentially reversible causes)***
- ***Penetrating traumatic arrests with a transport time of more than ten minutes***
- ***Sustained time down prior to arrival without CPR in progress with presenting rhythm of Asystole in warm adults***

***Note: Hypothermic arrests, near-drowning events and most medical pediatric arrests deserve full resuscitative attempts. CONTACT THE EMERGENCY DEPARTMENT PHYSICIAN for direction.***

#### **IV. EMS NOT TO SEARCH THE DECEDENT**

When EMS personnel arrive on scene and find it's an obvious death by applying the suggested Dead-On-Scene protocol, they are to not touch, add anything to, search, move or remove anything from or in the area of the decedent, with the exception of any trash produced by any EMS intervention. All interventions shall be left in place. The C/DC shall conduct any and all searches of the decedent and obtain any identification that may be present on the body. If EMS personnel cannot establish the identity of the deceased for their records, they may request that information from the responding C/DC. That information will be provided promptly.

## SECTION 14 – LAW ENFORCEMENT AT OBVIOUS DEATH SCENES

### I. LAW ENFORCEMENT AT OBVIOUS DEATH SCENES - GENERAL

Law enforcement agencies in Shelby County are requested to adhere to the following Standard Operating Guideline in regards to obvious death scenes in Shelby County. This Standard Operating Guideline, in no way, is meant to interfere with the timely and thorough investigation of any death scene by law enforcement.

### II. DEATH SCENES CONSIDERED HOMICIDE SCENES

All death scenes are considered homicide scenes until proven otherwise. Therefore, great care must be applied when operating in these scenes.

### III. LAW ENFORCEMENT NOT TO SEARCH THE DECEDENT

When law enforcement personnel arrive on scene and find it's an obvious death, they are to not touch, add anything to, search, move or remove anything from or in the area of the decedent. The only exception shall be any weapon that must be secured to render the scene safe.

### IV. CORONER TO BE NOTIFIED IMMEDIATELY

The Coroner's Office must be notified immediately. The Coroner's Office has statutory authority to take custody of the body. Absent a timely notification, the Shelby County Coroner's Office has been denied its legal obligation. In addition, a timely notification allows the C/DC to begin the process of locating and informing next of kin of the death. Unfortunately, families have learned of a loved-one's death via the media when a timely notification was overlooked.

### V. NOTIFYING THE CORONER'S OFFICE

The Coroner's Office can be reached by calling (205)669-418 or 911 Dispatch at 205-469-6919. A response time of approximately less than 60 minutes is usual and customary. Once the C/DC has been notified and has responded to the scene, the decedent will be viewed and death pronounced.

The Shelby County Coroner's Office understands that the decedent's body may need to remain in place for the duration of the scene investigation by law enforcement. **The C/DC shall be informed of this fact and will provide the lead investigator with contact information for when the body may be removed.**

**However, as a matter of good policy, allowing the decedent to be removed from public display at the very earliest opportunity without compromising the investigation is very desirable.**

## **VI. THE C/DC TO PARTICIPATE IN BRIEFINGS**

The C/DC shall participate in any scene briefings. This will provide the C/DC of an approximate timeline for removal of the decedent and reveal pertinent facts to guide the death investigation. The C/DC will confer with the lead investigator to discuss the timing of an autopsy and whether the on-scene response of a forensic pathologist is required. A timely autopsy will assist law enforcement in directing their investigation.

## **VII. EVIDENCE COLLECTION ON THE BODY**

Generally, evidence collection of items on the decedent's body is deferred to the time of autopsy. However, if the crime scene technician feels that some evidence may be disturbed during transport, then that evidence may be collected at the scene with approval of and in the presence of the C/DC.

Gunshot residue (GSR) testing is NOT PERFORMED BY ALDFS

If the LE agency feels collecting GSR at autopsy is necessary, then the C/DC shall place the decedent's hands in clean paper bags. The bags should be sealed with taperproof evidence tape and initialed. The C/DC shall instruct the LE agency that they need to be at autopsy to collect for GSR. ADFS will NOT collect samples or submit sample for GSR testing. Bagging the decedent's hands in any suspicious death is a good policy notwithstanding the desire to test for GSR.