

Death Scene Protocol

Policy:

All deaths reported to the Skagit County Coroner's Office shall be thoroughly investigated to determine jurisdiction, and, for those deaths that fall under the Coroner's jurisdiction, to aid in the certification of the cause and manner of death. Cases that are deemed Coroner cases and require investigations are defined in accordance with RCW 68.50.010.

The Skagit County Coroner's Office conducts an independent investigation separate from law enforcement or other investigative entities.

The investigator will routinely obtain copies of law enforcement reports and first responder reports as well as medical records. These records will not be retained after the case is closed.

High priority cases are those that are outdoor, in public view, homicide (or potential) scenes, and high-profile scenes. The investigator shall prioritize these cases over all other cases.

Investigators are responsible for being fully prepared at all times, i.e., keeping investigative kits fully stocked, vehicles fueled and ready, cameras, phones charged, carrying appropriate identification, and being properly attired for all weather conditions.

Scene Safety

Scene hazards include unstable structures, body fluids, hostile family/bystanders, traffic, animals, environmental extremes, and chemical exposures.

Use personal protective equipment.

Obtain clearance to enter the scene from appropriate officials (fire, lead detective, hazmat).

Always have law enforcement escort when interviewing family bystanders or entering a private residence.

The following are intended to assist the investigative staff in performing death investigations in a complete manner and in a safe and secure environment.

- Scene investigations are not only limited to the area where the body is located when a death is reported. The scene may extend to the location where the injury and/or incident occurred (e.g. body transported to the hospital but the original incident location occurred at home).
- Each investigator on-call is responsible for being fully prepared at all times (i.e. keeping investigative equipment stocked in scene bag, fuel in the county vehicle, cameras and phones charged, carrying appropriate identification, and being properly attired for all weather conditions).
- The investigator will contact the Coroner regarding all death reports and any follow-up needed.
- The on-call investigator will report to the scene promptly without compromising personal or public safety.
- Identify any cultural or religious considerations
 - Contact on-call supervisor with any concerns
- The responding investigator will request that the law enforcement agency of jurisdiction remain on scene until the scene investigation is complete.
- At minimum following return from the scene, all required fields in MDI log need to be completed along with a detailed narrative describing the circumstances of the death and any important details.