



NEW ORLEANS POLICE DEPARTMENT OPERATIONS MANUAL

CHAPTER: 41.33

TITLE: DEATH INVESTIGATIONS

EFFECTIVE: 04/15/2018

REVISED: Replaces Policy/Procedure 360

PURPOSE

The thoroughness of death investigations to include evidence gathering and witness identification is paramount. This Chapter provides guidelines on death investigations.

POLICY STATEMENT

1. The investigation of cases involving a death includes those ranging from natural causes to homicide. Some causes of death may not be readily apparent, and some cases differ substantially from what they appear to be initially.
2. All incidents involving a death shall be documented in an incident report (EPR).
3. In cases of a duty related death of an NOPD member, a death from an officer's use of force or an in-custody death, PIB shall be contacted immediately and **Chapter 1.3.2 – Force Investigation Team** applies.

DEFINITIONS

Coroner's Office—The medical examiner for the State of Louisiana whose role includes (R.S. 13:5717) retention of decedent's personal effects; moving or disturbing the body of a deceased person; prohibitions including: it shall be unlawful for any person without specific authorization from the coroner or his designee, other than law enforcement or medical personnel, to touch, move, or disturb the body of a deceased person or remove any personal effects or disturb the immediate area where the body is or has been found, if the deceased person's death occurred under any circumstances which reasonably suggest that the person's death, either directly or indirectly, occurred as a result of a violation of law or a coroner's case as defined by law. However, the body may be moved if it is necessary for the preservation of the body, or if necessary to protect public safety or welfare.

DEATH INVESTIGATION CONSIDERATIONS

4. Death investigation cases require certain actions be taken. Emergency Medical Services shall be called in all suspect cause death cases, unless the cause of death is obvious (e.g., the person has been decapitated).
5. Investigators are not authorized to "pronounce death." An investigating member shall

notify his/her supervisor in all death investigations. The District investigating officer's supervisor shall respond to the scene when notified.

REQUEST FOR MEDICAL EXAMINER / CORONER

6. The office of the Medical Examiner (Coroner's Office) shall be notified through Communications Services and provided with known facts concerning the time, place, manner and circumstances of the death involving **any** of the following circumstances (**R.S. 13:5712; C. Cr. P. 101**):
 - (a) Violent death by homicide, suicide or accident.
 - (b) Death from thermal, chemical, electrical or radiation injury.
 - (c) Death from criminal abortion, including any situation where such abortion may have been self-induced.
 - (d) Death from a disease which may be hazardous or contagious or may constitute a threat to the health of the general public or when a person dies.
 - (e) When the death was sudden and happened to a person who was in apparent good health.
 - (f) Where no physician, chiropractor or accredited Christian Science practitioner is in attendance within the 36-hour period immediately preceding death.
 - (g) While in the **custody of law enforcement officials** or while incarcerated in a public institution. (See also: **Chapter 1.3.2 – Force Investigation Team**).
 - (h) Death from external violence or unexplained cause or under suspicious circumstances.
 - (i) When a death occurs outside a licensed health care facility and a member of the NOPD is the first official to learn of the death.

SEARCHING DEAD BODIES

7. The Coroner, Assistant Medical Examiner, or authorized Coroner's Investigator are generally the only persons that should move, handle or search a body. These Coroner's Office representatives may take property, objects or articles found on the deceased or in the deceased's immediate vicinity that may be necessary for conducting an investigation to determine the identity of the deceased or the cause or manner of death. The Coroner's Office shall inventory the body on scene.
8. Should exigent circumstances indicate to an investigating officer that a search of a dead body is warranted **prior** to the arrival of the Coroner's Office representative, the investigating officer should, when reasonably possible, first obtain verbal consent from the Coroner's Office.
9. Whenever reasonably possible, a witness (preferably a relative of the deceased or a member of the household) should be requested to remain near the scene and available to the investigating officer pending the arrival of the Coroner's Office representative. The name and address of this person shall be included in the narrative portion of the incident report (EPR).

DEATH NOTIFICATION

10. When reasonably possible, and if not handled by the Coroner's Office, notification to the next-of-kin of the deceased person shall be made, in person, by the officer assigned to the incident and a supervisor (**R.S. 13.5714**).
11. If the next-of-kin lives in another jurisdiction, a law enforcement official from that jurisdiction shall be requested through Communications Services to make the personal notification.

12. If the relative lives outside of the United States, the Coroner's Office shall be requested to make the notification.
13. In the event a representative of NOPD has made the notification, the Coroner's Office shall be notified that the notification has been made.
14. If a deceased person has been identified as a missing person, this department shall attempt to locate family members and inform them of the death and location of the deceased missing person's remains. All efforts to locate and notify family members shall be recorded in appropriate reports and properly retained. (See also: **Chapter 41.23 – Missing Person Reporting**).

UNIDENTIFIED BODIES – DATA ENTRY

15. As soon as reasonably possible, but no later than 30 working days after the date a death is reported to the Department, all available identifying features of the unidentified body, including dental records, fingerprints, any unusual physical characteristics and a description of clothing or personal belongings found on or with the body, should be forwarded to the LSU FACES Laboratory in Baton Rouge by the investigating officer for entry into the Louisiana state database and the National Crime Information Center (NCIC) file. The FACES Lab can be contacted at faces@lsu.edu or 225-578-4761.

SUSPECTED HOMICIDES

16. If the initially assigned officer suspects that the death involves a homicide or other suspicious circumstances surround the cause of death exist, the officer shall take all necessary steps to protect the scene and isolate possible witnesses.
17. The officer shall notify the ISB - Homicide Section through Communications Services to request that a Homicide investigator respond to the scene for further investigation.
18. The officer shall notify his/her supervisor and request additional officers, units, equipment or support services as appropriate. The District investigating officer's supervisor shall respond to the scene when notified.
19. The assigned officer or detective investigating a homicide or a death under suspicious circumstances shall request the Coroner through Communications Services and document the request in the incident report (EPR).

EMPLOYMENT RELATED DEATH OR INJURY

20. Any member of this department who responds to a call and determines that a death, serious illness or serious injury has occurred as a result of an accident at or in connection with the victim's employment shall document the incident in a report (EPR) and ensure that the regional Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) office is notified by telephone or teletype with all pertinent information.

Baton Rouge Area Office

9100 Bluebonnet Centre Blvd, Suite 201

Baton Rouge, Louisiana 70809

(225) 298-5458

(225) 298-5457 FAX