

## Death Investigation

### 405.1 PURPOSE AND SCOPE

The purpose of this policy is to provide guidelines for situations where deputies initially respond to and investigate the circumstances of a deceased person.

Some causes of death may not be readily apparent and some cases differ substantially from what they appear to be initially. The thoroughness of death investigations and use of appropriate resources and evidence gathering techniques is critical.

### 405.2 POLICY

It is the policy of the Montgomery County Sheriff's Office to respond, document and investigate incidents where a person is deceased. Investigations involving the death of a person, including those from natural causes, accidents, workplace incidents, suicide and homicide, shall be initiated, investigated and properly documented.

### 405.3 INVESTIGATION CONSIDERATIONS

Emergency medical services shall be called in all suspected death cases unless death is obvious (e.g., decapitated, decomposed).

A supervisor shall be notified as soon as possible to assist and provide appropriate personnel and resources. The on-scene supervisor should determine whether follow-up investigation is required and notify the on-call investigator as necessary. The Shift Supervisor will make notification to command staff in accordance with the Major Incident Notification Policy.

#### 405.3.1 REPORTING

All incidents involving a death shall be documented on the appropriate form.

#### 405.3.2 MEDICAL EXAMINER REQUEST

The on call investigator shall be called in all suspicious, sudden, unexpected or unattended deaths or deaths due to other than natural causes. State law requires that the Medical Examiner be notified in any of the following cases:

- (a) Death resulting from violence, poisoning, accident, suicide or homicide
- (b) Sudden death when the deceased had been in apparent good health or was unattended by a physician
- (c) Death occurring in a jail, prison, correctional institution or in law enforcement custody
- (d) Death occurring in those State psychiatric hospitals, developmental centers, alcohol and drug treatment centers, neuro-medical treatment centers, and residential programs for children.
- (e) Death occurring under any suspicious, unusual or unnatural circumstance

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#### 405.3.3 SEARCHING DEAD BODIES

- (a) The Medical Examiner, his/her assistant and authorized deputies are generally the only persons permitted to move, handle or search a dead body. Deputies are authorized to move the body in the event the Medical examiner is unavailable and the Deputy has determined the presence of the body at the scene would risk the integrity of the body or provide or provide a hazard to the safety of others.
- (b) A deputy may make a reasonable search of an individual who it is reasonable to believe is dead, or near death, for the purpose of identification or for information identifying the individual as an anatomical donor. If a donor document is located, the Medical Examiner or his/her assistant shall be promptly notified.
- (c) The deputy or investigator shall seize property, objects or articles found on the deceased or in the immediate vicinity of the deceased that may be necessary for conducting an investigation to determine the identity of the deceased or the cause or manner of death.
- (d) Whenever reasonably possible, a witness, preferably a relative to the deceased or a member of the household, should be requested to remain nearby the scene and available to the deputy pending the arrival of the Medical Examiner or his/her assistant. The name and address of this person shall be included in the narrative of the death report.
- (e) Whenever personal effects are removed from the body of the deceased by a deputy or the Medical Examiner or his/her assistant, a receipt shall be obtained. This receipt shall be attached to the death report.

#### 405.3.4 SUSPECTED HOMICIDE

If the initially assigned deputy suspects that the death involves a homicide or other suspicious circumstances, the deputy shall take steps to protect the scene. The Criminal Investigative Division shall be notified to determine the possible need for an investigator to respond to the scene.

If the on-scene supervisor, through consultation with the Shift Supervisor or Criminal Investigations Director is unable to determine the manner of death, the investigation shall proceed as though it is a homicide.

The investigator assigned to investigate a homicide or death that occurred under suspicious circumstances may, with the approval of his/her supervisor, request the Medical Examiner to conduct physical examinations and tests, and to provide a report.

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#### **405.4 UNIDENTIFIED DEAD BODY**

If the identity of a dead body cannot be established, the handling deputy will request from the Medical Examiner a unique identifier for the body (i.e. dental records, DNA, etc.). The identifier shall be included in any report.

#### **405.5 DEATH NOTIFICATION**

When reasonably practicable, and if not handled by the Medical Examiner's Office, notification to the next-of-kin of the deceased person shall be made, in person, by the deputy assigned to the incident. If the next-of-kin lives in another jurisdiction, a law enforcement official from that jurisdiction shall be requested to make the personal notification.

If a deceased person has been identified as a missing person, this office 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.

