



Approved:
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Subject:

550. Death Investigations

Effective:
February 5, 2018

Revised:
January 15, 2026

CALEA Standards: 41.2.4, 55.2.6

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550.1: PURPOSE AND SCOPE

This policy provides guidelines to department members for investigating deaths, which may range from natural cause deaths to homicides.

550.2: POLICY

It is the policy of the Albany Police Department to conduct thorough death investigations, recognizing that causes of deaths may vary greatly, even from what they first appeared to be.

550.3: INVESTIGATION CONSIDERATIONS

The following shall occur in all death investigations:

- a. Notification of paramedics unless the death is obvious (decapitation, decomposition, etc.);
- b. Notification of a supervisor;
- c. Notification of the on-call medical Deputy Medical Examiner on each death investigation;
- d. All incidents involving a death shall be documented in the appropriate reports.

550.4: MEDICAL EXAMINER NOTIFICATION

- a. [Oregon Revised Statute 146.090](#) requires that a medical examiner must be notified for any death in the following circumstances:
 - 1) Apparently homicidal, suicidal or occurring under suspicious or unknown circumstances;
 - 2) Resulting from the unlawful use of controlled substances or the use or abuse of chemicals or toxic agents;
 - 3) Occurring while incarcerated in any jail, correction facility, or in police custody;

- 4) Apparently accidental or following an injury;
 - 5) By disease, injury or toxic agent during or arising from employment;
 - 6) While not under the care of a physician during the period immediately previous to death;
 - 7) Related to disease which might constitute a threat to the public health
 - 8) In which a human body apparently has been disposed of in a manner that is offensive to the generally accepted standards of the community.
- b. The body, effects of the deceased, and any instruments or weapons related to the death shall not be moved without permission of the Medical Examiner, **Medical-legal Death Investigator**, or the District Attorney ([ORS 146.103\(1\)](#)).
 - c. A Medical Examiner, **Medical-legal Death Investigator**, or District Attorney, in conjunction with the Albany Police Department and/or the county Major Crime Team, shall take custody of, or exercise control over the body, the effects of the deceased and any weapons, instruments, vehicles, buildings or premises which the medical examiner has reason to believe were involved in the death, in order to preserve evidence related to the cause and manner of death (ORS 164.103(3)).
 - d. The members of the Albany Police Department will work cooperatively with both the Medical Examiner's Office and the District Attorney in all death investigations.

550.5: DEATH NOTIFICATION

- a. When practical, notification to the next-of-kin of the deceased person shall be made, preferably in person, by the officer assigned to the incident, a chaplain, or other department member as assigned by a supervisor.
 - 1) If the next-of-kin lives in another jurisdiction, a law enforcement official from that jurisdiction should be requested to make the personal notification if possible. Other agencies may require a teletype.
- b. Upon identifying the body, investigators shall attempt to locate the next of kin or responsible friends to obtain the designation of a funeral home to which the deceased is to be taken ([ORS 146.109](#)).
 - 1) If next of kin is unable to be located, the on-call funeral home should be contacted for removal of the decedent ([ORS 146.109](#)).

550.6: SUSPECTED HOMICIDE

If the initially assigned officer suspects that the death involves a homicide or other suspicious circumstances, the Detective Unit **supervisor** shall be notified to determine if **detective** response to the scene is needed for further immediate investigation.

550.9: OVERDOSE INVESTIGATIONS

- a. Deaths involving drug overdoses are not automatically criminal in nature.
- b. A criminal investigation may be necessary if there is evidence to support that a person died as a result of the ingestion of controlled substances which were delivered or distributed to them by a secondary party.
 - 1) In these investigations, priority should be given to scene security, evidence processing, and interviews of witnesses and involved parties.

550.9.1: OVERDOSE NOTIFICATION

- a. If any investigating officer suspects the death appears to be from an overdose of drugs, the Linn County Narcotics Enforcement Task Force Supervisor or designated detective will be contacted immediately and briefed on the investigation.
- b. If a detective is assigned to investigate the death, they will make notifications to the District Attorney and Medical Examiner if they have not been notified.

550.9.2: OVERDOSE CRIME SCENES

- a. In cases where an overdose is suspected, the crime scene and all contents therein will be contained and secured by the investigating officer the same as any other homicide investigation, until detectives arrive to take over the scene.
- b. Witnesses will be identified and asked to remain at the scene until detectives arrive.

550.10: MEDICATION SEIZURE

- a. Officers conducting death investigations shall seize all controlled prescription medications and, if warranted, shall document the following in the Property and Evidence Report:
 - 1) Prescribing physician;
 - 2) Pharmacy;
 - 3) Fill date;
 - 4) Number of pills or amount of medication dispensed;
 - 5) Number of pills remaining;
 - 6) Dosage and instructions.

- b. If the circumstances surrounding the death suggest possible prescription-related causes, then the investigating officer should document the number of pills and/or amount of each prescribed medication.
- c. Medication which is seized and later determined to not be necessary as evidence (i.e., the decedent's body has been released) shall be entered into the Property and Evidence System as "For Destruction."

550.11: PROPERTY SEIZURE

- a. Property seized during a death investigation where the body is going to be released (no crime or post-mortem examination) shall be entered into the Property and Evidence System as "Safekeeping."
- b. Property seized during a death investigation which appears to be criminal in nature shall be entered into the Property and Evidence System as evidence.