



Colorado Springs Police Department

Standard Operating Procedure

DL-1030-01 Notification of Coroner

Section 1000 – Patrol Functions

Effective Date: 2/11/2025

Supersedes Date: 5/18/2023

.01 Purpose

The purpose of this directive is to define those cases in which the El Paso County Coroner's Office will be advised of deaths and provide protocols for police reporting of natural deaths.

.02 Cross Reference

[GO 1106 Death or Life-Threatening Injury Incidents](#)

[DL-1305-01 Fatal or Serious Injury Crashes](#)

[DL-1033-20 Overdose Deaths](#)

[DL-1100-07 Crimes Against Children](#)

.03 Definitions

This space is intentionally left blank.

.04 Procedure

On any death that officers or detectives are investigating, a notification will be made to the El Paso County Coroner's Office. The coroner, or their representative, will conduct an immediate inquiry into the manner and cause of death for any person under the following circumstances:

- From violence (including traffic accidents), unexplained causes, or under suspicious circumstances
- Due to the influence of or the result of intoxication by alcohol, drugs, or poison
- Where there is no physician in attendance (see below)
- From a criminal abortion
- From a disease that may constitute a threat to the health of the general public
- While in the custody of any law enforcement officer
- From an industrial accident
- From thermal, chemical, or radiation injury

- When death was sudden and happened to a person who was in good health, including infants and children

When officers are dispatched to a scene involving a dead body, the body shall not be moved or searched except as is necessary to determine that the person is dead and that emergency medical assistance is therefore not needed, until a representative of the El Paso Coroner has arrived on scene.

In any case where investigators from the Violent Crimes Section respond to the scene, including suicides, homicides, deaths occurring in police custody, deaths of juveniles six years of age to 17 years of age, and deaths occurring under suspicious circumstances, the investigator in charge from the Violent Crimes Section will assume sole responsibility for initiating notification of the Coroner's Office.

In any case where investigators from the Special Victims Section respond to the scene, such as deaths of children five years of age and younger, the investigator in charge from the Special Victims Section will assume responsibility for initiating notification of the Coroner's Office.

In any case where investigators from the Major Crash Team (MCT) respond to the scene, such as fatal traffic accidents, the ranking officer from the Major Crash Team will make a determination as to the notification of the Coroner's Office.

In those cases that are investigated solely by officers from the Patrol Operations Bureau, the responding officer or supervisor is responsible for initiating a notification to the coroner's office.

After the determination is made that the Coroner's Office is needed at a scene, a request to contact the coroner will be made through the Communications Center.

Attended Deaths

Deaths that occur in healthcare facilities, and/or while the decedent is under the care of a physician, will not normally be referred to the police department or Coroner's Office. Additionally, the El Paso County Coroner has determined that certain deaths, even though occurring outside the physical presence of a physician, may be considered to be "attended," and therefore, not require a Coroner's response, however, the coroner's office must still be notified. Such cases are limited to circumstances in which all the following apply:

- The death is non-violent, expected, and apparently from natural causes
- The death occurs in a nursing home or in a private residence with others (such as family members) present or able to immediately respond
- Decedent has been seen in person by a physician within the past 30 days

- Decedent had previously been diagnosed with significant medical condition(s) that could reasonably explain the death at this time
- Decedent was under the ongoing care of a professional Home Health Care (HHC) agency, such as, but not limited to, Memorial or Penrose Home Care, Pikes Peak Hospice, etc., and had been seen in person by the HHC provider within the past week
- After completing an examination of the decedent and scene of death, the responding officer has no reason to suspect that death was the result of other than natural causes. Officers should consider factors such as the decedent's age and known medical conditions, as well as any suspicious circumstances like unexplained marks on the body, signs of struggle, suspicious behavior by others in attendance, etc.

When the above circumstances are present, the responding officer or supervisor will direct the Communications Center to contact the coroner and request that a representative telephone them at the scene. When contact is established, the circumstances will be explained, and the Coroner's Office will decide whether or not to respond. If the responsible CSPD supervisor believes the Coroner's Office's decision not to respond will jeopardize a criminal investigation, they may consult higher authority and/or the Violent Crimes Section.

In cases where the Coroner's Office does not respond, the issue of legal declaration of death should be resolved by a licensed professional (usually a nurse) from the HHC agency in cooperation with their supervising physician. Investigating officers or decedent's family members should contact the involved HHC agency and request that a health care professional immediately respond to the scene to satisfy the legal requirements for declaration of death. Upon arrival, the HHC professional may communicate their observations by phone to a physician and arrange for completion of the death certificate. If the HHC agency cannot be identified or refuses to respond, the Coroner's Office should be re-contacted for further direction.

In cases that will not be handled by the Coroner's Office, responsibility for removal of the decedent's remains rests with the family, who may be assisted by the HHC agency. Responding officers are encouraged to offer whatever assistance is reasonable and necessary to begin this process, such as suggesting that family members contact a funeral home. Officers will not recommend the services of any particular private business but may refer the family to references such as the Internet or the yellow pages of the telephone book. Every effort should be made to ascertain that preliminary arrangements for the removal of the remains have been made prior to officers departing from the scene.

Offense Reports

Officers responding to death scenes that meet the above criteria for "Attended Deaths," and to which the Coroner's Office does not respond, does not need to prepare an official offense or incident report unless they or a supervisor determine extraordinary circumstances exist, which require additional

documentation. When no report is made, the assigned officer will enter the minimal basic facts to be included on the associated Call for Service screen, to include the name and DOB of the decedent, that the death was of "apparently natural causes," and the fact that the Coroner's Office was notified but did not respond. All other deaths will continue to be documented in an offense or incident report appropriate to the nature of their investigation.

Organ Donation from Deceased Persons

In order for human organs to be medically viable for transplantation, the donor must be on life support at the time of harvesting. Human organs cannot be harvested from people who are obviously deceased outside of a hospital setting because, once the heart has stopped, the organs cannot be used. Therefore, no efforts are necessary to preserve the organs of persons who died outside of a hospital.

Property of Deceased Persons

The El Paso County Coroner is responsible for the property and all personal effects of anyone who dies within the City of Colorado Springs. Without coordination and approval of the Coroner's Office, officers should not release or take custody of any personal property of any decedents, unless exigent circumstances exist. In the event of an exigent circumstance, notify the Coroner's Office as soon as practical after the exigency has passed.

Keep the Peace responses involving deceased persons and their property should be referred to the El Paso County Coroner's Office for review and approval.