



GOODYEAR POLICE DEPARTMENT

Policy and Procedure Manual
POLICY 3.19
DEATH INVESTIGATION

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09/22/2022

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02/23/2021

Approved:

1. PURPOSE AND SCOPE

1. The investigations of cases involving death include those ranging from natural cause to homicide. 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 cannot be emphasized enough. Scene preservation should be priority in the early stages of a death investigation.

2. EMERGENCY MEDICAL SERVICES (EMS)

1. EMS shall be called in all suspected death cases unless the death is obvious (e.g., rigor mortis present, lividity, decapitation, or decomposition.)
2. In all suspected death cases where EMS is present on scene, two EMS personnel will be escorted by officers to the victim for medical confirmation of death.
 - A. The names, agency, and vehicle identifier of EMS personnel entering the crime scene shall be provided to the Medical Examiner and documented in the police report and/or crime scene log.
 - B. All other medical personnel should remain outside of the established crime scene.
 - C. This does not preclude EMS personnel from entering a crime scene to treat other injured parties.

3. INVESTIGATION CONSIDERATIONS

1. A supervisor shall be notified in all death investigations.
2. MEDICAL EXAMINER REQUEST
 - A. The County Medical Examiner shall be promptly called in all sudden or unexpected deaths or deaths due to other than natural causes, including but not limited to:
 1. Death when not under the current care of a health care provider as defined by Arizona Revised Statutes.
 2. Death resulting from violence.
 3. Death occurring suddenly when in apparent good health.
 4. Death occurring in a prison or the death of a prisoner.
 5. Death occurring in a suspicious, unusual or unnatural manner.
 6. Death from disease or accident believed to be related to the deceased's occupation or employment.
 7. Death believed to present a public health hazard.
 8. Death occurring during, in association with or as a result of anesthetic or surgical procedures; except deaths occurring during, in association with or as a result of surgical or anesthetic procedures from natural diseases.
 9. Death involving unidentifiable bodies.
 - B. In any case where the County Medical Examiner has taken custody of the decedent, the case detective shall request a copy of the medical examiner's autopsy report via the following link:
 1. <https://www.maricopa.gov/FormCenter/Medical-Examiner-24/Public-Records-Request-195>

- C. Detectives may use the following link to check the status of their autopsy report request. It should be noted that the immediate findings may be posted upon completion of the autopsy, but the official medical examiner autopsy report may take several weeks to complete and upload.

1. <https://omecasestatus.maricopa.gov/>

3. SEARCHING DEAD BODIES

- A. The Medical Examiner or his/her assistants and authorized investigators are generally the only persons permitted to move, handle, search or remove a body known to be dead. An officer may be permitted to make a reasonable search of an individual who it is reasonable to believe is dead, or near death, for the purposes of identification or for information identifying the individual as a donor. If a donor document is located, the Medical Examiner shall be promptly notified.
- B. Should exigent circumstances indicate to an officer that any other search of a known dead body is warranted prior to the arrival of the Medical Examiner; the investigating officer shall first obtain verbal consent from the Medical Examiner.
- C. The Medical Examiner, with the permission of the Department, may take possession of any property, objects or articles found on the deceased or in the deceased's immediate vicinity which may aid in the determination of the identity of the deceased or the cause or manner of death.
- D. Whenever personal effects are removed from the body of the deceased by the Medical Examiner, a receipt shall be obtained. This receipt shall be attached to the death report. Upon completion of the findings, the Medical Examiner, within 30 days, shall deliver the personal effects to the Department, the deceased legal representative or county treasurer. .
- E. Whenever reasonably possible, a witness, preferably a relative of the deceased or a member of the household, should be requested to remain nearby the scene and available to the officer, pending the arrival of the Medical Examiner. The name and address of this person shall be included in the narrative of the death report.

4. NOTIFICATION TO THE CRIMINAL INVESTIGATIONS DIVISION

- A. Notification to the on-call CID Supervisor shall be done in accordance with Department policy on Specialized Unit Call-Outs. In the event of a death where the facts show the death appears to be from obvious natural causes and a doctor will sign the death certificate or where the Medical Examiner declines jurisdiction and the on-scene supervisor determines a CID response is not warranted no notification is required.
- B. If the circumstances exist where the initially assigned officer suspects that the death was **caused by anything other than obvious natural causes**, the officer shall take steps to protect the scene in accordance with policy and report writing guidelines as well as notify the on-duty supervisor. The on-scene supervisor should reference the Specialized Unit Call-Out policy to determine if notification to the on-call CID Supervisor is necessary.

5. EMPLOYMENT-RELATED DEATHS OR INJURIES

- A. Any member of this agency who responds to 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, may notify the nearest office of the Arizona Division of Occupational Safety and Health (ADOSH) with all pertinent information.

4. ATTENDED DEATHS

1. In cases involving death from natural causes when a physician will sign the death certificate, patrol officers will complete an informational report. If next of kin, or a responsible health care employee is on scene, the officer need not remain on scene after insuring that a mortuary is notified and in route.

5. DEATH NOTIFICATION

1. When practicable, notification to the next-of-kin of the deceased person shall be made, in person, by the officer 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.
2. 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 the location of the deceased missing person's remains. All efforts to locate and notify family members shall be recorded in appropriate reports.

6. REPORTING

1. UNIDENTIFIED BODIES DATA ENTRY

- A. As soon as reasonably possible, 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 Department of Public Safety for entry into the Arizona state database and the NCIC file.

2. DEATH INVESTIGATION REPORTING

- A. All incidents involving a death shall be documented in a police report. The Deceased Person Checklist should be utilized by Patrol to assist with the initial investigation of any death and prior to a CID response. In death investigations of an infant (12 months or younger), an officer shall complete the Sudden Unexplained Infant Death Investigation (SUIDI) checklist as per the Arizona Revised Statutes instead of using the Deceased Person Checklist, and prior to any autopsy being conducted.
 1. The Department shall retain the original SUIDI checklist and immediately forward a copy to the Medical Examiner.

7. AUTOPSY ATTENDANCE

1. Criminal Investigations Division

- A. Attending an autopsy will be limited to one Major Crimes Unit detective.
- B. A detective will be expected to attend the autopsy during the following investigations.
 1. Homicides
 2. Child deaths
 3. Deaths under suspicious circumstances

2. Traffic Unit

- A. If pertinent to the investigation and could provide relevant investigative information one reconstruction investigator will attend the autopsy of those involved in fatal collisions.

3. For training and other reasonable requests, a supervisor may approve attendance of additional investigators.