



NORTHERN LANCASTER COUNTY REGIONAL POLICE DEPARTMENT

- ☒ General Order
☐ Special Order
☐ Personnel Order

Order Number
7.1.18

Subject: **AGENCY GUIDANCE and RESPONSE TO PRELIMINARY DEATH INVESTIGATIONS**

Original date of issue: **04-04-2020** Effective date: **11/27/2023** Review Date: **Until amended or revoked**

Reference: **6.1.25 – 7.1.11 – 6.1.34 – 3.5.1- 7.3.4- 7.1.10, S.O. 2.8.1**

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Rescinds

Review Dates: 11/24/20, 11/9/2022, 01/31/2023, 11/27/2023, 11/14/2024

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Distributions:

1. General Order Manuals
2. Reading Verification to all Personnel
3. Distribution via Power DMS

In interpretation of this chapter, the singular shall include the plural and the masculine shall include the feminine and the neuter.

This order contains the following sections:

W.D. 7.1.18 NLCRPD Agency Guidance and Response to Preliminary Death Investigations

I. PURPOSE

The purpose of this policy is to provide initial responding officers with guidelines for conducting preliminary investigations of deceased persons.

II. POLICY

NLCRPD Agency members shall comply with the guidance contained within this written directive.

A. Scope of NLCRPD Requirements – Full Agency Response Requirements

1. The NLCRPD generally assumes full response requirements for cases required by statute that fall under the jurisdiction of the coroner. (Exclusions or limitations and suggested response parameters are depicted in Appendix “A” for applicability in response to (a) to (k) of this directive.)

2. Statutory duty Office of the Coroner. The coroner, having a view of the body, shall investigate the facts and circumstances concerning a death that appears to have happened within the county, notwithstanding where the cause of the death may have occurred, for the purpose of determining whether or not an autopsy or inquest should be conducted in the following cases:
- a) A sudden death not caused by a readily recognizable disease or if the cause of death cannot be properly certified, by a physician on the basis of prior recent medical attendance.
 - b) A death occurring under suspicious circumstances, including if alcohol, a drug, or another toxic substance may have had a direct bearing on the outcome.
 - c) A death occurring because of violence or trauma, whether apparently homicidal, suicidal, or accidental, including, but not limited to, death due to mechanical, thermal, chemical, electrical, or radiational injury, drowning, cave-in, or subsidence.
 - d) A death in which trauma, chemical injury, drug overdose, or reaction to a drug or medication or medical treatment was a primary or secondary, direct, or indirect, contributory, aggravating, or precipitating cause of death.
- Drug Overdose-associated death: Any death determined to have been caused by a drug overdose, regardless if NARCAN has been administered, requires reporting via the Overdose Information Network (ODIN). Reporting requirements outlined in NLCRPD GO 2.8.1.**
- e) A perioperative death in which the death is not readily explainable based on prior disease.
 - f) A death in which the body is unidentified or unclaimed.
 - g) A death known or suspected to be due to a contagious disease and constituting a public hazard.
 - h) A death occurring in prison or a penal institution or while in the custody of the police.

- i) A death of an individual whose body is to be cremated, buried at sea or otherwise disposed of so as to be unavailable for examination thereafter.
- j) A sudden and unexplained infant death.
- k) A stillbirth

B. Scope of Response Requirements - Response Declined by Agency

1. Nursing Home or Health Care Facilities, Memory Care Facilities Those who die of natural causes while medically attended. (By Memorandum Filed Via Office of the Chief Effective on Friday, March 13, 2020 at 16:00 hours the NLCRPD will no longer respond to handle calls related to the investigation of deaths covered within these circumstances.)
2. The NLCRPD will no longer respond to handle calls related to the investigation of deaths covered within these circumstances or
 - a) A resident in a nursing facility
 - b) A patient in hospice care
 - c) A resident in a memory care facility
 - d) Any person within a healthcare facility
 - e) Some cases of those who die from natural causes at home and are seen regularly and are under the care of a physician.
3. Any death related to or believed to be related to the COVID-19 Public Health Crisis.

C. Scope of Response Requirements – Limited Response Provided by Agency

1. Natural Deaths at Home. NLCRPD has no requirement to stand by for any prolonged periods of time at these scenes.
2. Sign-offs by attending physician(s) may be received and documented by the NLCRPD in accordance with the requirements listed in sections D and E of this order.
3. The NLCRPD preferred option is for the Office of the Coroner to be notified by the responding EMS service., however, the NLCRPD notification is permissible but not desirable.
4. After the investigating officer is reasonably assured the death is natural

- and non-criminal in nature, the occupants of the home should be advised not to disturb the scene or touch the decedent, and the scene should be vacated by NLCRPD members.
5. While EMS has protocols in place for natural deaths, there is no requirement for the police to stand by pending arrival by the coroner's office.
 6. The Office of the Coroner has NO authority to demand police standby at death scenes.
 7. The NLCRPD has no requirement to collect property. All requirements for the safeguarding of property fall upon the Office of the Coroner.

D. Initial Response.

Deceased persons or persons near death may be encountered in response to a wide variety of calls for service. Officers who encounter such situations shall, in order of importance, based on the circumstances, perform the following:

1. Identify and arrest any perpetrator(s) if present.
2. Ensure officer safety and the safety of others by safeguarding any weapons at the scene.
3. Administer emergency first aid if necessary and/or summon emergency medical personnel.
 - a) Death can only be determined in an official capacity by a physician. However, in cases involving unmistakable evidence of death (e.g., the presence of lividity or rigor mortis, decomposition, or other obvious indicators of death), emergency medical personnel need not be summoned.
 - b) If the officer determines that the person is dead, the factors surrounding that determination shall be entered into the officer's report.
 - c) Officers shall resolve any doubt concerning the life or death of a subject by summoning appropriate medical assistance.
4. Where emergency medical personnel are on the scene or have been summoned, provide such personnel with as much latitude as possible to deliver emergency medical services notwithstanding the officers' responsibility to protect the crime or incident scene.
5. Isolate and protect the crime scene from any intrusion by non-essential personnel including officers not directly involved in the crime scene

investigation.

6. Notify communications of the circumstances and request the response of a supervisor and any additional personnel as needed. If the death is perceived to be a homicide or potential homicide or the result of an accident or suicide, an investigative officer shall also be summoned, and the patrol supervisor notified.
7. Agency notification protocols apply.
8. Agency reporting requirements apply. Observe and note pertinent circumstances at the scene.
9. Record the nature of any physical modifications to the crime scene as the result of intervention by emergency medical personnel or others.
10. Record in a crime scene log the identity of any persons who were present at or who entered the crime scene.
11. Identify witnesses and record basic information regarding the event. Ask witnesses to remain, if possible. If not possible, determine their identity and how they can be contacted by investigators.
12. Identify and ensure that any suspects do not leave. Responding officers may conduct basic, preliminary questioning of a suspect or witness, but should normally defer interviews to investigators.
13. Ascertain if the deceased was under a physician's care for a potentially life-threatening health problem, and note the name, telephone number, and address of the physician.
14. In deaths apparently resulting from natural causes, determine, to the degree possible, the deceased's physical condition before death.
15. Do not release any information concerning the deceased to the press or the public without agency authorization until the next of kin has been notified as established by the policy of this agency.

E. Death by Natural Causes

1. The deceased's body may be released to a mortuary next of kin chosen if the following conditions are met:
 - a) there are no indications of foul play, accident, or suicide; and
 - b) the deceased was under the ongoing care of a physician for a life-threatening disease or illness; and

- c) the physician upon contact agrees to sign a death certificate.
2. Under the foregoing circumstances, the coroner's office and homicide investigators need not be summoned.
3. If the attending physician cannot be reached or cannot/will not sign a death certificate in the above situation, the coroners shall be notified to respond to the scene and shall decide regarding the disposition of the body.
4. The NLCRPD has no requirement to collect property. All requirements for the safeguarding of property fall upon the Office of the Coroner.
5. NLCRPD will depart the scene in cases of natural death without the requirement to stand by for the coroner.
6. Bodies shall not be moved unless located in a spot that is deemed untenable (e.g., in open view of the public) and only under conditions noted in item B.2.a. above that do not require a police investigation or coroner's response.
 - a) Emergency medical personnel or funeral home attendants may be requested to move bodies when necessary and permitted.
 - b) In all other cases, bodies may be covered but may not be moved without the approval of the coroner or homicide investigators.

F. Death by Other Than Natural Causes

1. In all cases of death other than those due to natural causes where the death will be certified by an attending physician, the coroner's office shall be notified.
2. In any case in which there is doubt concerning the cause of death, the coroner's office and criminal investigators shall be notified and shall be responsible for investigating the death.
3. In cases of death by accident, suicide, homicide, or undetermined causes, the supervisor shall coordinate with homicide investigators and the coroner's office in protecting the scene and conducting a preliminary investigation of the incident.
4. In cases under this section the NLCRPD is responsible for the evidence and property identification, collection, and preservation.

G. Supervisory Responsibilities

1. General Considerations - A supervisory officer shall respond to any reported death within the full response requirement of this directive. Responsibilities of the supervisory officer include but are not necessarily limited to the following:
 - a) Assure that only essential resources or personnel have access to death scenes where there is a potential or known viral, biological, or another pathogen involved or suspected.
 - b) Verify that appropriate requests have been made for assistance by crime scene technicians, homicide investigators, and command personnel and request any additional personnel to protect the crime scene or conduct the investigation as necessary.
 - c) Receive a verbal report from initial responding officers regarding pertinent conditions at the scene upon their arrival, circumstances surrounding the death, the presence of witnesses and/or suspects, disposition of the body, and related details.
 - d) Ensure completion of preliminary information collection and the protection and integrity of the crime or incident scene
 - e) Ensure proper reporting is completed to include initial on-scene, supplemental, investigatory, and state-required reporting.

E. Assistance to Survivors

1. The guidance in the following paragraphs is predicated upon the circumstances surrounding the death scene. In cases involving the presence of potentially communicable illness, officers should consider the health and welfare implications and limit or exclude contact with survivors present at the scene. The priority in these instances is generally:
 - a) Limiting NLCRPD resource allocation to the event
 - b) Entry to the death scene only when necessary and only after the use of screening questions by the officer to the family of EMS staff.
 - c) Notice to the Office of the Coroner for case handling and further disposition.
 - d) Return to service after appropriate advisory has been made to survivors.
2. Providing basic support and crisis assistance to survivors is the

responsibility of both responding officers and investigators. The nature of such assistance must be dictated by the circumstances, but officers should use the following as a guide in these instances.

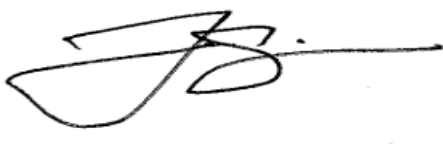
3. Officers should endeavor not to leave the scene of a death where survivors are present until reasonably assured that the survivors have adequate personal control and/or family or close friends readily available to provide support. In gauging the need for assistance, officers shall also consider the following:
 - a) The emotional reactions and physical condition of the survivors;
 - b) Availability of other adults in the home or immediate area;
 - c) Responsibility of the survivors for infants or small children;
 - d) Home environment, if apparent, (e.g. evidence of excessive alcohol use or drug use, lack of means of financial support, shortage of food, problem with shelter, etc.); and
 - e) Availability of a support system (e.g. including friends, family, close neighbors, access to clergy, means of transportation, etc.)
4. Officers should remain alert to the need of survivors for emergency medical assistance, for example, in cases of physical or emotional collapse or related problems.
5. Officers should be aware of confusion on the part of survivors. They should speak slowly and deliberately and write down any pertinent information that survivors may need. This may include such matters as the following:
 - a) Disposing of the body.
 - b) Locating personal effects.
 - c) Meeting identification requirements/procedures; and
 - d) Providing notifying officers' names, agency, and telephone numbers.
6. Officers should assess the physical and emotional well-being of survivors before departing. Officers should be reasonably assured that survivors can take care of themselves and those for whom they may be responsible.
7. Officers should endeavor not to leave a lone survivor unattended until all reasonable efforts have been made to garner first-hand support from the survivor's family, friends, co-workers, neighbors, family, clergy, crisis counselors, or other community social service agency.
8. Officers shall refer to and follow procedures provided by this agency for the notification of next of kin.

F. Deconfliction of statutory and NLCRPD written directive requirements.

1. Nothing within this written direct is intended to conflict with statutory or agency response requirements.

Date: November 27, 2023

By Order of:

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'J. Kilgore', is written over a white rectangular box.

Joshua P. Kilgore
Chief of Police

APPENDIX “A”

A resident in a nursing facility, A patient in hospice care, A resident in a memory care facility, Any person within a health care facility, Some cases of those who die from natural causes at home and are seen regularly and are under the care of a physician.

Any case involving Covid 19 death

Natural Deaths at Home. NLCRPD has no requirement to standby for any prolonged periods of time at these scenes. Sign offs by attending physician may be received and documented by the NLCRPD in accordance with the requirements listed in sections D and E of this order. The NLCRPD preferred option is for Office of the Coroner to be notified by the responding EMS service., however the NLCRPD notification is permissible but not desirable.

After the investigating officer is reasonably assured the death is natural and non-criminal in nature, the occupants of the home should be advised not to disturb the scene or touch the decedent and the scene should be vacated by NLCRPD members. While EMS has protocols in place for natural deaths, there is no requirement for the police to standby pending arrival by the coroner's office.

