

	DEATH INVESTIGATION	Operations Order 7.20.00
	PHOENIX POLICE DEPARTMENT	Rev. 10/15 PAGE 1

1. **VIOLENT CRIMES BUREAU (VCB) INVESTIGATED DEATHS**

A. When officers arrive at a death scene, VCB should be contacted regarding any of the following situations.

- Death resulted from violence
- Death of a person in the custody of any law enforcement agency
- Death at the Arizona State Hospital
- Death occurred in a suspicious, unusual, or unnatural manner
- Death was from a disease or accident believed to be related to the deceased's occupation or employment, to include persons on medical retirement or leave
- Death resulted from an injury or illness that could cause a public health hazard: for example, radiation or plague
- Death occurring as a result of any prior traumatic injury: for example, gunshot or stabbing
- Death accompanied by substantial decomposition
- Death of a child with no life-threatening medical conditions
- Death occurred to a fetus 20 weeks or older

B. VCB can be contacted at the following:

During business hours Monday through Friday	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The VCB Homicide Unit at 602-495-5883
After 5 p.m. and Weekends/holidays	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The VCB Desk sergeant at 602-262-6141

C. Officers will be required to provide:

- Deceased's name
- Address of occurrence
- Time of dispatch
- Incident number
- Circumstances of death

D. Patrol officers will be responsible for initially securing the scene until relieved by VCB personnel.

E. When VCB investigators are not available, a sworn supervisor may authorize patrol officers to document the death in an Incident Report (IR) or Field Interview (FI).

2. **MARICOPA COUNTY OFFICE OF THE MEDICAL EXAMINER (OME) INVESTIGATED DEATHS**

A. In cases where the death is **natural**, non-trauma related, and a doctor **is not** available to sign the death certificate, an investigator from the OME should routinely investigate the death, when available.

B. Prior to contacting the OME, officers need to visually confirm there is no trauma (stab wounds, gunshot wounds, etc.).

C. The following types of death investigations will be handled by OME investigators:

- (1) All apparent natural deaths without decomposition (this includes United States (U.S.) Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) patients)
- (2) All deaths occurring where decedent was under anesthesia and/or undergoing a legal surgical procedure.



DEATH INVESTIGATION

Operations Order

7.20.00

PHOENIX POLICE DEPARTMENT

Rev. 10/15

PAGE 2

2. C. (3) All apparent natural deaths at home, in a secure environment, or witnessed collapse outside a residence where identification will not be a problem and there is no doctor in attendance.
- (4) An apparent natural death where decedent was previously transported to a mortuary and death certification is problematic.
- (5) All other jurisdiction (FOJ) deaths where incident occurred outside the City limits, (accident, suicides, homicides, etc.)

EXAMPLE: The injury occurs in Yuma, but the victim is flown to a Phoenix area hospital for medical care and dies.

- D. The OME service is available 24 hours a day, seven days a week, and is based on the availability of an investigator.

- Patrol officers will contact the OME at 602-506-3322.

- E. If an OME investigator is available, an investigator and transport service will be dispatched.

- (1) Officers will remain at the scene until the OME investigators arrive, complete their investigation, and leave with the decedent's remains (officers will not be required to stand by at hospitals or mortuaries).

- (2) Officers will need to provide the OME with:

- A brief description of the circumstances.
- Fire/rescue unit that responded.
- Deceased information
- Next of kin (NOK) (if possible)

- (3) Officers will attempt to locate the next of kin (using either personal effects of the deceased or items at the scene).

- (4) Officers will complete an FI (see section 4 of this order for reporting guidelines).

- Officers will impound any valuable property of the deceased that requires safekeeping (see [Operations Order 5.8.00, Evidence, Impounding, and Property](#)).

- (5) The OME investigator will complete all other required paperwork, deal with the family at the scene, and conduct all other follow-up investigation.

- F. In cases where the OME investigator is not available and it is an apparent natural death, patrol officers will handle the investigation as outlined in section 3 of this order and complete the Maricopa County Medical Examiner Identification (yellow) Tag (see [7.2.A, MCME ID Tag](#)).

- G. If questions arise during the investigation, or suspicious circumstances develop, officers should contact VCB.

3. PATROL INVESTIGATED DEATHS

- A. Patrol officers will normally investigate all deaths classified as **natural**, non-trauma related, and a doctor is **available** to sign the death certificate.

- (1) When the deceased died of natural causes and the attending physician is qualified and willing to sign the death certificate, the listed procedures will be followed:

- (a) If the next of kin is not available or has no mortuary preference, officers will contact the OME at 602-506-3322 to advise of the location of the deceased.

	DEATH INVESTIGATION	Operations Order 7.20.00
	PHOENIX POLICE DEPARTMENT	Rev. 10/15 PAGE 3

3. A. (1) (b) The OME will provide officers with information about contacting the appropriate mortuary for a transport vehicle.
 - B. Patrol officers may be required to investigate deaths classified as **natural**, non-trauma related, when a doctor is **unable** to sign the death certificate, identification of the deceased cannot be confirmed, **and** an OME investigator is unavailable.
 - (1) Officers will still need to contact the OME and arrange for removal of the deceased.
 - (2) The investigating officers will complete the FI and a Maricopa County Medical Examiner Identification (yellow) Tag (see [7.2.A, MCME ID Tag](#)).
 - Officers will impound any valuable property of the deceased that requires safekeeping.
 - C. NOK Notification
 - (1) Patrol officers are responsible for making reasonable efforts to notify the NOK in deaths that they investigate.
 - (2) If the NOK cannot be identified or notified, officers will contact VCB to notify them of the situation and request a detective be assigned to complete the notification.
 - (3) NOK notifications, or lack therefore, will be documented in the IR/FI.
4. **DOCUMENTATION**
- A. Each death requires a separate IR/FI.
 - (1) Select the appropriate Arizona Revised Statute (ARS) code or *Other/Death Investigation* as the "Offense Description" in the Offense section.
 - (2) The deceased's name will be entered in the Victim section ensuring "Deceased" is selected from the "Injury 1" drop-down box.
 - (3) The following information will also be included in the IR/FI:
 - Explanation of the circumstances surrounding the death
 - Unit number and shift of paramedics or firefighters, if utilized
 - Name of the NOK contacted [entered in the Other Person section (if applicable)]
 - OME investigator's name [entered in the Other Person section (if applicable)]
 - Name and telephone number of the physician
 - Mortuary name and if that mortuary was used at the request of the decedent's family or was a rotation assignment by the OME
 - Notation of jewelry or other valuables worn by listing the items as "Property" if left on the body/at the scene or "Evidence" if impounded.
 - B. One of the following types of death will be selected as "Offense Element 1" in the Offense section of the IR/FI:
 - Accidental Death
 - Death Unknown
 - Drowning
 - Overdose
 - C. The investigating detail will complete the "Death Info" tab of the RMS Master Name Index module.

	DEATH INVESTIGATION	Operations Order 7.20.00
	PHOENIX POLICE DEPARTMENT	Rev. 10/15 PAGE 4

4. C. (1) When a subject has been positively identified and **does not** have a master name index, the investigating detail will also initiate a Workflow notification to the Information Services Unit (ISU).
- “Death Notification on (*insert subject’s name*)” will be included in the “Comments” data field under the “Begin New Workflow” tab.
- (2) If the subject has been positively identified and has fingerprints on file **or** if a subject has not been positively identified, the investigating detail will initiate a Workflow notification to the Laboratory Services Bureau (LSB) to request the deceased be fingerprinted.
- “Death notification, fingerprints required on (*insert subject’s name*)” and the associated MNI number (if any) will be included in the “Comments” data field under the “Begin New Workflow” tab.
- (a) Once the fingerprints are obtained, LSB will forward the Federal Bureau of Investigations (FBI) Criminal Fingerprint Card (FD-249) to the Centralized Booking Detail Fingerprint Unit.
- (b) Upon verifying the subject’s identity, the Centralized Booking Detail Fingerprint Unit will update the subject’s MNI and make the necessary notifications to the appropriate governmental entities.

D. Reporting Requirements

(1) Victim	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • List name, physical description, marks, tattoos, clothing, and injuries <ul style="list-style-type: none"> * If identity is known, a physical description is not needed. • Check victim’s RMS record <ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Indicate what the record consists of and include last entry in the IR * If the last entry could have contributed to his/her death, include the IR number and the date.
(2) Next of Kin	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Include in the Other Person section of the IR • Include full name, address, telephone number, relationship to deceased, and whether notified or not
(3) Mortuary	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • List name, address, and telephone number • State whether request or list
(4) Suspect	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Include a complete description when appropriate to include marks, scars, tattoos, hair style, facial hair, voice, clothing, etc.
(5) Paramedics	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Include names, unit assignment, stations, and shifts
(6) Time of Death	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Include time of death pronounced by doctor or paramedics
(7) Time Found	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Include time body was found
(8) Property and Evidence	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Include personal property taken from the victim • Indicate whether property was impounded or released (if released, to whom)
(9) Photographs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Digital photographs should be taken at all death investigations
(10) Weapon	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Describe in detail
(11) Vehicle	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • List full description
(12) Witnesses or Investigative Leads	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • List names, addresses, and telephone numbers • Include business name, address, telephone, work hours, and days off
(13) Narrative	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • List dispatch time and time of arrival • Describe the scene as found (including type of structure, lighting, weather) • Indicate who was contacted and their statements • Examine the body (latex gloves or equivalent will be worn when handling the body.) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> * List location of body (which room, bed, floor, etc.)

	DEATH INVESTIGATION	Operations Order 7.20.00
	PHOENIX POLICE DEPARTMENT	Rev. 10/15 PAGE 5

4. D. Reporting Requirements: (Continued)

(13) Narrative (Continued)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Include position of body (face up or down, head north, feet south, etc.), arms, and legs * List condition of body (cool, warm, post mortem lividity, rigor, wounds, cuts, bruises, etc.) • Explain the circumstances of the death <ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Indicate type of death (sudden, unexpected, resulting from chronic illness, accident, etc.) * Include, if known, symptoms prior to death, such as pain, location of pain, shortness of breath, bleeding, and vomiting * Include, if known, any history of previous illness, such as heart or lung disease, fever, or cough, and who supplied the information • Include the apparent manner of death: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Natural, homicide, unknown, suicide, or accident * If the death appears to be due to other than natural causes, indicate the reason and evidence. • In cases of motor vehicle accidents or motor/pedestrian accidents, indicate the following: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> * If victim was driver or passenger * Where the person was seated in the vehicle * Whether the person had been cited for illegal procedures leading to the accident or if such citations are pending • Do not attempt to make medical diagnosis, but simply indicate symptoms and past history, if any • Do not request specific laboratory procedures or an autopsy examination <ul style="list-style-type: none"> * These decisions will be made by the medical examiner • In the case of possible or probable drug overdose, indicate, if known, the identification of the drugs used. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> * If available, send these drugs or medications with the body to the OME * Place the drugs or medications in the OME's identification tag envelope, which will be sealed and initialed. • Indicate the officer/detective who completed the Maricopa County Medical Examiner Identification (yellow) Tag <ul style="list-style-type: none"> * See 7.2.A, MCME ID Tag for completing tag. • Indicate who removed the body to the OME
---------------------------------------	---

5. **DEATH NOTIFICATION**

A. Notification of death or serious injury will be carried out in a prompt and considerate manner.

(1) Two officers should be assigned the task.

(2) When possible, officers should try to arrange for a friend, relative, or member of the clergy to be present.

(3) If patrol officers cannot make NOK notification by the end of their shift, they should notify VCB so efforts can be continued until successful.

B. When a request for notification has been made by another jurisdiction and officers are unsuccessful in locating the subject to be notified, the requesting agency will be notified of the negative results.

	DEATH INVESTIGATION	Operations Order 7.20.00
	PHOENIX POLICE DEPARTMENT	Rev. 10/15 PAGE 6

Last Organizational Review: