SUDDEN OR UNATTENDED DEATH INVESTIGATIONS

INDEX CODE: 1802
EFFECTIVE DATE: 04-18-22

Contents:

I. Policy
II. Death Due to Natural Causes
III. Medical Examiner Cases
IV. Removal of Bodies
V. Proponent Unit
VI. Cancellation

I. POLICY

Investigations of sudden or unattended deaths require the on-scene supervision of a sergeant or above. Deaths due to natural causes occurring in a hospital or nursing home setting are considered attended deaths, and are not the subject of this index code. Regardless of the circumstances, all juvenile deaths (individuals under 18 years of age) require that a CID supervisor is notified.

II. DEATH DUE TO NATURAL CAUSES

A. If the investigation concludes that there are no suspicious circumstances and the deceased has been under the care of a physician in recent weeks, the investigating officer will contact the physician, explain the circumstances, and determine if the attending physician* will certify the cause of death within 24 hours. If the attending physician will sign the death certificate within 24 hours, the body may be released to the family. The investigating officer will assist the family in making arrangements for removal of the body. The attending physician's name, address and phone number must be provided to the funeral home handling the removal of the body. The physician's name, address, and phone number; and the funeral home business name, address and phone number must be listed in the incident report.

> * Note: The term "Attending Physician" does not imply that the physician needs to be physically present at the time of a person's death. An Attending Physician is a physician who is responsible for the care given to a particular patient; and/or the person's private physician, if that physician cares for the person on an individual and/or outpatient basis.

B. If the attending physician will not sign the death certificate or cannot be contacted within a reasonable time, the investigating officer will contact the medical examiner, explain the circumstances, and follow the medical examiner's instructions as to removal of the body.

C. If the medical examiner authorizes release of the body to the family or next of kin, the officer will assist the family in making arrangements for removal of the body, as dictated by the circumstances. If the family or next of kin are not on scene, the investigating officer is responsible for arranging personal notification by this department or by another law enforcement agency, if the family or next of kin are located outside Anne Arundel County. Typically, a request to notify made to another law enforcement agency will need to be done via Teletype notification. Teletype personnel will ask for a request for verification of notification when sending the Teletype. The investigating officer will follow up with Teletype to determine the outcome of the notification process. Only as a last resort will next of kin be notified via telephone from Anne Arundel County, if contact cannot be made in person.

D. The investigating officer will prepare and submit an Offense/Incident report using Incident Type, “Death.” The relevant Incident Statistics checkboxes on the “Death” Incident Card will be selected. The Narrative will document the facts of the case and the details of the investigation, as well as efforts to contact next of kin.

III. MEDICAL EXAMINER CASES

The medical examiner is required to investigate cases of death under the following circumstances:

* Death occurs as a result of suicide, violence, or casualty.
* Death happens suddenly when the deceased was in apparent good health, when unattended by a physician.
* Death occurs in a suspicious or unusual manner.

The following procedures will be followed in Medical Examiner cases:

A. Patrol Supervisor

A uniformed patrol supervisor will respond to the scene and oversee the preliminary investigation by District personnel. Upon evaluation of all available evidence and information, the platoon supervisor will decide whether or not the Homicide Unit will be summoned. Any doubt as to whether or not the death was a result of criminal homicide will be resolved by summoning the Homicide Unit. It is not necessary to "notify" Homicide of cases where homicide has been ruled out by the on-scene commander. The supervisor is responsible for arranging personal notification of the deceased's next of kin, either by this department or by another law enforcement agency if the next of kin is located outside Anne Arundel County. Typically, a request to notify made to another law enforcement agency will need to be done via Teletype notification. Teletype personnel will ask for a request for verification of notification when sending the Teletype. The Patrol Supervisor will follow up with Teletype to determine the outcome of the notification process. Only as a last resort will the next of kin be notified via telephone from Anne Arundel County, if contact cannot be made in person.

B. Investigating Officer

The supervisor will assign a patrol officer to conduct the police investigation of the unattended death. The investigating officer is responsible for the following actions:

1. Secure and preserve the crime scene pending the arrival of an Evidence Collection Unit.

2. Assist E.C.U. in the identification, collection, and submission of evidence.

3. Conduct all necessary interviews of witnesses, friends, relatives, neighbors, acquaintances. Take formal statements when possible.

4. Obtain positive identification of the deceased. Positive identification should be based on fingerprints, dental records, and/or personal papers found on the deceased.

5. Complete all investigative procedures necessary to establish the cause and manner of death.

6. Contact and brief the medical examiner, and preserve the scene pending his/her arrival. If the cause of death is such that the medical examiner decides not to respond to the scene, obtain instructions from him/her as to removal of the body.

7. Establish a chain of custody of the body in cases where the medical examiner directs that the body be removed to a morgue for a postmortem examination.

8. Secure the personal property and residence of the deceased.

9. The investigating officer will prepare and submit an Offense/Incident report using Incident Type, “Death.” The relevant Incident Statistics checkboxes on the “Death” Incident Card will be selected. The Narrative will document the facts of the case and the details of the investigation, as well as efforts to contact next of kin.

10. A copy of the Offense/Incident report must be ***emailed*** to the Office of the Chief Medical Examiner in Baltimore ***(photo@ocmemd.org) before the end of the officer's tour of duty. The email should include the OCME case number for reference. The report can also be faxed to*** 410-333-6501 ***if necessary.***

11. The primary officer/investigator must contact the Office of the Chief Medical Examiner to obtain the results of the autopsy and his/her findings as to the cause and manner of death. This information will be documented in a supplement report.

IV. REMOVAL OF BODIES OF DECEASED PERSONS

A. Natural Causes

In cases of non-suspicious death (cases not requiring an investigation by the police or the Medical Examiner) where the deceased person's physician has agreed to sign the death certificate, removal of the body is the responsibility of the deceased person's survivors. The Fire Department is not responsible for transporting the body. Officers should provide reasonable assistance to the surviving family in arranging transportation.

Experience has shown that police officers are delayed for extended periods of time attempting to resolve the following situations:

1. The next of kin cannot be located, or will not be available for at least two hours;
2. No one will assume responsibility for the deceased's body;
3. The surviving family or friends cannot afford the funeral costs;
4. The deceased person's doctor will sign the death certificate, but cannot respond for at least two hours.

If one or more of the above problems exists, the investigating officer should call the State Anatomy Board at 410-547-1222. The Anatomy Board will make transport arrangements and have the body brought to their office in Baltimore City.

B. Medical Examiner Cases

In all cases of death requiring an investigation by the Medical Examiner, the body may not be removed from the scene without the Medical Examiner's permission. Such permission may be requested and obtained via telephone in cases where the body constitutes a public nuisance and criminal homicide has been ruled out. In such cases the investigating officer will inform the Medical Examiner where the body has been taken, if not already so instructed by the Medical Examiner.

When the Medical Examiner orders the body transported to the morgue, he/she will arrange for transportation. The investigating officer's report will indicate the names of the persons who transport the body to the morgue, and their place of employment. If the Medical Examiner fails to arrange transportation, the investigating officer or, if necessary, the squad supervisor will re-contact him/her for instructions on removal of the body.

V. PROPONENT UNIT: Bureau of Patrol.

VI. CANCELLATION: This directive cancels Index Code 1802, dated ***11-15-21***.