



DEATH INVESTIGATIONS FOR FIRST RESPONDERS

POLICY

Refer to Policy 360 (Death Investigation) of the Los Angeles Port Police Manual for further information.

Reporting an incident

Crime Scene Management

When responding to a radio call of a death investigation the following procedures should be considered:

Arrival Assessment

- Render aid to victims and ensure scene is safe for medical personnel
- Establish a perimeter and secure area
- Coordinate arriving units
- Record names and units numbers of units on scene, especially Fire Personnel if they pronounced the time of death (Crime Scene Log)
- Remove unnecessary units from scene
- Secure clothing and evidence
- Initial Assessment. Does this appear to be a crime? If so, what type of crime?
- Assign officer to suspect
- Assess need for immediate suspect arrest
- Is evidence present on the suspect?

Establishing Command

- Designate command. Who's in charge?

Stabilize and Secure Scene

- Clear crime scene and establish perimeter with crime scene tape
- Determine the size of the crime scene (It's easier to reduce size of the crime scene than to expand it)
- Designate entry/exit points
- Start detailed crime scene access log
- Assign an Officer to be the Scribe (Documentation/Sit-Stat/Re-Stat) on scene
- Locate witnesses and obtain initial statements
- Search immediate area for additional evidence or crime scenes
- Establish command post and staging area

Department Notifications and Report Writing

- The officer(s) handling the death investigation should immediately notify the on duty Watch Commander or Field Supervisor of the circumstances surrounding the incident to determine how to proceed. The Watch Commander or Field Supervisor will then notify the appropriate personnel (For further information refer to Los Angeles Port Police Policy #358 – Major Incident Notification and Supervisor’s Field Operations Guide)
- According to the SFOG, Public Information Officer (PIO), Maritime Coordination Center, LAPD Watch Commander, USCG and On Duty/Call Port Police Detective should be notified by the on duty Supervisor
- All reports shall accurately reflect the identity of the persons involved, all pertinent information seen heard or assimilated by any other sense, and any actions taken.
- A detailed report should be completed answering the Who, Where, Why, What, When, How, etc. (Refer to Los Angeles Port Police Policy #344 – Report Preparation for further information)

Transfer of Command

- Meet and brief detective supervisor and other personnel
- Help determine need for warrant
- Direct all patrol personnel to complete detailed reports as soon as possible
- Meet with detectives to discuss scene and evidence
- Transfer command to detective supervisor

Coroner Request

If a crime is committed, suspected or obvious signs of foul play exist, or descendant’s personal physician refuses to sign the death certificate, the coroner should be notified. The coroner contact number is (323) 343-0711.

Detailed information is not required for an initial notification of death if the body is still at the scene. Basic information such as location, callback telephone number, preliminary mode, sex of victim(s) and number of victims will suffice for the initial call to the coroner. Death reports for bodies that have been transported to a hospital will require additional information since the scene is no longer intact.

Once death is pronounced, no one should be permitted to further disturb the body or any related evidence. The clothing and personal property of the decedent fall within the Coroner’s jurisdiction and should not be further disturbed, discarded or release prior to the Coroner’s arrival. Anything that was on or with the decedent when they arrived at the hospital should remain with the body pending Coroner arrival.

For further details refer to Government Code § 27491 and Health & Safety Code § 102850 direct the Coroner to inquire into and determine the circumstances, manner and cause of certain deaths.

Searching Dead Bodies

The Coroner or Deputy Coroner is generally the only person permitted to search a body known to be dead from any of the circumstances set forth in Government Code § 27491. The only exception is that an officer is permitted to search the body of a person killed in a traffic collision for the limited purpose of locating an anatomical donor card (Government Code § 27491.3). If such a donor card is located, the Coroner or a designee shall be promptly notified.

Should exigent circumstances indicate to an officer that any search of a known dead body is warranted prior to the arrival of the Coroner or a designee; the investigating officer shall first obtain verbal consent from the Coroner or a designee (Government Code § 27491.2).

Whenever possible, a witness, preferably a relative to the deceased or a member of the household, should be requested to remain at the scene with the officer pending the arrival of the Coroner or a designee. The name and address of this person shall be included in the narrative of the death report. Whenever personal effects are removed from the body of the deceased by the Coroner or a designee, a receipt shall be obtained. This receipt shall be attached to the death report.

Death Notification

When practical, and if not handled by the Coroner's Office, notification to the next-of-kin of the deceased person should be made, in person, by a uniformed officer. If the next of kin lives in another jurisdiction, a law enforcement official from that jurisdiction shall be requested to make the personal notification. If the relatives live outside this county, the Coroner may be requested to make the notification. The Coroner needs to know if notification has been made.

Moving the body without Coroner Permission

In some rare cases, exigent circumstances may require the body to be moved to a secure location prior to the law enforcement agency contacting the Coroner. This must only be considered when the circumstances are such that the scene cannot reasonably be rendered safe and the delay caused by contacting the Coroner for permission to move the body may result in loss of the body or crucial evidence on the body.

When the body is floating in the ocean, a river or pool it may be removed from the water and moved to a boat or the shore immediately adjacent to the location of the discovery prior to contacting the Coroner. Bodies beneath the surface of the water should only be removed from the water when Coroner personnel are present due to accelerated decomposition of such bodies once out of the water.

When the body is in immediate danger of being damaged by approaching fire or other hazard it may be moved to a safe location immediately adjacent to the location of death prior to contacting the Coroner.