



# GENERAL POLICE ORDER CLEVELAND DIVISION OF POLICE



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SUBJECT: <b>DEAD BODY INVESTIGATIONS</b>			
ASSOCIATED MANUAL: <b>WARRANT UNIT</b>		RELATED ORDERS: <b>1.3.01, 4.1.03, 6.1.02</b>	
CHIEF OF POLICE: <i><b>Michael McGrath, Chief</b></i>			

*Substantive Revisions in Italic*

**PURPOSE:** To provide guidelines for initial dead body investigations.

**POLICY:** Members of the Cleveland Division of Police shall treat the deceased with dignity *and maintain a professional demeanor at all times taking into account the sensitivities of the public and the deceased's survivors. Evidence related to a dead body investigation shall be handled in a manner that maximizes the preservation and integrity of the evidence. The on-scene supervisor shall weigh all the circumstances surrounding the death and determine if the death is a probable suicide, accidental death, homicide, or suspected violence.*

**PROCEDURES:**

- I. Responding Officer Responsibilities:
  - A. *Request a supervisor to respond the scene.*
  - B. Check for signs of life without unduly disturbing the body. Emergency Medical Service (EMS) personnel shall immediately assume custody *unless an officer can conclusively determine that a person is deceased and EMS is not needed.* If EMS is not present *and is required,* officers on the scene shall request that the Communication Control Section (CCS) ask EMS to respond.
  - C. If there are *conclusively* no signs of life, telephone the *Cuyahoga County Office of the Medical Examiner* to advise them of the death. Provide the *Medical Examiner's Office* the information as requested.
  - D. Follow the instructions *of the Medical Examiner's Office.* The *Medical Examiner's Office* shall make the determination as to whether or not to assume custody of the body.

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- E. If the death appears to be the result of a homicide or suspected violence, officers shall:
1. *Treat the scene as a crime scene and follow the guidelines established in General Police Order 4.1.01 Use of Crime Scene Entry Log and General Police Order 4.1.03 Crime Scene Preservation and processing.*
  2. Detain *and separate* all witnesses and suspects for questioning by the Homicide Unit.
  3. Not allow the body to be moved until Homicide Unit personnel permit.
- F. If firearms are discovered at the scene, officers shall:
1. Not disturb the firearm until the *Crime Scene and Records Unit (CRSU)* photographs it.
  2. Record the firearm's exact location and condition.
  3. *If the need to preserve firearm evidence (protection from the environment [rain] or man-made conditions [traffic, hostile crowd]) requires that the firearm be moved, use latex or latex-like gloves to manipulate the firearm. This serves to protect the recovery of any "touch" DNA that may be found on the firearm. The gloves shall not be re-used to touch any other piece of evidentiary evidence.*
  4. *If approved by CRSU to do so, unload the firearm and note the number of live rounds and spent rounds, condition of the hammer (cocked or not cocked) and the location of spent shell casings.*
  5. *Officers shall take due care walking through an area expected to contain shell casings so as not to kick the items to a different location. Handling of shell casings shall also be accomplished using latex or latex-like gloves to prevent DNA contamination of evidence.*
  6. If the firearm is jammed or damaged and cannot be unloaded or if the officers are unable to unload it:
    - a) Tape the hammer closed and place tape around the trigger guard.

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- b) Mark the Gun Bag Tag with large red letters to indicate that the firearm is or may be loaded.
  
- 7. Carefully convey loaded or possibly loaded firearms to the Forensic Unit for inspection, unloading and processing. If the Forensic Unit is closed, the weapon shall be kept at the district/unit, separate from other property and evidence, until transport.
  
- 8. *If the death appears to be the result of a suicide caused by a firearm, ensure that the unloaded firearm is turned over to the Medical Examiner's Office.*
  
- G. Contact the Warrant Unit to check for warrants on the deceased.
  - 1. If a warrant is discovered *and the dead body is a Medical Examiner's case*, the on-scene supervisor shall notify the *Medical Examiner's Office of the warrant. The Medical Examiner's Office will then be responsible for taking fingerprints of the deceased.*
  
  - 2. *If a warrant is discovered and the dead body is not a Medical Examiner's case, the on-scene supervisor shall notify CSRU to follow up and secure the fingerprints of the deceased.*
  
- H. Advise the next of kin that they may contact a funeral home if the *Medical Examiner's Office* relinquishes custody **and** the attending physician agrees to sign the death certificate.
  
- I. Take all keys found *in plain view* on the scene, medication, firearms, and property found on the body to the *Medical Examiner's Office*. If it is necessary to remove other property or evidence from the scene, take the property or evidence to the *Medical Examiner's Office*.
  
- J. Do not allow any other property to be removed from the scene without the consent of the *Medical Examiner's Office*.
  
- K. Do not give property from the scene to anyone without the consent of the *Medical Examiner's Office*.
  
- L. Do not permit members of the *Medical Examiner's Office* contract ambulance service to search the scene.

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- M. Secure the premises, ensure that the contract ambulance service affixes the *Medical Examiner's Office* adhesive seal on the door and door frame and instruct all parties that the premises are sealed on behalf of the *Medical Examiner's Office* and that **no one** may enter without the permission of the *Medical Examiner's Office*.
  
- N. Next of kin notification:
  - 1. *Officers shall not search a scene for next of kin information where there is an expectation of privacy at that location.* If no information is readily available, officers shall contact a neighbor, building manager, or other person/entity for next of kin information.
  - 2. Death notifications shall be made in person.
  - 3. If the next of kin resides outside of Cuyahoga County, *contact CCS to request* that the local police agency make a personal notification.
  
- O. If the death is a *Medical Examiner's Office* case, notify the *Medical Examiner's Office* desk attendant when the next of kin are notified. Provide to the *Medical Examiner's Office* the name of the person notified and the relationship to the deceased.
  
- P. If the *Medical Examiner's Office* takes custody of the body:
  - 1. The *Medical Examiner's Office* shall dispatch an ambulance to retrieve the body.
  - 2. If the body transport service does not arrive within 45 minutes or if there are less than two attendants on the responding unit, the responding officers shall complete a Form-1 specifying the deficiency and forward it to the *Deputy Chief* of Field Operations.
  
- II. Supervisory officers:
  - A. Shall respond to the scene of a dead body investigation.
  - B. Supervisory officers shall ensure that EMS is not unnecessarily used to transport bodies. However, if family or public sensitivity is likely to be aroused and criminality is not otherwise suspected, EMS may be requested to remove the body immediately.

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- C. *If the deceased has an outstanding warrant, refer to the Section [I(F)] above for proper protocol.*
- D. *Take photographs of any involved firearm if CSRU is unavailable or is delayed and the firearm needs to be secured expeditiously; and ensure that the photographs are marked, tagged, and entered into evidence.*

### III. Record Management Incident (RMS) report:

- A. An RMS report is required when the Division responds to a dead body situation.
  - 1. Zone car personnel shall complete an RMS report on non-traffic fatalities.
  - 2. An OH-1, with supplement reports, shall be used to report traffic fatalities.
- B. Officers shall include the following information in the narrative section of the RMS report:
  - 1. Circumstances surrounding the discovery of the body or the death.
  - 2. *Apparent or suspected cause of death, if reasonably determined.*
  - 3. History of illness (*mental or physical*), despondence, or suicide attempts.
  - 4. Name, address, phone number, and relationship of the next of kin notified.
  - 5. Method of notification and the name and badge of the officer who notified the next of kin.
  - 6. Name of the *Medical Examiner's* Office personnel notified of the next of kin notification.
  - 7. Time that the *Medical Examiner's* Office was notified.
  - 8. Results of the warrant check.

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- C. If applicable, officers shall include the following information in the narrative of the RMS report:
1. Description of the crime scene, including the location of the body.
  2. Name of the transport service by which the deceased was conveyed.
  3. Arrival time of the transport service.
  4. Names of transport personnel.
  5. Description of property removed from the scene (*as approved by the Medical Examiner's Office*), the names of those to whom the property was given, and where it is being taken.
  6. The name of the doctor pronouncing the death and time the victim was pronounced dead.
  7. Presence of physical evidence that may indicate suicide.
  8. Name of the person *in the Record Section* who placed the name of the deceased on the Hospital List.
  9. Statement that the premise was secured and that the keys were given to the *Medical Examiner's Office*.
  10. Other investigating officers and units present.
  11. Forms issued.
  12. Other notifications.