

Death Investigation

329.1 PURPOSE AND SCOPE

The purpose of this policy is to provide guidelines for situations where officers initially respond to and investigate the circumstances of a deceased person.

Some causes of death may not be readily apparent and some cases differ substantially from what they appear to be initially. The thoroughness of death investigations and use of appropriate resources and evidence gathering techniques is critical.

Death investigations shall be conducted pursuant to CRS § 30-10-606.

329.2 INVESTIGATION CONSIDERATIONS

Emergency medical services shall be called in all suspected death cases, unless the death is obvious (e.g., decapitated, decomposed).

A supervisor shall be notified as soon as possible to assist and provide appropriate personnel and resources. The on-scene supervisor should determine whether follow-up investigation is required and notify the Detective Sergeant as necessary. The Shift Supervisor will make notification to command staff in accordance with the Major Incident Notification Policy.

329.2.1 CORONER REQUEST

Officers are not authorized to pronounce death unless they are also Coroners, Deputy Coroners, or appointed Coroner investigators. The Coroner shall be called as soon as practicable after the scene is safe and secure in all deaths. Investigating officers shall investigate and work in cooperation with the Coroner involving any of the following circumstances (CRS § 30-10-606(1)):

- a. The death is, or may be, unnatural as a result of external influences, injury, or violence, including:
 1. A death that is due to the influence of, or is the result of, intoxication by alcohol, drugs, or poison.
 2. A death that is the result of an accident, including an accident at the workplace.
 3. A death that involves the unexpected or unexplained death of an infant or child.
- b. There is no physician in attendance, or the physician is at the scene but is unable to certify the cause of death.
- c. The death occurs within 24 hours of admission to a hospital.
- d. The death is the result of a criminal abortion, including any situation where such abortion may have been self-induced.
- e. The death is the result of a disease that may be hazardous or contagious or may constitute a threat to the health of the public.
- f. The death results from the action of a peace officer, or while the person was in the custody of law enforcement officials or incarcerated in a public institution.

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- g. The death was sudden, and happened to a person who was in apparent good health.
- h. The body is unidentifiable, decomposed, charred, or skeletonized.
- i. The death occurs under circumstances that the Coroner determines may warrant further inquiry in order to determine the cause and manner of death, or that requires further law enforcement investigation.

In cases involving any of the above-mentioned circumstances, the body of the deceased shall not be removed from the place of death prior to the arrival of the Coroner. This restriction shall not apply if the Coroner grants permission for removal or removal is necessary to identify the victim, protect property from damage, preserve evidence, or protect life, health, or safety.

When the Coroner arrives at the scene, law enforcement personnel shall make all reasonable accommodations to allow the Coroner to collect time-sensitive information.

If a suicide note is found at the place of death, investigating officers or the Coroner shall take custody of the note based on a prior agreement. If there is no prior agreement, investigating officers have the authority to take custody of the suicide note and shall provide a copy to the Coroner.

329.2.2 SEARCHING DEAD BODIES

- a. The Coroner or their assistant and authorized investigators are generally the only persons permitted to move, handle, or search a body.
- b. An officer may make a reasonable search of an individual who it is reasonable to believe is dead, or near death, for the purpose of identification or for information identifying the individual as an anatomical donor. If a donor document is located, the Coroner or their assistant shall be promptly notified.
- c. The Coroner, with the permission of the Department, may take property, objects, or articles found on the deceased or in the immediate vicinity of the deceased that may be necessary for conducting an investigation to determine the identity of the deceased or the cause or manner of death.
- d. Should exigent circumstances indicate to an officer that any other search of a known dead body is warranted prior to the arrival of the Coroner or their assistant, the investigating officer should first obtain verbal consent from the Coroner or their assistant when practicable.
- e. Whenever reasonably possible, a witness, preferably a relative to the deceased or a member of the household, should be requested to remain nearby the scene and available to the officer pending the arrival of the Coroner or their assistant. The name and address of this person shall be included in the narrative of the death report.
- f. Whenever personal effects are removed from the body of the deceased by the Coroner or their assistant, a receipt shall be obtained. This receipt shall be attached to the death report.

329.2.3 SUSPECTED HOMICIDE

If the initially assigned officer suspects that the death involves a homicide or other suspicious circumstances, the officer shall take steps to protect the scene. The Detective Section shall be notified to determine the possible need for an investigator to respond to the scene.

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If the on-scene supervisor, through consultation with the Shift Supervisor or Detective Section supervisor, is unable to determine the manner of death, the investigation shall proceed as though it is a homicide.

The investigator assigned to investigate a homicide or death that occurred under suspicious circumstances may, with the approval of their supervisor, request the Coroner to conduct physical examinations and tests, and to provide a report.

329.2.4 EMPLOYMENT-RELATED DEATHS OR INJURIES

Any member of this department who responds to and determines that a death, serious illness, or serious injury has occurred as a result of an accident at or in connection with the victim's employment should ensure that the regional Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) office is notified of all pertinent information.

329.2.5 REPORTING

All incidents involving a death shall be documented on the appropriate form.

329.3 POLICY

It is the policy of the Louisville Police Department to respond, document, and investigate incidents where a person is deceased. Investigations involving the death of a person, including those from natural causes, accidents, workplace incidents, suicide, and homicide, shall be initiated, conducted, and properly documented.

329.4 UNIDENTIFIED DEAD BODY

If the identity of a dead body cannot be established, the handling officer will request from the Coroner a unique identifying number for the body. The number shall be included in any report.

329.5 DEATH NOTIFICATION

When reasonably practicable, notification to the next-of-kin of the deceased person shall be made by the the Coroner's Office. If the next-of-kin lives in another jurisdiction, a law enforcement official from that jurisdiction may be requested to make the personal notification.

If a deceased person has been identified as a missing person, this department shall attempt to locate family members. All efforts to locate and notify family members shall be recorded in appropriate reports.

