

## 18. RESPONDING TO DEATH SCENES & TRANSPORT OF DECEASED PERSONS

(December 2005)

### I. POLICY

All deaths are traumatic to family and friends of the deceased, sudden and violent deaths more so.

Officers responding to death scenes shall preserve the scene and determine whether or not the death is suspicious.

Officers should be conscious of the effect that these incidents have on others, present a professional demeanor to those who may be grieving, and be prepared to deal with individuals in emotional distress.

### II. CHECKLIST

- Detain suspects
- Detain and separate any witnesses
- Secure the crime scene
- Protect physical evidence
- Request an evidence technician
- Complete an Incident Report which details actions taken and notifications made

### III. DEFINITIONS (N/A) IV. FORMS

- Incident Report (PGC Form #3529)
- Property Record (PGC Form #4360)
- Special Report (PGC Form #3530)

### V. PROCEDURES

In all incidents involving death, the reporting officer must closely inspect the body and the scene to determine whether the death appears to be natural, or due to suspicious circumstances. Relatives and witnesses may be questioned as appropriate. In all cases, the reporting officer shall notify the Homicide Unit and document the notification on the Special Report. Homicide Investigators are responsible for determining which scenes they will respond to.

#### 1. Natural Death Scenes

After determining that the cause of death appears to be natural, the officer shall:

- Contact a forensic investigator
- Ensure proper disposition of the deceased's property
- Ensure security of the deceased's home
- Notify next of kin
- Complete a Special Report
- Complete a Property Report as needed

#### 2. Suspicious Death Scenes

Accidental deaths, suicides, and deaths involving unusual or unexplained circumstances must be referred to the Medical Examiner for autopsy. In these cases, the Homicide Unit must be notified immediately. *See: CHECKLIST.*

For additional details concerning these investigations, *See: VOLUME II, CHAPTER 17. CRIMINAL INVESTIGATIONS*, section **9. Homicide Section.**

#### 3. Transport of Deceased Persons

A relative of the decedent should arrange for transportation of the body in cases where it

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is not transported to the medical examiner for autopsy. Officers should help the family with contacting a funeral home or transport service, after the family has decided which funeral home they want to use. All arrangements and costs are the family's responsibility.

If a relative cannot be contacted to facilitate transport, or the family is indigent and unable to make arrangements, the Anatomy Board of Maryland may be requested to provide transportation.

### **4. Coordination With the Fire Department**

The Fire Department provides emergency transportation for sick or injured persons to medical care facilities. The Fire Department is not responsible for the routine transportation of deceased individuals.

### **5. Requesting Transport by the Anatomy Board**

The Anatomy Board will transport deceased persons if all of the following conditions are met:

- The body is donated or unclaimed
- The body is located where no morgue facility exists
- The attending physician has signed the death certificate, or the medical examiner has released the body

Officers shall notify their supervisor and obtain their approval prior to requesting transport by the Anatomy Board. Supervisors should ensure that all reasonable attempts to obtain transportation services by a family member have been exhausted, and

that the requisite criteria for Anatomy Board transportation have been satisfied.

### ***Information Required by the Anatomy Board***

Subsequent to a request for transport, a funeral director from the Anatomy Board should arrive.

If the medical examiner has released the body, a death certificate should be left for the funeral director.

If an attending physician has been notified and will sign the death certificate, the funeral director will need the physician's name, address, and telephone number. If a physician will not sign the death certificate, the medical examiner will be contacted to obtain assistance.

### **6. Emergency Transport by a Funeral Home**

The Anatomy Board has limited funds available to pay for the emergency transport of a deceased person by a local funeral home.

If a delay in transport of one hour is unreasonable due to the location and condition of the body, the Anatomy Board will pay the expense of providing an immediate transport by a local funeral home. To obtain expedited service, the Anatomy Board must be notified of the circumstances when the transport is requested.

The Anatomy Board will contact a local funeral home and arrange for an immediate

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transport. This procedure is only to be used in emergencies.

If the Anatomy Board cannot be contacted to make the transport, Public Safety information concerning the death certificate or responsible physician must be given to the funeral director making the immediate removal. The Anatomy Board will pay for the transport, provided that exigent circumstances existed at a time of transport.

Whenever a local funeral home is used for an emergency transport, the circumstances and identity of the authorizing supervisor will be documented on an Incident Report.

### **7. Transportation in Medical Examiner Cases**

In cases of suspicious death or homicide, all transportation arrangements will be made by the Medical Examiner.

## **VI. GOVERNING LEGISLATION & REFERENCE**

This General Order addresses:

Commission on Accreditation for Law Enforcement Agencies, Standards:  
41.2.5, 42.1.4, 42.2.1, 42.2.2, 55.1.3,  
55.2.6, 82.2.1, 82.2.2, 84.1.1

Communications may contact a local funeral home and arrange for transport to the local morgue or funeral home. In such cases,

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