


Death Investigation

329.1 POLICY HEADER

Original Effective Date:	Revised Date:
September 1, 2021	January 4, 2023
Authorization:  Jason Haberman Chief of Police	

329.2 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.

329.3 POLICY

It is the policy of the Mt. Lebanon Police Department to respond to, 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 INVESTIGATION CONSIDERATIONS

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

The Watch Commander shall respond to any suspicious death or death resulting from an accident or suicide to assist and provide appropriate personnel and resources. The Watch Commander should determine whether follow-up investigation is required, call the Duty Officer for approval and then notify the Investigative Services Unit supervisor. The Watch Commander will make notification to command staff in accordance with the Major Incident Notification Policy.

329.4.1 REPORTING

All incidents involving a death shall be documented on the appropriate form unless they occur in a hospital, assisted living facility, or where hospice care is being provided and criminal activity

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is not suspected. Members may complete the Mt. Lebanon Police Department [Death Scene Investigation Checklist](#) .

329.4.2 MEDICAL EXAMINER REQUEST

The Medical Examiner shall be called in all sudden or unexpected deaths. State law requires that the Medical Examiner be notified in any of the following cases (16 P.S. § 1218-B; 16 P.S. § 9521):

- (a) A death that is unattended by a physician
- (b) A death involving drugs or alcohol or suspicious circumstances
- (c) A death that is a result of violence, trauma, or accident
- (d) A death where the victim is unidentified or unclaimed
- (e) A stillborn child or sudden infant death
- (f) A death in police custody or confinement in a jail or prison
- (g) A death that may be the result of a contagious disease and there is a possible public health risk
- (h) When the officer is at a death scene and is made aware that the body will be disposed of by cremation or other method that will make the body unavailable for future examination

329.4.3 SEARCHING DEAD BODIES

- (a) The Medical Examiner, his/her assistant and authorized investigators are generally the only persons permitted to move, handle or search a dead 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 Medical Examiner or his/her assistant shall be promptly notified.
- (c) The Medical Examiner, 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 Medical Examiner or his/her assistant, the investigating officer should first obtain verbal consent from the Medical Examiner or his/her 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 Medical Examiner or his/her assistant. The name and address of this person shall be included in the narrative of the death report.

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- (f) Whenever personal effects are removed from the body of the deceased by the Medical Examiner or his/her assistant, a receipt shall be obtained. This receipt shall be attached to the death report.

329.4.4 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. With the approval of the Duty Officer, the Investigative Services Unit supervisor shall be notified to determine the possible need for an investigator to respond to the scene.

If the on-scene supervisor, through consultation with the Watch Commander or Investigative Services Unit 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 his/her supervisor, request the Medical Examiner to conduct physical examinations and tests, and to provide a report.

With approval of the Duty Officer, an outside agency may be requested to assist in investigations involving suspected homicides.

329.4.5 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.

329.5 UNIDENTIFIED DEAD BODY

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

In the case of an unidentified deceased child, the Investigative Services Unit supervisor shall ensure that either the Medical Examiner or this department do the following:

- (a) Makes an entry in the Unidentified Deceased Person File of the Commonwealth Law Enforcement Assistance Network (CLEAN) with the known descriptive information.
- (b) Collects a biological sample within 24 hours of discovering the child.
- (c) Submits the biological sample along with any known personal identifying information to the Pennsylvania State Police within 48 hours of the collection (18 Pa.C.S. § 2908; 44 Pa.C.S. § 2316.4).

329.6 DEATH NOTIFICATION

When reasonably practicable, and if not handled by the Medical Examiner's Office, notification to the next-of-kin of the deceased person shall be made, in person, by the officer assigned to

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the incident. 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 a deceased person has been identified as a missing person, this department shall attempt to locate family members and inform them of the death and location of the deceased missing person's remains. All efforts to locate and notify family members shall be recorded in appropriate reports.

[For additional procedure on DEATH NOTIFICATION click here.](#)

Attachments

Form 20 - Death Scene Investigation Checklist.pdf



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Death Scene Investigation Checklist



2/24/2021

Date: / /		Time:		Incident #:	
Deceased's <u>FULL</u> Name:				DOB:	
				Age:	
Address:				OLN:	
				SSN:	
Phone #'s:				Marital Status:	
				E-mail:	
HT:	WT:	Hair:	Eyes:	Handedness:	
Reported/Found By:				Relationship:	
				DOB:	
Address:				OLN:	
				SSN:	
Phone #'s:				E-mail:	
Next of Kin:				Relationship:	
				DOB:	
Address:				E-mail:	
Phone #'s:			Notified?	By Whom:	

INJURIES/MARKS/TATTOOS

Position of Body:	<p>Diagram of Body:</p>
Head/Neck:	
Arms/Hands:	
Legs/Feet:	
Front Torso:	
Back Torso:	
Clothing/Jewelry:	
Damage to Clothing:	

Medical History:		
Medications:		
Family Doctor:	Phone:	Date/Time:
Funeral Home:	Phone:	Date/Time:
M.E. Contact:	Phone:	Date/Time:
Released To:	Phone:	Date/Time:
Investigating Officer:		Date:
Watch Commander:		Date:



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Death Scene Investigation Checklist



Date:		Day:		Start Time:	
Location:				Other Medical Personnel On-Scene:	
Time Pronounced Dead:		By:		NOTES OR SKETCHES:	
On-Scene Checklist - ***COMPLETE BEFORE LEAVING***		Y	N		
Has the WATCH COMMANDER BEEN NOTIFIED?					
Was the victim positively identified?					
Anyone known to have observed the victim's death?					
Last known contact for victim known/established?					
Is information available on victim's activities 24 hrs before death?					
Did emergency medical services respond?					
Was the scene photographed?					
Was the scene processed for physical evidence?					
Any sign of tampering or disturbance at scene?					
Condition of windows/doors checked?					
Method of entry/access known (key, forced, etc.)?					
Dated material observed/checked (mail, newspapers, etc.)?					
Any evidence indicating date and time of victim's death?					
Any evidence that victim was dressed/undressed after death?					
Any evidence action occurred away from where body was found?					
Weapons or other apparent implement of death found/examined?					
Any inconsistencies between injuries and apparent implement?					
Was a firearm used, and if so, was its condition documented?					
Other apparent/possible implement(s) of death examined?					
Were alternate theories of death posed/considered?					
Did the victim have existing medical conditions?					
Did the victim have mental health issues/conditions?					
Any evidence of drugs or alcohol at the scene?					
Was there evidence of sexual activity before/after death?					
Was a suicide note, message, recording found?					
If note found, are other examples of victim's writing available?					
Are victim's life insurance and/or last will available?					
Other physical evidence at the scene documented?					
Was the victim listed as a missing/wanted person in CLEAN/NCIC?					
Any significant issues remain unresolved?					
Was the residence/building/area secured before leaving?					
Other:				Investigating Officer:	
Other:				Date:	
				Watch Commander:	
				Date:	