



SACRAMENTO POLICE DEPARTMENT GENERAL ORDERS



533.03 DEAD HUMAN BODIES 11-19-12

PURPOSE

The purpose of this order is to establish procedures when dead human bodies are encountered.

POLICY

It shall be the policy of the Sacramento Police Department to ensure that officers who encounter dead human bodies proceed in a manner that ensures the protection of the scene, the prevention of contamination of evidence and the notification of appropriate supervisory and investigative personnel.

PROCEDURE

A. GENERAL

1. Officers shall not disturb human remains before the arrival of investigative personnel or the Sacramento County Coroner's Office (SCCO) unless necessary in order to preserve critical evidence or to prevent further damage to or the loss of the remains (See Section E for suicide procedures).
 - a. Officers shall not remove identification cards, wallets, contraband, clothing or any other objects from human remains unless they have received explicit permission from a deputy coroner to do so.
 - b. Officers shall not cover the body or disturb the immediate scene with attempts to cover the body.
2. If the circumstances are suspicious or appear to indicate a homicide, the officer shall immediately request that a field supervisor respond to the scene.
3. Officers who encounter a dead human body shall immediately attempt to determine the circumstances of the death. Officers shall notify their supervisor of all circumstances surrounding any death.
 - a. Officers who have any doubt as to whether or not a person is dead shall request that the Fire Department respond to the scene.
 - b. Obvious cases of death shall not be transported to the hospital.
 - c. If the death appears to be natural, the officer shall request the SCCO as soon as possible to conduct an inspection of the body and to solicit an opinion concerning the cause of death.
4. The officer on scene and the responding supervisor shall consider the protection of the scene as his or her primary responsibility when there is a homicide or suspicious death.
5. Officers should be aware of the trauma experienced by families and/or friends in the event of an unexpected death. Officers shall
 - a. Ask family members/friends of the deceased if they would like a community chaplain to provide assistance. If needed, the officer should request that the Communications Center notify the community chaplaincy and request their response.
 - b. Minimize their contact with ride-a-longs and other non-essential persons at the scene.
 - c. Avoid any further intrusion on the grieving family than is necessary in order to perform timely, reliable and quality police service.

B. HOMICIDE

1. Obvious circumstances of death
 - a. The first officer on scene shall request that a field supervisor respond.
 - b. The officer that locates a dead human body shall:
 - (1) Maintain scene responsibility until the arrival of a supervisor;
 - (2) Request any additional personnel and/or utilize barrier tape to ensure that an adequate area surrounding the scene is properly protected;
 - (3) Keep all persons out of the scene until the field supervisor arrives; and
 - (4) Advise the supervisor immediately upon their arrival of the known circumstances of death.



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2. If the circumstances of death are obvious, the field supervisor shall
 - a. Immediately notify the watch commander of the circumstances surrounding the death. The watch commander shall make a determination if detectives are needed, and if so, request that they respond.
 - b. Not allow anyone except investigative personnel to enter the crime scene area unless exigent circumstances exist.
 - c. Ensure that the number of authorized personnel entering the crime scene is kept to a minimum.
 - d. Ensure the maintenance of a log which captures the names of all parties entering the crime scene.
3. The crime scene supervisor or Homicide sergeant shall coordinate their efforts with the SCCO while conducting their investigation. Information obtained at the scene, including witness statements, shall be exchanged as deemed necessary.
4. A neighborhood canvass should be completed for potential witnesses and surveillance footage. Officers shall complete supplements to the General Offense report that indicates the addresses checked, whether or not contact was made, the contact information for all individuals contacted, and all corresponding statements.
5. Any weapon(s) used or suspected of being used during the commission of a homicide shall remain in the custody of the Police Department to be handled in accordance with General Order 525.01 (Evidence and Property).
6. Projectiles that are contained within human bodies are normally recovered by the SCCO and placed in an evidence locker at the Sacramento County Crime Lab. NOTE: Homicide investigators may obtain such projectiles directly from the medical examiner for transportation to the Sacramento County Crime Lab.
7. All clothing from the deceased will be removed by the Deputy Coroner and placed in an evidence locker at the Sacramento County Crime Lab.
8. When called to the scene of a dead human body, the Homicide Unit shall assume case responsibility.

C. QUESTIONABLE CIRCUMSTANCES OF DEATH

1. If the information indicates that the death may not be a homicide, the field supervisor(s) shall enter the scene and investigate.
2. If the supervisor determines that the death is a homicide, they shall follow the procedures outlined in Section B (Homicide).
3. When encountering a death with questionable circumstances, the supervisor may request that forensic investigators or a deputy coroner respond to the scene to provide assistance.
4. If the supervisor determines that the death was not a homicide, they shall direct the officer assigned to the call to complete the appropriate actions and reports.

D. SERIOUS ASSAULTS

If a person is seriously injured and may die as a result of the assault, the first officer on scene shall:

1. Immediately request that the Fire Department respond and notify their supervisor.
2. Protect the scene as much as possible while allowing medical personnel to administer medical aid.
3. Consider taking a dying declaration from the victim.

E. SUICIDES AND ACCIDENTAL DEATHS

1. In cases involving suspected suicide or accidental death, officers shall notify their supervisor of the circumstances surrounding the death. If unusual circumstances exist, the supervisor shall notify the watch commander who will determine if detectives are needed.
2. Officers will not disturb any weapons prior to the arrival of a deputy coroner, unless the weapon presents an immediate hazard.
3. Suicide notes shall remain in the possession of the SCCO.
 - a. Before turning any suicide note over to the SCCO, officers shall copy it verbatim into their report.
 - b. If a suicide letter is lengthy (more than two pages), officers may summarize its content and note that a copy of the original letter will be forthcoming.



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4. When a suicide involves the discharge of a firearm, the Deputy Coroner will
 - a. Note the location and position of the involved firearm.
 - b. Photograph the involved firearm and scene.
 - c. Examine the firearm and ammunition.
 - d. Render the firearm "safe" and unloaded. NOTE: Officers shall confirm that the firearm has been rendered "safe" prior to taking custody of the weapon.
 - e. Supply officers with a suitable bag or box to contain the weapon in to ensure the prevention of contamination from body fluids and tissue.
5. Officers shall book the weapon(s) into Evidence and Property. Recovered projectiles may be obtained from the SCCO upon request by Detectives if deemed necessary for official inquiry into a criminal offense.
6. Officers shall not alter or remove items of evidence. However, precautions shall be taken to preserve such evidence if contamination appears likely.
7. Upon arrival, the Deputy Coroner will assume responsibility for the removal of the deceased and the collection of evidence. All clothing from suspected suicide victims will be retained by the SCCO.
8. The SCCO will take possession of all medication such as pills, capsules, or other ingested material, poisons, narcotics, or drugs, and all other fluids, tissue, and personal property that belonged to the deceased.

F. TRAFFIC ACCIDENTS

1. When a death is due to a traffic accident, a field supervisor shall respond to the scene.
2. The field supervisor shall immediately notify the watch commander of the circumstances surrounding the death.
3. The watch commander shall determine if the Major Collision Investigative Unit (MCIU) is needed and if so, request that they respond.

G. RESPONSIBILITY

1. Crime Scene Investigators (CSI) shall be dispatched to photograph crime scenes and collect physical evidence on
 - (a) Homicide scenes.
 - (b) Suicide scenes at the discretion of the supervisor on scene.
 - (c) Serious assaults where it is likely the victim may die.
 - (d) Fatal accidents.
2. Detectives
After consulting with the officer and field supervisor, the Detective shall accept responsibility of the crime scene investigation.
3. Movements and removal of the remains
 - a. Dead human bodies shall be removed only at the direction of the SCCO.
 - b. Mutilated or dismembered remains shall not be moved before the arrival of the SCCO.
4. Fingerprinting Homicide Victims
At the request of Homicide Detectives, the Forensic Investigations Section shall fingerprint all victims of criminal homicides.

H. REPORTING

1. The assigned patrol officer shall submit the General Offense page for approval by the assigned sergeant of the Homicide Unit.
2. The MCIU shall prepare the collision report for all traffic-related fatalities.
3. Responding officers shall prepare a casualty report for natural deaths, suicides and accidental deaths. NOTE: No report is required when Fire Department personnel and the SCCO have assumed primary scene responsibilities in the event of a naturally occurring death with no unusual circumstances.
4. Officers with pertinent supplemental narratives, witness statements, and entity information concerning death investigation shall add that information to the appropriate report prior to the end of their shift.