



SACRAMENTO POLICE DEPARTMENT

GENERAL ORDERS



533.03

DEAD HUMAN BODIES

09-23-2026

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 (SPD) to ensure that officers who encounter dead human bodies proceed in a manner that ensures the safety of officers and the public, protection of the scene, the prevention of contamination of evidence, and the notification of appropriate supervisory and investigative personnel.

PROCEDURE

A. GENERAL

1. Officers who encounter a dead human body shall attempt to determine the circumstances of the death.
 - a. Officers who have any doubt as to whether a person is dead shall request emergency medical services (EMS) personnel respond to the scene.
 - b. Bodies that are obviously dead should not be transported to the hospital. However, the final authority for determining whether a person should be transported rests with EMS personnel.
2. If the fire department responds to a medical call and pronounces the person deceased and the facts surrounding the deceased indicate a possible natural death, overdose death or non-criminal death, the fire department will handle notification of the Sacramento County Coroner's Office (SCCO). The SPD will not generally respond to those scenes.
 - a. If the SCCO determines the death is suspicious SPD will respond to investigate.
 - b. If SPD officers are first to respond to a non-responsive person and EMS responds afterwards and pronounces the subject deceased, SPD officers will handle all follow-up.
 - c. If the death appears to be natural, an officer shall contact the SCCO as soon as possible to determine the course of action.
 - (1) Officers should request the SCCO respond to the scene to conduct an inspection of the body and solicit an opinion concerning the cause of death.
 - (2) If the deceased person had pre-existing medical conditions that were life-threatening and is under the care of a doctor, the SCCO may elect not to respond after consultation with the doctor. If this occurs, the SCCO will release the officer from the scene and the next of kin will be responsible for the removal of the body.
3. Officers shall not disturb human remains before the arrival of investigative personnel or the SCCO unless necessary to preserve critical evidence, or to prevent further damage to, or the loss of the remains.
 - 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.
 - c. Officers should use body barriers to shield bodies that are visible to members of the public.
4. If the circumstances are suspicious or appear to indicate a homicide, the officer shall immediately request a field supervisor to respond to the scene.
5. The officer on scene and the responding supervisor shall consider the safety of the public, officers, and the protection of the scene as their primary responsibilities when there is a homicide or suspicious death.
6. Officers should be aware of the trauma experienced by families and friends in the event of an unexpected death. Officers should:
 - a. Ask family members or friends of the deceased if they would like assistance from a community chaplain. 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.



SACRAMENTO POLICE DEPARTMENT

GENERAL ORDERS



- c. Avoid any further intrusion on the grieving family than is necessary to perform timely, reliable, and quality police service.

B. HOMICIDE

1. Obvious circumstances of homicide:
 - a. The first officer on scene shall request a field supervisor to respond.
 - b. Officers shall:
 - (1) Maintain scene responsibility until the arrival of a supervisor.
 - (2) Request any additional resources that are needed and 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.
 - (4) Advise the supervisor of the known circumstances of death.
2. If the circumstances of death are suspicious and may be a homicide, the field supervisor shall:
 - a. Notify the watch commander of the circumstances surrounding the death. The watch commander shall determine 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 shall 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 weapons used or suspected of being used during the commission of a homicide shall remain in the custody of the SPD and 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 (SCCL).
 - a. Homicide investigators may obtain such projectiles directly from the medical examiner for transportation to the SCCL.
7. All clothing from the deceased will be removed by the deputy coroner and placed in an evidence locker at the SCCL.
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 shall enter the scene and investigate.
2. If the supervisor determines that the death is a homicide, they shall follow the procedures in accordance with this order.
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

1. If a person is seriously injured from and may die as a result of an assault, the first officer on scene shall:
 - a. Immediately request EMS to respond and notify their supervisor.
 - b. Protect the scene as much as possible while allowing medical personnel to administer medical aid.
 - c. 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.



SACRAMENTO POLICE DEPARTMENT

GENERAL ORDERS



2. Officers should be mindful that an overdose death may be a result of criminal conduct and conduct a thorough investigation, including the collection of electronics as evidence.
3. Officers will not disturb any weapons prior to the arrival of a deputy coroner unless the weapon presents an immediate hazard.
4. Suicide notes shall remain in the possession of the SCCO.
 - a. Before turning any suicide note over to the SCCO, officers shall:
 - (1) Copy the note verbatim into their report
 - (2) Take a photograph of the note and attach it to the 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.
5. 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.
 - e. Transfer custody of the firearm to an officer.
 - (1) Officers shall confirm that the firearm has been rendered "safe" prior to taking custody of the weapon.
 - f. Supply officers with a suitable bag or box to contain the weapon in to ensure the prevention of contamination from body fluids and tissue.
6. Officers shall book the weapons as evidence. Recovered projectiles may be obtained from the SCCO upon request by detectives if deemed necessary for official inquiry into a criminal offense.
7. Officers shall not alter or remove items of evidence. However, precautions shall be taken to preserve such evidence if contamination appears likely.
8. Upon arrival, the deputy coroner will assume responsibility for the removal of the deceased and the collection of evidence with the exception of firearms. All clothing from suspected suicide victims will be retained by the SCCO.
9. 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, the officer shall act in accordance with General Order 537.05 (Major Collision Investigation and Follow Up).

G. RESPONSIBILITY

1. Forensic investigators 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
 - a. After consulting with the officer and field supervisor, detectives 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.

H. REPORTING

1. The assigned patrol officer shall submit the general offense page as soon as reasonably possible, and no later than the end of the shift.
2. Homicide or pending homicide reports shall only be approved by the assigned sergeant of the homicide unit.
3. The MCIU shall prepare the collision report for all traffic-related fatalities.
4. Responding officers shall prepare a general offense casualty report for natural deaths, suicides, and



SACRAMENTO POLICE DEPARTMENT GENERAL ORDERS



accidental deaths.

- a. No report is required when EMS personnel and the SCCO have assumed primary scene responsibilities in the event of a naturally occurring death with no unusual circumstances.
5. Officers with pertinent supplemental narratives, witness statements, and entity information concerning death investigations shall add that information to the appropriate report prior to the end of their shift.