

Death Investigation

331.1 PURPOSE AND SCOPE

The investigation of cases involving death include those ranging from natural cause to homicide. Some causes of death may not be readily apparent and some cases differ substantially from what they appeared to be initially. The thoroughness of death investigations cannot be emphasized enough.

331.2 INVESTIGATION CONSIDERATIONS

Death investigations require certain actions be taken. Paramedics shall be called in all suspected death cases unless the cause of death is obvious (e.g., when the subject has been decapitated or the body is decomposed). Officers are not authorized to pronounce death. A supervisor shall be notified in all death investigations. The Coroner should be notified in all deaths and shall be notified under those conditions listed below in this policy.

The responsible supervisor should determine whether follow-up investigation is required and ensure that a lead investigator is assigned when appropriate.

Only officers who have successfully completed the Illinois Law Enforcement Training and Standards Board (ILETSB) program in death and homicide investigations, or who have been granted a waiver by the board, shall be assigned as lead investigator on any death or homicide investigation (50 ILCS 705/10.11).

331.2.1 CORONER REQUEST

Every Coroner has the responsibility to investigate the following as soon as he knows or is informed that the dead body of any person is found, or lying within his/her county, whose death is suspected of being (55 ILCS 5/3-3013):

- (a) A sudden or violent death, whether apparently suicidal, homicidal or accidental.
- (b) A maternal or fetal death due to abortion, or any death due to a sex crime or a crime against nature.
- (c) A death where the circumstances are suspicious, obscure, mysterious or otherwise unexplained or where, in the written opinion of the attending physician, the cause of death is not determined.
- (d) A death where addiction to alcohol or to any drug may have been a contributory cause.
- (e) A death where the decedent was not attended by a licensed physician.

The body shall not be disturbed or moved from the position or place of death without permission of the Coroner.

331.2.2 SEARCHING DEAD BODIES

The Coroner or Deputy Coroner is generally the only person permitted to search a body known to be dead from any of the circumstances set forth in 55 ILCS 5/3-3013. The only exception is

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that an officer is permitted to search the body of a person killed in a traffic collision for the limited purpose of locating an anatomical donor card. If such a donor card is located, the Coroner or Deputy Coroner shall be promptly notified. Should exigent circumstances indicate to an officer that any search of a known dead body is warranted prior to the arrival of the Coroner or Deputy Coroner; the investigating officer shall first obtain verbal consent from the Coroner or Deputy Coroner (55 ILCS 5/3-3019).

Whenever possible, a witness, preferably a relative to the deceased or a member of the household, should be requested to remain at the scene with the officer pending the arrival of the Coroner. The name and address of this person shall be included in the narrative of the death report. Whenever personal effects are removed from the body of the deceased by the Deputy Coroner, a receipt shall be obtained. This receipt shall be attached to the death report.

331.2.3 DEATH NOTIFICATION

When practical, and if not handled by the Coroner's Office, notification to the next-of-kin of the deceased person shall be made, in person, by the officer assigned to 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 the relatives live outside this county, the Coroner or Medical Examiner may be requested to make the notification. The Coroner needs to know if notification has been made. Assigned detectives may need to talk to the next-of-kin.

331.2.4 UNIDENTIFIED DEAD BODIES

If the identity of a dead body cannot be established after the Coroner arrives, the Coroner's office will issue a "John Doe" or "Jane Doe" number for the report.

331.2.5 DEATH INVESTIGATION REPORTING

Investigating deaths is of primary importance. Care should be taken to document every detail. Considerations for inclusion in reports include:

- Coroner - notification of, who responded, etc.
- Detective interactions
- Crime scene efforts
- Secured perimeter
- Evidence of homicide, suicide, natural causes, or accidental death

331.2.6 SUSPECTED HOMICIDE

If the initially assigned officer suspects that the death involves a homicide or other suspicious circumstances, the Investigations Division shall be notified to determine the possible need for a detective to respond to the scene for further immediate investigation.

331.3 SPECIMEN SUBMISSION

As soon as possible, but no later than 30 days after receipt of any blood, buccal or tissue specimen from the Coroner, the Criminal Investigations Division Commander shall ensure the specimen

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and department case number is submitted to an approved National DNA Index System (NDIS) participating laboratory within this state for analysis and categorizing into genetic marker groupings and that the results are submitted to the Illinois State Police (55 ILCS 5/3-3013).

331.4 UNUSED MEDICATIONS

If an officer collects any unused prescription medication at the scene of a death investigation, the officer shall (210 ILCS 150/18(g)):

- (a) Document the number or amount of medication to be disposed of.
- (b) If the medication is collected as evidence, photograph the unused medication and its container or packaging, if available, and include the photograph and documentation with the report.