

Procedure
3.14

**EFFECTIVE
DATE
11-15-99**

**Eugene
Police Department**



Death Investigation

3.14.1 PURPOSE AND SCOPE

ORS 146.090 outlines certain categories of deaths for which the Medical Examiner must investigate and certify the cause and manner of death.

Section I.C.1 of this policy was revised effective August 24, 2010 by authority of Command Directive 10-016.

PART I - Responsibilities and Procedures for All Personnel

- A. Investigated deaths
- B. Medical Examiner
- C. Deaths not investigated
- D. Preliminary investigation
- E. Other requirements
- F. Victim background information
- G. Disposition of the body
- H. Disposition of the deceased's property
- I. Reports

PART II - Responsibilities and Procedures for Supervisors and Command Personnel

- A. Media
- B. Incident supervision

3.14.2 RESPONSIBILITIES AND PROCEDURES FOR ALL PERSONNEL

A. Investigated deaths

1. An officer is to be dispatched to any of the following situations:
 - homicides *
 - suicides *
 - deaths under suspicious circumstances *
 - deaths from unlawful use of controlled substances *
 - deaths from use or abuse of chemicals or toxic agents *
 - deaths of prisoners (incarcerated or in police custody) *
 - death related to an employment accident

2. The Violent Crimes Unit supervisor should be notified of any situation above marked with

an asterisk (*).

B. Medical Examiner

1. Notify the Medical Examiner as soon as practicable upon becoming involved in a death investigation, even though there may be no intent to remove the body from the scene immediately.
2. The Medical Examiner has authority over the body. We have responsibility for the crime scene, and the approval of the supervisor in charge must be obtained before allowing the Medical Examiner entry into the crime scene.
3. You cannot move or permit a body to be moved without prior authorization from the Medical Examiner.

C. Deaths not investigated

1. You are not required to investigate apparent natural deaths if:
 - a. the victim was under the care of a physician for a chronic illness in a facility designated for the care of elderly or infirmed patients, or was in hospice care for a chronic illness,
 - b. the circumstances of death appear consistent with the chronic illness, **and**
 - c. the attending physician or the Medical Examiner will accept responsibility for stating the cause of death and authorize removal of the body.

Unless *all* of these circumstances exist, investigate the death.

2. A police officer or community service officer will be dispatched to stand by for body removal, only if:
 - a. EMS personnel handling the call need to return to service **or**
 - b. there are no family members present and we need to secure the premises or the victim's property.

D. Preliminary investigation

1. Secure the scene to preserve evidence. The crime scene must be large enough to ensure that all relevant evidence and areas are included. Do not hesitate to enlarge it if necessary.
2. Take photographs of the scene as soon as possible, to document the situation at the earliest time possible. If exigent circumstances require that any evidence must be moved or removed, attempt to photograph it in its original condition and location prior to doing so.
3. Unless the supervisor in charge of the scene authorizes otherwise, allow **only** the following to enter:

- a. The minimum number of EMS or fire personnel needed to tend to living victims.
- b. The minimum number of police personnel needed to remove suspects, victims, or others.
- c. The assigned investigator (Patrol or Investigations).
- d. Necessary lab personnel.

E. Other requirements

1. Ensure that a field supervisor is aware of the death investigation. Record names of all fire/EMS personnel involved and any action they took which might affect the integrity of the scene.
2. Establish a log to record **every** person entering and leaving. Submit the log with the Supplemental Report.
3. Take particular precautions when entering the scene. Wear gloves and protective shoe covers to protect yourself and prevent contamination of the scene.
4. Determine if detectives and FEU personnel are needed.
5. If detectives are responding, patrol officers should:
 - a. Establish crime scene with barricade tape, if needed. **Red tape** is used to barricade the primary (immediate) crime scene. **Yellow tape** is used to barricade the secondary (crowd control) crime scene. Always secure both the primary and secondary crime scenes with tape.
 - b. Gather pertinent information such as identity of victim, brief statements from witnesses regarding the circumstances of death, and when the victim was last seen.
6. If detectives are not responding, follow these steps:

- a. You must take photographs.
- b. Use 35mm color film or a digital camera. Take both distant and close-up shots of the body, paying attention to wounds or marks on the body.
- c. Take two sets of all close-ups: one as you found the scene, and another, duplicate set after you have put a measuring scale (ruler, yardstick) in the area included in the picture. You may have to move the measuring scale.
- d. Detectives will decide whether or not to print the film.
- e. Seize all related special evidence (e.g., notes, prescriptions). Any relevant prescription medications should be sent along with the body. Any illegal drugs or drug paraphernalia (e.g., syringes) should be submitted to the PCU as evidence. The assigned investigator will ensure release of evidence once it is no longer needed.
- f. After the ME says the body can be moved, but prior to removal, examine the body, without unreasonably disturbing the clothing, for wounds or suspicious marks. You can ask the call-car attendants to assist.
- g. After the body is removed, take photographs of the location where the body was located.

F. Victim background information

1. Determine whether the victim was under doctor's care.
2. Attempt to question people who may have information about the victim or circumstances of death, including the person who last saw the victim alive, persons residing with the victim, and neighbors.

G. Disposition of the body

1. If detectives do not respond to a death scene, ensure that the next of kin are notified about the death. Detectives will normally assume this responsibility if they respond.
2. Once the ME has authorized removal of the body, and you have the photographs, evidence, and measurements you need, moving the body is the responsibility of the call-car attendants.

H. Disposition of the deceased's property

1. Unless seized as evidence, document property found on the body.
2. Keep such property with the body even during removal and storage.

3. Secure any valuables at the scene unless you release them to an immediate family member or other responsible adult residing at the location. Have them sign a receipt, or record this in your report.

I. Reports

1. Write a report for any death which you investigate, entitling it "Death Investigation."
2. If detectives respond to the scene, the detective in charge of the investigation coordinates the reports with patrol officers.
3. When possible, all homicide reports will be prepared electronically and submitted to the Violent Crimes Supervisor via the preparing officer's immediate supervisor. The Violent Crimes Supervisor will ultimately approve homicide reports prior to filing or submission to the D.A.

3.14.3 RESPONSIBILITIES AND PROCEDURES FOR SUPERVISORS AND COMMAND PERSONNEL

A. Media

1. Normally a media release will be prepared by Investigations if the incident meets the criteria for notifying detectives. If detectives do not respond, but a release is necessary, the responding patrol supervisor will have one prepared.
2. We would not normally release information about the instrumentality of death, the cause of death, or circumstances immediately surrounding the death investigation, unless authorized by Investigations Command.
3. Entitle all news media releases "Death Investigation."
4. You may not reveal the identity of the deceased until it is verified and the next of kin have been notified.
5. You may not make any media release unless authorized by the investigator or a patrol supervisor.

B. Incident supervision

1. A field supervisor who is made aware of a death investigation will ensure that all necessary steps for a proper investigation are taken. Unless occupied by something of higher priority, a field supervisor will respond to all reported homicides, suicides, and suspicious deaths.

2. When appropriate, initiate incident command procedures at the scene and cause the notification of additional personnel and the PIO.
3. Patrol supervisors and Investigations supervisors will be responsible for notifying their respective chains of command regarding death investigations that have high media or community interest or that will require the mobilization of a major investigative effort.