

TALLAHASSEE POLICE DEPARTMENT GENERAL ORDERS MANUAL

 Proudly Policing Since 1841	SUBJECT Natural Death Investigations		 Nationally Accredited 1986
	CHIEF OF POLICE <i>Signature on File</i>		
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AUTHORITY/RELATED REFERENCES

General Order 18, Criminal Investigations
 General Order 37, Notification of Death or Serious Injury
 General Order 42, Impounding and Controlling of Property and Evidence

ACCREDITATION REFERENCES

CALEA Chapter 41, 81

KEY WORD INDEX

Disposition of Property:	Procedure I D
District Supervisory Responsibilities:	Procedure II
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POLICY

Members of the Tallahassee Police Department who are responsible for natural death investigations shall adhere to established protocols in the course of such investigations.

DEFINITIONS

Natural Death (Investigation): Solely for the purpose of this policy, a death (investigation) where the available evidence leads the member(s) present to conclude the death is not of a criminal, intentional, accidental, or suspicious

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nature, and the incident is not related to: 1) a traffic crash, 2) a hospice care situation, or 3) a situation where the person was receiving medical treatment at a local hospital under a doctor's care.

Lividity: Discoloration from venous (vein) congestion in a deceased body that may present itself as black or blue on the skin.

Rigor Mortis: Stiffening of a deceased body caused by the hardening of muscle tissue.

Trauma: A wound or injury to living tissue caused by an extrinsic agent (outside source) such as a bruise, puncture, tear, or laceration.

PROCEDURES

I. NATURAL DEATH INVESTIGATIVE PROTOCOLS

A. Members shall treat all natural death investigations as a criminal homicide investigation until evidence clearly establishes otherwise, and follow the applicable guidelines set forth in General Order 18 (Criminal Investigations) in regard to:

1. Crime scene protocols
2. Preliminary and follow-up investigations
3. Call-out procedures

B. Members investigating a natural death are responsible for checking the interior and exterior of the incident scene for indications of criminal action or other foul play, and denoting their observations in the offense report.

C. Members investigating a natural death are responsible for:

1. Examining – in concert with the on-scene district supervisor – the deceased person's body, and denoting the following information in the offense report:
 - a. Position of the body (in relation to objects nearby, and – if possible – the cardinal direction of the head or feet).
 - b. Clothing, jewelry, or any other items on the body.

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- c. Body temperature (whether the body is hot, warm, cold, or clammy to the touch; best determined by touching the underarm).
 - d. Presence or absence of rigor mortis.
 - e. Presence of lividity, and whether or not it is consistent with the position of the body.
 - f. Presence of any observable trauma.
 - g. Presence of blood or other body fluids.
2. Gathering, and denoting in the offense report, information about the deceased person from observations of the incident scene, and interviews of witnesses, next of kin, or others, in order to determine the following:
- a. Identification
 - 1) Full name
 - 2) Date of birth
 - 3) Race and gender
 - 4) Social Security Number
 - b. Medical history
 - 1) Current physician's name, and the names of other physicians who recently provided medical treatment.
 - 2) If applicable, the name of the physician(s) or nurse(s) present at the time of death.
 - 3) Any known medical problems and length of any illness(es).
 - 4) Any medicine or narcotics present at the scene or any known to have been taken, and if prescribed medicine, record the following:
 - a) Type or brand name
 - b) Dosage instructions

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- c) Prescribing physician's name
 - d) Date issued
 - e) Issuing pharmacy
 - f) Quantity remaining in container or on scene
- c. Pre-death activity
- 1) When was the last time someone saw the deceased person alive?
 - 2) Where was the deceased person last seen alive?
 - 3) Who last saw the deceased person alive?
 - 4) What was the deceased person doing, and what was he/her demeanor when last seen alive?
3. In all interviews, establish (and denote in the offense report) the relationship between the person being interviewed and the deceased person.
- D. Members shall take prudent actions in regard to the disposition of personal property found on the deceased person at the time of the investigation, and:
- 1. May give such property to the closest next of kin available, but only after the member ensures a property receipt (PD139, available on SharePoint) has been completed and is signed by the person receiving the property.
 - 2. Should give the property to a next of kin in the following order of preference in relation to the deceased person:
 - a. Wife or husband
 - b. Child (at least 18 years of age)
 - c. Mother or father
 - d. Sister or brother

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3. If no next of kin is available, the property shall be impounded in accordance with General Order 42 (Impounding and Controlling of Property and Evidence).
4. Officers shall seize and impound all prescription medications prescribed for the deceased person.

II. DISTRICT SUPERVISORY RESPONSIBILITIES

- A. A district field supervisor shall respond to each natural death investigation scene, and ensure such incidents are treated as a criminal homicide investigation until evidence clearly establishes otherwise.
- B. The designated field supervisor is responsible for ensuring members conducting the natural death investigation are following this policy and the applicable guidelines set forth in General Order 18 in regard to:
 1. Crime scene protocols
 2. Preliminary and follow-up investigations
 3. Call-out procedures
- C. The designated field supervisor is responsible for the following:
 1. Conducting – in concert with the primary officer – an examination of the deceased person’s body for signs of trauma to assess whether or not the investigation should, in fact, be handled as a natural death investigation.
 - a. If there are no signs of foul play, circumstances support it being a natural death, and a primary care physician is willing to sign the death certificate, the supervisor will move forward with the funeral home transport without consulting with the ME’s office.
 - b. If the incident does not appear to be a natural death, or a primary care physician will not sign the death certificate or cannot be located, contact the Medical Examiner’s Office. The supervisor can consult with the ME’s office even if the circumstances do not require a consultation.
 2. Notifying the Medical Examiner’s Office, and:

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- a. Relay facts, circumstances, and evidentiary information to the Medical Examiner (ME) about the deceased person and the incident scene.
- b. Establish, via the ME, if the deceased person's body should be released directly to funeral home personnel or transported to the morgue for examination (autopsy or external exam), and:
 - 1) If the ME dictates an autopsy is to be performed, promptly notify the Violent Crimes Unit Homicide supervisor (regular business hours) or the on-call Persons Section supervisor (all other times) to determine if a Violent Crimes Unit detective will respond to the scene.
 - 2) If the ME dictates only an *external exam* is to be performed, do not notify the Violent Crimes Unit.
3. As warranted, facilitate an officer to accompany the funeral home personnel with the deceased body to the morgue in instances where the ME dictates an autopsy (see subsection IV D below).
4. As warranted, make appropriate notifications to the on-duty watch commander.

III. NOTIFICATION OF NEXT OF KIN

- A. Members involved in natural death investigations are responsible for making timely and appropriate death notifications, as outlined in General Order 37 (Notification of Death or Serious Injury).
- B. Members involved in natural death investigations should assist the deceased person's next of kin with funeral home arrangements, yet be mindful most questions related to funeral arrangements are best addressed by the selected funeral home.
- C. If a member believes the natural death notification requires the assistance of a Department victim advocate, the member should seek the counsel of the appropriate on-duty supervisor in his/her chain of command.

IV. REMOVAL OF THE BODY

- A. Members involved in natural death investigations are responsible for making timely and appropriate arrangements for the removal of the deceased person's body from the incident scene.

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- B. In incidents where the ME authorizes the release of the body directly to a funeral home, and a next of kin is available, the member in charge of the investigation shall inquire whether or not the person has a funeral home preference, and:
1. If the next of kin has a preference, honor that request if possible.
 2. If the next of kin does not have a preference, ensure a funeral home is selected from the funeral home rotation list maintained in the Consolidated Dispatch Agency (CDA).
- C. In incidents where the ME authorizes the release of the body directly to a funeral home, and a next of kin is not available, the member in charge of the investigation shall ensure a funeral home is selected from the funeral home rotation list.
- D. In incidents where the ME does not authorize the release of the body directly to a funeral home, and dictates an *autopsy* is to be performed, a designated officer shall:
1. Accompany the transport company personnel in the delivery of the body to the morgue (an officer following the transport company vehicle in his/her police vehicle is considered accompanying the transport company personnel).
 2. Ensure the following information is recorded in the original or supplemental offense report:
 - a. Name of the transport company.
 - b. Time the body was released to transport company personnel.
 - d. Name(s) of transport company personnel who responded to the scene and delivered the body to the morgue.
 - e. Time the body was released to the morgue.
 - f. Name(s) of the ME Office personnel who accepted the body at the morgue.
- E. In incidents where the ME does not authorize the release of the body directly to a funeral home, and dictates an *external exam* is to be performed, the primary officer:

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1. Has no further investigative responsibility once the deceased body is removed from the scene. And,
2. Shall ensure the following information is recorded in the original or supplemental offense report:
 - a. Name of the funeral home.
 - b. Time the body was released to funeral home personnel.
 - c. Name(s) of funeral home personnel who responded to the scene and took possession of the body.

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