

Death Investigation

331.1 PURPOSE AND SCOPE

The purpose of this policy is to provide guidelines for situations where officers initially respond to and investigate the circumstances of a deceased person.

Some causes of death may not be readily apparent and some cases differ substantially from what they appear to be initially. The thoroughness of death investigations and use of appropriate resources and evidence gathering techniques is critical.

331.2 POLICY

It is the policy of the Missoula Police Department to respond, document and investigate incidents where a person is deceased. Investigations involving the death of a person, including those from natural causes, accidents, workplace incidents, suicide and homicide, shall be initiated, conducted and properly documented.

331.3 INVESTIGATION CONSIDERATIONS

Emergency medical services shall be called in all suspected death cases unless death is obvious (e.g., decapitated, decomposed).

A supervisor shall be notified as soon as possible to assist and provide appropriate personnel and resources. The on-scene supervisor will determine whether follow-up investigation is required and notify the Detective Division as necessary. The Shift Commander will make notification to command staff in accordance with the Major Incident Notification Policy.

331.3.1 REPORTING

All incidents involving a death shall be documented in a Case Report.

331.3.2 CORONER REQUEST

Officers are not authorized to pronounce death unless they are also Coroners, Deputy Coroners or appointed Coroner investigators. A Coroner shall be called in all death investigations. This will be done when the investigation reaches an appropriate stage.

331.3.3 SEARCHING DEAD BODIES

- (a) The Coroner, their assistant and authorized investigators are generally the only persons permitted to move, handle or search a dead body.
- (b) An Officer may make a reasonable search of an individual who it is reasonable to believe is dead, or near death, for the purpose of identification or for information identifying the individual as an anatomical donor. If a donor document is located, the Coroner or their assistant shall be promptly notified.
- (c) The Coroner, with the permission of the Department, may take property, objects or articles found on the deceased or in the immediate vicinity of the deceased that may

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be necessary for conducting an investigation to determine the identity of the deceased or the cause or manner of death.

- (d) Should exigent circumstances indicate to an officer that any other search of a known dead body is warranted prior to the arrival of the Coroner or their assistant, the investigating officer should first obtain verbal consent from the Coroner or their assistant when practicable.
- (e) Whenever reasonably possible, a witness, preferably a relative to the deceased or a member of the household, should be requested to remain nearby the scene and available to the officer pending the arrival of the Coroner or their assistant. The name and address of this person shall be included in the Case report.
- (f) Whenever personal effects are removed from the body of the deceased or the scene where the body is located, it should be documented in the appropriate case report.

331.3.4 SUSPECTED HOMICIDE

All unattended deaths which are reported to the Missoula Police Department shall receive preliminary investigation as a possible homicide. A supervisor shall respond to the scene of all unattended death calls.

If the supervisor suspects that the death involved suspicious circumstances, appropriate steps shall be taken to protect the scene and contact the Detective Division for further investigation.

The investigator assigned to investigate a homicide or death that occurred under suspicious circumstances may, with the approval of his/her supervisor, request the Coroner to conduct physical examinations and tests, and to provide a report.