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			Distribution: All
Title: DEATH INVESTIGATION: Homicide/Suicide/Vehicular Fatality/Unattended Death		Section: Investigations	
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Review: Semi-Annual	Authority: Chief Michael A. Keller <i>MJK</i>		

I. Purpose

The purpose of this General Order is to provide both first responding and investigating officers with guidelines for conducting investigations of deceased persons.

II. Policy

Unattended deaths of persons shall be responded to by officers of this department for investigation and for the purpose of providing basic assistance to survivors. It is the responsibility of first responding and investigating officers, in cooperation with emergency medical responders, physicians and the medical examiner to establish the manner of death whether naturally, by accident, suicide, homicide or unknown causes. Officers shall approach the investigation of any unattended death as a homicide until determined otherwise. If a motor vehicle accident or public accident results in a fatality, or is likely to result in a fatality, the investigation shall be done in the same manner as a death investigation.

III. Definitions

- A. **Unattended Death:** Death of a person, other than those under immediate care and presence of a medical provider.
- B. **Death by Natural Causes:** A death caused solely by disease or the aging process.

IV. Regulations

- A. (This section is intentionally left blank.)

V. Procedures

A. First Responding Officer Responsibilities

1. First responding officers are to follow the procedures listed in General Orders O2501 Criminal Investigations, O2516 Crime Scene Processing, and/or O2604 Traffic Accident Investigation, as appropriate.
2. More specifically first responding officers shall in the order of importance, based on the circumstances, perform the following:

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- a. Identify and arrest any perpetrator(s) if present.
- b. Ensure officer safety and the safety of others by safeguarding any weapons at the scene.
- c. Administer emergency first aid if necessary and/or summon emergency personnel.
 - (1) Death can only be determined in an official capacity by a physician. However, in cases involving unmistakable evidence of death (e.g., the presence of lividity or rigor mortis), emergency medical personnel need not be summoned.
 - (2) If the officer determines that the person is dead, the factors surrounding that determination shall be entered into the officer's report.
 - (3) Officers shall resolve any doubt concerning the life or death of a subject by summoning appropriate medical assistance.
- d. Where emergency medical personnel are on the scene or have been summoned, provide such personnel with as much latitude as possible to deliver emergency medical services notwithstanding officers' responsibility to protect the crime or incident scene.
- e. Isolate and protect the crime scene from any intrusion by non-essential personnel including officers not directly involved in the crime scene investigation.
- f. Notify Communications of the circumstances and request the response of a supervisor and a Detective.
- g. Observe and note pertinent circumstances at the scene.
 - (1) Record the nature of any physical modifications to the scene as the results of intervention by emergency medical personnel or others.
 - (2) Record in a crime scene entry log (APD Form 27) the identity of persons present at the scene and for those entering after the initial response, the identity and time they entered and left the scene.
 - (3) Identify witnesses and record basic information regarding the event. Ask witnesses to remain if possible. If not possible, determine their identity and how they can be contacted by investigators.
 - (4) Identify and ensure that any suspects do not leave. Responding officers may conduct basic preliminary questioning of a suspect or witness, but should normally defer interviews to investigators.
- h. Ascertain if the deceased was under a physician's care for a potentially life-threatening health problem, and note the name, telephone number and address of the physician.
- i. In deaths apparently resulting from natural causes, determine to the degree possible, the deceased's physical condition before death.
- j. Follow General Order O2109 Public Information in reference to releasing information to the press or public.

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k. Attempt to determine the deceased's next of kin and contact information.

B. Investigating Officer Responsibilities

1. The investigating officer will receive a verbal report from initial responding officers regarding pertinent conditions at the scene upon their arrival, circumstances surrounding the death, the presence of witnesses and/or suspects, disposition of the body, and related details.
2. Prior to starting the Death Scene Checklist (APD Form 46), which is a search, the investigating officer will obtain proper legal authority for the search.
3. The investigating officer will complete the Death Scene Checklist, which aids in the collection of information and evidence needed to determine the manner of death.
4. The investigating officer will follow the procedures listed in General Orders O2501 Criminal Investigations and O2516 Crime Scene Processing, as appropriate.
5. Death by Natural Causes
 - a. The deceased's body may be released to a mortuary the next of kin has chosen if the following conditions are met:
 - (1) There are no indications of foul play, accident, or suicide; and
 - (2) The deceased was under the on-going care of a physician for a life-threatening disease or illness; and
 - (3) The physician, upon contact, agrees to sign a death certificate; and
 - (4) The coroner shall be notified by phone, and the coroner's office shall be notified by fax/email, of the deceased's name and date of birth, the circumstances surrounding the death, and the attending physician's willingness to sign the death certificate.
 - b. If the attending physician cannot be reached or cannot/will not sign the death certificate, the coroner shall be contacted, advised of the situation and a determination will be made whether an autopsy will be performed. If an autopsy is to be performed;
 - (1) An authorization, pre-signed by the coroner, for the autopsy shall be faxed to Sedgwick County Regional Forensic Science Center.
 - (2) Appropriate arrangements will be made to transport the body to Sedgwick County Regional Forensic Science Center.
 - (3) The coroner's office shall be notified by fax/email, of the deceased's name and date of birth, and the circumstances surrounding the death.
 - c. Bodies shall not be moved unless located in a spot deemed untenable (e.g., in open view of the public) and only under conditions noted in 5. a. (1)-(4).
 - (1) Emergency medical personnel or funeral home attendants may be requested to move bodies when necessary and permitted.
 - (2) In all other cases bodies may be covered but may not be moved without approval of the coroner and investigator.

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6. Death by Other Than Natural Causes
 - a. In all cases of death other than those due to natural causes where the death certificate will be signed by an attending physician, the coroner shall be notified by phone, and the coroner's office shall be notified by fax/email, of the deceased's name and date of birth, the circumstances surrounding the death, and the attending physician's willingness to sign the death certificate.
 - b. In any case in which there is a doubt concerning the cause of death the coroner shall be contacted, advised of the situation and a determination will be made whether an autopsy will be performed.
 - c. In cases of death by accident, suicide, homicide, or undetermined causes the coroner shall be contacted, advised of the situation and a determination will be made whether an autopsy will be performed.
 - d. If the coroner comes to the scene, note the arrival and departure time, the preliminary estimate of the time of death, document the apparent cause of death after conferring with the coroner, and determine if the injuries are consistent with the suspected weapon involved. If an autopsy is to be performed, bag the victim's hands with paper bags to preserve any trace evidence under the fingernails and release the body to the appropriate mortuary service who will provide a new body bag with locking device. Note the names of mortuary service personnel and the number on the locking device. Escort the body to its secure location at the Sedgwick County Regional Forensic Science Center. Note the time of release.

C. Specific Investigative Considerations

1. Release of the Homicide Crime Scene

Critical decision: Hold the crime scene as long as possible in the event that further processing, investigation, or review becomes necessary as additional information becomes available.

 - a. Do NOT release the scene prior to the completion of the canvass and any interviews of witnesses or interrogation of suspect(s).
 - b. Have the deceased's mailbox searched and note the date of any mail found therein.
 - c. Note the telephone numbers of any phones at the scene.
 - d. If the scene is to be abandoned temporarily during certain investigatory procedures, provide for the continued crime scene protection during the absence of investigators.
 - f. Gather all materials used in the crime scene processing and remove from the scene for destruction and disposal at another location.
2. Suicide
 - a. Evaluation of the wounds:
 - (1) Could the deceased have caused the injuries and death?
 - (2) Was the person physically able to accomplish the act?

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- (3) Are the wounds within reach of the deceased?
- (4) Are the wounds grouped together?
- (5) Is there more than one cause of death?
- (6) Describe the nature and position of the injuries.
- (7) Are there any hesitation marks?
- b. Psychological state of the victim:
 - (1) Obtain a background of the victim from family and friends, to include medical as well as social information.
 - (2) Were there any warning signs indicated by the victim?
 - (3) Were there any recent deaths in the family?
 - (4) Is there any indication of a recent upset or stress?
 - (5) Did the victim leave any notes?
 - (a) Obtain a sample of the victim's handwriting for a comparison analysis with any note found at scene.
 - (b) Obtain a sample of the victim's handwriting for an analysis in case a note is later discovered.
 - (6) Did the deceased have any close personal relationships, any close friends, etc.? Interview those persons as soon as possible.
- c. Any prior mental disease or defect:
 - (1) Has the deceased been under any professional treatment?
 - (2) Had the deceased ever attempted suicide in the past?
 - (3) Has anyone in the family ever committed suicide?
 - (4) Was the deceased a heavy drinker?
 - (5) Was the deceased on any medication?
 - (6) Was there a history of drug abuse?
- d. Recognized warning signs in suicides.
 - (1) A change in sleeping habits (sleeping more than usual or staying up much later), followed by sadness.
 - (2) A change in eating habits--weight loss or lack of appetite.
 - (3) A lack of interest in sex--a loss of the sex drive.
 - (4) A sudden drop in grades or school attendance--young people.
 - (5) A loss of work interest--adults.
 - (6) Loss of interest in favorite activities, hobbies, or sports.
 - (7) Loss of interest in friends, family, etc.--isolation.
 - (8) A preoccupation with death, or an unusual interest in art or music dealing with death (teenagers' "Heavy Metal," rock, etc.; adults' preoccupation with death and afterlife).
 - (9) Loss of interest in personal hygiene and appearance.
 - (10) Involvement with drugs, including an abuse of alcohol.
- e. Recognized extreme danger signs in suicides
 - (1) Suddenly becoming cheerful or calm after a depression; a sudden euphoria or burst of activity. This could mean that the person has

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resolved the inner conflict by deciding to take his or her own life. The decision has been made.

- (2) Giving away prized possessions
 - (3) Speaking of life in the past tense, for example, saying, "I've loved you," or "You've been a good mother."
3. Autoerotic Fatalities (Accidental Asphyxia)--Deaths which result during solo sex-related activities.
- a. Is the victim nude or sexually exposed?
 - b. If the victim is a male, is he dressed in feminine attire?
 - c. Is there evidence of masturbatory activity?
 - d. Are sexually stimulating paraphernalia present (vibrators, dildos, other sexual fantasy aids or pornography, etc.)?
 - e. Is bondage present (ropes, chains, blindfolds, gags, etc.)?
 - f. Are the restraints interconnected?
 - g. Is there protective padding between the ligature and neck?
 - h. Is there evidence of infibulations, which is an act or practice of fastening by ring, clasp, or stitches the labia majora in girls and the foreskin in boys in order to prevent sexual intercourse?
 - i. Is there evidence of fantasy (erotic literature, diaries, fantasy drawings, etc.) or fetishism?
 - j. Are there any mirrors or other reflective devices present?
 - k. Is the suspension point within the reach of the victim?
 - l. Is there evidence of prior such activities (abrasions or rope burns on the suspension point, photographs, etc.)?
 - m. Is there a positioned camera?
 - n. Does the victim possess literature dealing with bondage, escapology, or knots?
 - o. Is there any indication of suicidal intent?
4. Fatal Fires
- a. Was the fire intentional or accidental?
 - b. Was the victim alive or dead before the fire? Many times arson is used to conceal a homicide, disguise a crime scene, or destroy evidence.
 - c. The fire incident--Identify the fire officer in charge of fire operations.
 - (1) Obtain the name, rank, assignment, and unit responsibility of all fire personnel involved in the operation.
 - (2) Obtain a copy of the report describing the fire operations taken to extinguish the fire. This includes:
 - (a) Determination of origin/cause--suspicious or other.
 - (b) Was the fire incendiary? What accelerant was used?
 - d. Suspicious designation--general determination factors:
 - (1) Rate of burning not consistent with type of combustibles present in the location at the time of fire.

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- (2) A person died as a result of the fire.
 - (3) Questionable or multiple points of origin of the fire.
 - (4) Firefighter(s) noticed odor of gasoline or other accelerant.
 - (5) Cause not readily determined.
 - e. Maintenance of the fire crime scene--Determine the condition of the scene based upon fire operations (body moved, debris removed, building collapse, etc.).
 - f. Work with the fire investigator at the scene to:
 - (1) Interview survivors as soon as possible.
 - (2) Interview people with an interest in the fire, who may still be present, at the scene while firefighters are working.
 - (3) Interview firefighters who have firsthand knowledge of the conditions within the building.
 - (4) Obtain information on all injured, evacuated, and relocated persons for interview.
 - (5) Interview any ambulance, paramedic, or other emergency crews, including Red Cross personnel who assisted with operations.
 - (6) Initiate an investigative canvass.
 - (7) Request the fire investigator or arson expert to begin an origin/cause investigation at the scene to make an official determination of the fire incident.
 - (8) Record the crime scene--conduct the crime scene examination.
 - (9) Examination of body.
 - g. Investigative considerations in arson cases:
 - (1) Identity of the victim.
 - (2) Was victim dead or alive?
 - (3) Is victim face-up or face-down? (Usually, when people collapse, they fall face forward.)
 - (4) Does the body evince a pugilistic attitude (a boxing pose or fetal position caused by the effect of heat upon the muscles)?
 - (5) Post mortem lividity (should be pink to cherry-red due to the inhalation of carbon monoxide if the person was alive and breathing during fire).
 - (6) Blistering--Blisters surrounded by a pink ring can be considered as having occurred before death. However, the medical examiner makes final determination.
 - h. Determination of arson--The determination of arson must be based upon expert opinion. This opinion is established after a careful review of the facts as well as the ability of the expert to "read the fire," which provides the investigator with the necessary legal basis for an arson determination and subsequent prosecution.
5. Motor Vehicle Fatalities

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- a. The investigating officer shall note the injured party's appearance including clothing and any visible injuries.
- b. In all fatality accidents, blood samples shall be obtained from the deceased, and each driver involved shall be asked to submit to a chemical test for alcohol and/or drugs.

D. Assistance to Survivors

Providing basic support and crisis assistance to survivors is the responsibility of both responding and investigating officers. The nature of such assistance must be dictated by the circumstances, but officers should use the following as a guide in these instances.

1. Officers shall refer to and follow General Order M1108 Victim-Witness Assistance for next of kin notification.
2. Police Chaplain services of assistance with emotional and spiritual support will be offered to survivors and a Police Chaplain will be summoned if the offer is accepted.
3. Officers should not leave the scene of a death where survivors are present until reasonably assured that the survivors have adequate personal control and/or family or close friends readily available to provide support. In gauging the need for assistance, officers shall also consider the following:
 - a. The emotional reactions and physical condition of the survivors;
 - b. Availability of other adults in the home or immediate area;
 - c. Responsibility of the survivors for infants or small children;
 - d. Home environment, if apparent, (e.g. evidence of excessive alcohol use or drug use, lack of means of financial support, shortage of food, problem with shelter, etc.); and
 - e. Availability of a support system (e.g. including friends, family, close neighbors, access to clergy, means of transportation, etc.)
4. Officers should remain alert to the need of survivors for emergency medical assistance, for example, in cases of physical or emotional collapse or related problems.
5. Officers should be aware of confusion on the part of survivors. They should speak slowly and deliberately, and write down any pertinent information that survivors may need. This may include such matters as the following:
 - a. Disposition of the body;
 - b. Location of personal effects;
 - c. Identification requirements/procedures; and
 - d. Providing officers' names, agency, and telephone numbers.
6. Officers should assess the physical and emotional well-being of survivors before departing. Officers should be reasonably assured that survivors can take care of themselves and those for whom they may be responsible. In addition to

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concerns noted in item D-3 above, officers should be able to answer “yes” to the following types of questions:

- a. Are the survivor(s) thinking clearly? That is, do the individuals:
 - (1) Seem aware of your presence?
 - (2) Have some grasp of time and space?
 - (3) Demonstrate a progressive ability to express himself/herself? and/or
 - (4) Begin to demonstrate some grasp of the reality of the death?
 - b. Do the survivors have reasonable control over emotions, or do they display shock (no apparent emotion), furious hostility, or the desire to commit suicide?
 - c. Can survivors cope physically? For example, has a survivor fainted, displayed debilitating weakness, or emotional collapse, and do survivors have an adequate support system that can be relied upon?
7. Officers should not leave a lone survivor unattended until all reasonable efforts have been made to garner first-hand support from the survivor’s family, friends, co-workers, neighbors, family, clergy, crisis counselors, or other community social service agency.