

**DEATH CASES**

This order describes the procedures for investigating death cases (e.g., homicides, suicides and deaths by apparent natural causes), and delineates responsibilities of the investigating officer and of the Medical Examiner.

**I. PROCEDURES**

**A. DETERMINING DEATH.** The first consideration at the scene of an apparent death case is to determine if the person is dead. Even if death is evident, call for an ambulance. Paramedics will determine whether medical care is to be given. If the paramedics determine that the person is dead and no medical care is to be given, contact the Medical Examiner's Office.

**B. SEARCHING OR MOVING A BODY**

1. **PROHIBITION/EXCEPTIONS.** Officers shall neither search or move a body, nor allow anyone to search or move a body, except in the following cases:
  - a. If you believe your life or the lives of others are in danger if the body is not searched or removed immediately.
  - b. If failure to move the body would likely result in its loss (e.g. by fire, ocean currents). If possible, this decision should be made by a supervisory officer.
  - c. With the permission of the Medical Examiner's Office.

When a homicide is not suspected and the Medical Examiner will be delayed over 30 minutes in responding, you may contact the Medical Examiner's Office by telephone and discuss the reasons the body should be moved (e.g., where a large crowd is gathering or the body is impeding traffic).

2. **DOCUMENTATION.** Whenever you move or permit someone to move a body prior to the arrival of the Medical Examiner, indicate the reason in your incident report. Also include the name of the person who authorized the search or movement.

**C. SEARCHES BY THE MEDICAL EXAMINER**

1. **WITNESSING THE SEARCH.** You must witness the search by the Medical Examiner and obtain a receipt for any property taken from the body or the premises. The inspector assigned the investigation may, with the consent of the Medical Examiner, take charge of any evidence relating to a suspected homicide.
2. **DESCRIPTION OF PROPERTY.** Indicate the details of the search and describe any property taken in your incident report. Be sure to attach the Medical Examiner's receipt to your incident report when submitting it.
3. **SUICIDE NOTES/WILLS.** In cases of apparent suicide, the Medical Examiner will take any suicide note or will and the instrument with which the suicide was effected.

**D. LEAVING THE SCENE**

1. **WHEN.** You may leave the scene of a death case prior to the Medical Examiner's arrival only when all of the following conditions are present:
  - a. The death does not appear to have been caused by homicide, suicide or accident.
  - b. The Medical Examiner will be delayed more than 30 minutes.
  - c. There is no reason to remain at the scene (e.g., a relative is willing to take responsibility for the deceased).
  - d. Authorization is received from a superior officer.
2. **AUTHORIZATION.** If the above conditions are present, request a superior officer to respond and determine if you may leave the scene. If you or your supervisor are in doubt, call the Medical Examiner's Office and request an expedited response.
3. **RECORDS/RECEIPT.** It is your responsibility to make arrangements to obtain a copy of the Medical Examiner's receipt. Before leaving the scene, provide your name, star number, unit number, and telephone number to the responsible person.

- E. DEATH NOTIFICATION.** Officers are not responsible for death notifications; this is the responsibility of the Medical Examiner's Office.
- F. SUICIDE CASES.** The responsibility for investigating cases of suicide rests with the Medical Examiner. After completing an incident report of a suicide, forward a copy to the Psychiatric Liaison Unit. Also refer individuals that may need subsequent counseling to the Psychiatric Liaison Unit.
- G. HOMICIDE CASES**
- 1. INVESTIGATIVE PROCEDURES/NOTIFICATION.** At the scene of an obvious homicide, immediately take the following steps:
    - a. Protect the crime scene, disturb nothing, and touch nothing! Do not search the body.
    - b. Initiate a Crime Scene Log (SFPD 28). See DGO 6.01, Crime Scene Log.
    - c. Notify your field supervisor.
    - d. Make the following notifications:
      - (1) Homicide Section (after business hours, contact the Operations Center).
      - (2) Crime Scene Investigations Unit (after business hours, contact the Operations Center).
      - (3) Medical Examiner's Office (after business hours, contact the Operations Center).
      - (4) Photo Lab.
  - 2. PROTECTING THE CRIME SCENE.** In all cases of homicide, secure the crime scene and prevent anyone from entering except for necessary emergency personnel and the following members of the investigating team:
    - Homicide Inspectors.
    - Members of the photo lab.
    - Members of the Crime Lab.
    - The Medical Examiner or Deputy.

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3. **EVIDENCE** (see DGO 6.02, Physical Evidence). Never touch a weapon or other potential evidence unless its loss or destruction is likely. Under no circumstances attempt to unload a firearm. If anything must be moved, carefully note the position of the item in reference to the crime scene.
4. **WITNESSES AND STATEMENTS**. Record the names and addresses of persons present, or persons who may have knowledge of the incident. Detain anyone whose actions, conduct, statement, declaration or testimony may in any way be relevant to the investigation of the case, but do not interview or "Mirandize" known or possible suspects. If a suspect is at the scene, remove him/her from the immediate area as soon as possible.
5. **REMAINING AT THE SCENE**. Remain at the scene until the body is removed by the Medical Examiner and you are released by the Homicide Inspector.

#### H. DYING DECLARATIONS

1. **WHEN**. If a victim may die before the Homicide Inspector has a chance to interview him/her, try to get a dying declaration.
  2. **WITNESSES/FORMAT**. Attempt to locate a witness(es). Write the victim's statement on a statement form, read it to the victim for verification and, if possible, have both the victim and witness(es) sign it. The declaration must be in the following format:
    - a. That the declaration is made under a sense of impending death.
    - b. That the victim believes he/she is about to die.
    - c. That the injury was inflicted by (give the name of the person causing the injury).
    - d. The cause of circumstances that led thereto.
    - e. The name, age, nativity, residence and occupation of the injured party.
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