

Death Investigation

330.1 PURPOSE AND SCOPE

The investigations of cases involving death include those ranging from natural cause to homicide. Some causes of death may not be readily apparent and some cases differ substantially from what they appeared to be initially. The thoroughness of death investigations cannot be emphasized enough.

330.2 INVESTIGATION CONSIDERATIONS

Death investigation cases require certain actions be taken. Paramedics shall be called in all suspected death cases unless the death is obvious (e.g., decapitated, decomposed). A supervisor shall be notified in all death investigations.

330.2.1 CORONER REQUEST

Government Code § 27491 and Health & Safety Code § 102850 direct the Coroner to inquire into and determine the circumstances, manner and cause of certain deaths. The Coroner shall be called in any of the following cases:

- (a) Unattended deaths (No physician in attendance or during the continued absence of the attending physician. Also, includes all deaths outside hospitals and nursing care facilities).
- (b) Deaths where the deceased has not been attended by either a physician or a registered nurse, who is a member of a hospice care interdisciplinary team, as defined by Health and Safety Code § 1746 in the 20 days prior to death.
- (c) Physician unable to state the cause of death. Unwillingness does not apply. Includes all sudden, unexpected and unusual deaths and fetal deaths when the underlying cause is unknown.
- (d) Known or suspected homicide.
- (e) Known or suspected suicide.
- (f) Involving any criminal action or suspicion of a criminal act. Includes child and dependent adult negligence and abuse.
- (g) Related to or following known or suspected self-induced or criminal abortion.
- (h) Associated with a known or alleged rape or crime against nature.
- (i) Following an accident or injury (primary or contributory). Deaths known or suspected as resulting (in whole or in part) from or related to accident or injury, either old or recent.
- (j) Drowning, fire, hanging, gunshot, stabbing, cutting, starvation, exposure, alcoholism, drug addiction, strangulation or aspiration.
- (k) Accidental poisoning (food, chemical, drug, therapeutic agents).
- (l) Occupational diseases or occupational hazards.
- (m) Known or suspected contagious disease and constituting a public hazard.

Santa Clara Police Department

SCPD Policy Manual

Death Investigation

- (n) All deaths in operating rooms and all deaths where a patient has not fully recovered from an anesthetic, whether in surgery, recovery room or elsewhere.
- (o) In prison or while under sentence. Includes all in-custody and police involved deaths.
- (p) All deaths of unidentified persons.
- (q) All deaths of state hospital patients.
- (r) Suspected Sudden Infant Death Syndrome (SIDS) deaths.
- (s) All deaths where the patient is comatose throughout the period of the physician's attendance. Includes patients admitted to hospitals unresponsive and expire without regaining consciousness.

The body shall not be disturbed or moved from the position or place of death without permission of the coroner.

[See attachment: Reportable Death Chart 2018.pdf](#)

330.2.2 SEARCHING DEAD BODIES

The Coroner or Deputy Coroner is generally the only person permitted to search a body known to be dead from any of the circumstances set forth in Government Code § 27491. The only exception is that an officer is permitted to search the body of a person killed in a traffic collision for the limited purpose of locating an anatomical donor card (Government Code § 27491.3). If such a donor card is located, the Coroner or a designee shall be promptly notified. Should exigent circumstances indicate to an officer that any search of a known dead body is warranted prior to the arrival of the Coroner or a designee; the investigating officer shall first obtain verbal consent from the Coroner or a designee (Government Code § 27491.2).

Whenever possible, a witness, preferably a relative to the deceased or a member of the household, should be requested to remain at the scene with the officer pending the arrival of the Coroner or a designee. The name and address of this person shall be included in the narrative of the death report. Whenever personal effects are removed from the body of the deceased by the Coroner or a designee, a receipt shall be obtained. This receipt shall be attached to the death report.

330.2.3 DEATH NOTIFICATION

Notification of next of kin of deceased persons should normally be handled by a representative of the Santa Clara County Coroner's Office. The coroner's office has established a system of notification that encompasses the necessary requirements of the law and other necessary information that might be requested.

In situations where a person is killed as a result of police action, Department investigators may be contacting next of kin shortly after the incident to conduct follow-up investigation. It is necessary to ensure that the next of kin is appropriately notified as to the death of their family member, as long as positive identification of the deceased has been made. Close coordination with the Santa Clara County Coroner's Office is highly recommended.

Santa Clara Police Department

SCPD Policy Manual

Death Investigation

When practical, and if not handled by the Coroner's Office, notification to the next-of-kin of the deceased person shall be made, in person, by the officer assigned to the incident. If the next-of-kin lives in another jurisdiction, a law enforcement official from that jurisdiction shall be requested to make the personal notification. If the relatives live outside this county, the Coroner may be requested to make the notification. The Coroner needs to know if notification has been made. Assigned detectives may need to talk to the next-of-kin.

330.2.4 UNIDENTIFIED DEAD BODIES

If the identity of a dead body cannot be established after the Coroner arrives, the Coroner's office will issue a "John Doe" or "Jane Doe" number for the report.

330.2.5 DEATH INVESTIGATION REPORTING

All incidents involving a death shall be documented on the appropriate form.

330.2.6 SUSPECTED HOMICIDE

If the initially assigned officer suspects that the death involves a homicide or other suspicious circumstances, the Investigations Division shall be notified to determine the possible need for a detective to respond to the scene for further immediate investigation.

330.2.7 EMPLOYMENT RELATED DEATHS OR INJURIES

Any member of this agency who responds to and determines that a death, serious illness, or serious injury has occurred as a result of an accident at or in connection with the victim's employment shall ensure that the nearest office of Cal-OSHA is notified by telephone immediately or as soon as practicable with all pertinent information (8 CCR 342(b)).

Attachments

Reportable Death Chart 2018.pdf

REPORTABLE DEATH

PLEASE CALL THE COUNTY OF SANTA CLARA
MEDICAL EXAMINER CORONER'S OFFICE
AT

408-793-1900

MEDICAL EXAMINER - CORONER
COUNTY OF SANTA CLARA



MEDICAL EXAMINER-CORONER OFFICE
COUNTY OF SANTA CLARA, CALIFORNIA

MICHELLE A. JORDEN, MD

850 THORNTON WAY - SAN JOSE, CALIFORNIA 95128

FAX: 408-793-6759

HOMICIDE

SUICIDE

BURNS OR FIRE-RELATED

DEATH RELATED TO HOT OR
COLD WEATHER EXPOSURE

FETAL DEATHS WITH
+DRUG/TRAUMA OR
ACCIDENT

IN-CUSTODY DEATH/LAW
ENFORCEMENT INVOLVEMENT

UNIDENTIFIED
DECEDENT

CONTAGIOUS DISEASE/
MASS CASUALTY

NEXT-OF-KIN CANNOT BE
LOCATED

INTRAOPERATIVE DEATH OR
WITHIN 24 HRS

DECEDENT HAS NO
PRIMARY CARE PHYSICIAN

DROWNING

ALL DEATHS WITHIN 24 HRS
OF ADMISSION

UNEXPECTED BABY/CHILD
DEATH

MOTOR VEHICLE ACCIDENT

ELECTROCUTION

OCCUPATIONAL INJURY
OR DISEASE

CHOKING ON FOOD BOLUS

ACUTE ALCOHOL OR ANY
DRUG INTOXICATION

POISONING/CARBON
MONOXIDE

FALL, ACCIDENT, OR TRAUMA-RELATED
(RECENT OR DELAYED COMPLICATION)

ABUSE OR NEGLECT
RELATED