

EAST RANGE POLICE DEPARTMENT

Death Investigation Policy

POLICY
210

REV 03/10/2025

I. PURPOSE AND SCOPE

The investigation 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.

Death investigations shall be conducted pursuant to Minn. Stat. 390.005 through 390.252 if the county has an elected or appointed Coroner (Minn. Stat. 390.34).

II. INVESTIGATION CONSIDERATIONS

Death investigation cases require certain actions be taken. Emergency Medical Services shall be called in all suspected death cases unless the death is obvious (e.g., decapitated or decomposed). Peace officers are not authorized to pronounce death unless they are also Coroners or deputy coroners. A supervisor shall be notified in all death investigations.

III. MEDICAL EXAMINER REQUEST

- A. The Medical Examiner shall be called in all sudden or unexpected deaths or deaths due to other than natural causes, including, but not limited to (Minn. Stat. 390.11):
1. Unnatural deaths, including violent deaths arising from homicide, suicide or accident.
 2. Deaths due to a fire or associated with burns or chemical, electrical or radiation injury.
 3. Unexplained or unexpected perinatal and postpartum maternal deaths.
 4. Deaths under suspicious, unusual or unexpected circumstances.
 5. Deaths of persons whose bodies are to be cremated or otherwise disposed of so that the bodies will alter be unavailable for examination.
 6. Deaths of inmates of public institutions and persons in custody of law enforcement officers who have not been hospitalized primarily for organic disease.
 7. Deaths that occur during, in association with or as the result of diagnostic, therapeutic or anesthetic procedures.
 8. Deaths due to culpable neglect.
 9. Stillbirths of 20 weeks or longer gestation unattended by a physician.
 10. Sudden deaths of persons not affected by recognizable disease.
 11. Unexpected deaths of persons notwithstanding a history of underlying disease.

12. Deaths in which a fracture of a major bone, such as a femur, humerus or tibia, has occurred within the past six months.
13. Deaths unattended by a physician occurring outside of a licensed health care facility or licensed residential hospice program.
14. Deaths of persons not seen by their physician within 120 days of demise.
15. Deaths of persons occurring in an emergency department.
16. Stillbirths or deaths of newborn infants in which there has been maternal use of or exposure to un-prescribed controlled substances, including street drugs, or in which there is a history or evidence of maternal trauma.
17. Unexpected deaths of children.
18. Solid organ donors.
19. Unidentified bodies.
20. Skeletonized remains.
21. Unexpected deaths occurring within 23 hours of arrival at a health care facility.
22. Deaths associated with the decedent's employment.
23. Deaths of non-registered hospice patients or patients in non-licensed hospice programs.
24. Deaths attributable to acts of terrorism.

IV. SEARCHING DEAD BODIES

- A. The Medical Examiner or his/her assistants and authorized investigators are generally the only persons permitted to move, handle or search a body known to be dead.
- B. An Officer is permitted to make a reasonable search of an individual who it is reasonable to believe is dead, or near death, for a document of gift or other information identifying the individual as a donor or as an individual who made a refusal (Minn. Stat. 525A.12 (a) (1)). If a donor document is located, the Medical Examiner shall be promptly notified.
- C. Should exigent circumstances indicate to an officer that any other search of a known dead body is warranted prior to the arrival of the Medical Examiner, the investigating officer shall first obtain verbal consent from the Medical Examiner.
- D. The Medical Examiner is required to release property or articles to law enforcement that are necessary for conducting an investigation unless reasonable basis exists pursuant to Minn. Stat. 390.225 Subd. 2 to not release the property or articles (Minn. Stat. 390.221).
- E. Whenever reasonably possible, a witness, preferably a relative of 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 Medical Examiner.
- F. The name and Address of this person shall be included in the narrative of the death report.
- G. Whenever personal effects are removed from the body of the deceased by the Medical Examiner, a receipt shall be obtained. The receipt shall be attached to the death report.

V. DEATH NOTIFICATION

- A.** Should a human death result from a fire, this officer shall immediately notify the state fire marshal (Minn. Stat 299F.04 Subd. 5 (b)).
- B.** When practicable, and if not handled by the Medical Examiner, 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 Medical Examiner may be requested to make the notification. The Medical Examiner needs to know if notification has been made. Assigned investigators may need to talk to the next-of-kin.
- C.** If a deceased person has been identified as a missing person, this office shall attempt to locate family members and inform them of the death and the location of the deceased missing person's remains. All efforts to locate and notify family members shall be recorded in appropriate reports and properly maintained (Minn. Stat. 390.25 Subd. 2 (b)).

VI. UNIDENTIFIED DEAD BODIES

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

VII. UNIDENTIFIED BODIES DATA ENTRY

As soon as reasonably possible, but no later than 30 working days after the date a death is reported to the Office, all available identifying features of the unidentified body, including dental records, fingerprints, any unusual physical characteristics and a description of clothing or personal belongings found on or with the body, shall be forwarded to the Medical Examiner for entry into the Missing Children and Missing Persons Information Clearinghouse and the National Crime Information Center (NCIC) file (Minn. Stat. 390.25 Subd. 2 (a)).

VIII. DEATH INVESTIGATION REPORTING

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

IX. SUSPECTED HOMICIDE

- A.** If the initially assigned officer suspects that the death involves a homicide or other suspicious circumstances, the officer shall take steps to protect the scene and the Division shall be notified to determine the possible need for an investigator to respond to the scene for further immediate investigation.
- B.** If the on-scene supervisor, through consultation with the Chief of Police or Criminal Investigations Division supervisor, is unable to determine the manner of death, the investigation shall proceed as though it is a homicide.

- C. The investigator of a homicide or suspicious-circumstances death may, with the approval of his/her supervisor, request the Medical Examiner to conduct physical examinations and tests and provide a report with the costs borne by the Officer (Minn. Stat. 390.251).

X. 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, may ensure that the nearest office of the Minnesota Department of Labor and Industry is notified by telephone with all pertinent information.

XI. REFERENCES AND REVISIONS

a. REFERENCES

- i. Minn. Stat. 390.005 through 390.252

b. REVISIONS

- i. 04/19/2016 – Initial Policy
- ii. 03/10/2025 – ERPSB Approval Date