



Death Investigation

360.1 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 appear to be initially. The thoroughness of death investigations cannot be emphasized enough.

360.1.1 NATURAL DEATH INVESTIGATIONS

In Natural Death Investigations where a doctor will sign a death certificate, officers shall follow Standard Operating Procedure PSB-360.

360.2 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).

A supervisor shall be notified in all death investigations.

360.2.1 MEDICAL EXAMINER REQUEST

The Medical Examiner shall be promptly called in all sudden or unexpected deaths or deaths due to other than natural causes, including but not limited to (ARS § 11-593(A)):

- Death when not under the current care of a health care provider (ARS § 36-301).
- Death resulting from violence.
- Death occurring suddenly when in apparent good health.
- Death occurring in a prison or the death of a prisoner.
- Death occurring in a suspicious, unusual or unnatural manner, such as Sudden Infant Death Syndrome (SIDS).
- Death from disease or accident believed to be related to the deceased's occupation or employment.
- Death believed to present a public health hazard.
- Death occurring during, in association with or as a result of anesthetic or surgical procedures.
- Unidentifiable bodies.

360.2.2 SEARCHING DEAD BODIES

The Medical Examiner or his/her assistants and authorized investigators are generally the preferred persons permitted to move, handle or search a body known to be dead.

An officer may be permitted to make a reasonable search of an individual who it is reasonable to believe is dead, or near death, for the purposes of identification or furtherance of the investigation where time is of the essence.

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The Medical Examiner, with the permission of the Department, may take property, objects or articles found on the deceased or in the deceased's immediate vicinity that may be necessary for conducting an investigation to determine the identity of the deceased or the cause or manner of death (ARS 11-595(B)).

Whenever personal effects are removed from the body of the deceased by the Medical Examiner, the items will be documented in the report and photographed and a receipt shall be obtained. This receipt shall be attached to the death report.

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.

The name and address of this person shall be included in the narrative of the death report.

360.2.3 DEATH NOTIFICATION

Should a human death result from a fire, the investigation will be handled by the Major Crimes Unit. .

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 a deceased person has been identified as a missing person, this department 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.

360.2.4 UNIDENTIFIED DEAD BODIES

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

360.2.5 UNIDENTIFIED BODIES DATA ENTRY

As soon as reasonably possible, 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 should be entered into the Arizona state database and the NCIC file.

360.2.6 DEATH INVESTIGATION REPORTING

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

In addition, an officer shall complete an infant death investigation checklist during any unexplained infant death investigation and before any autopsy is conducted (ARS § 36-2293).

The Department shall retain the original infant death investigation check list and immediately forward a copy to the Medical Examiner and the Department of Health Services (ARS § 36-2293(C)).

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360.2.7 SUSPECTED HOMICIDE

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. The supervisor shall be notified to determine the possible need for an investigator to respond to the scene for further immediate investigation.

360.2.8 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 Arizona Division of Occupational Safety and Health (ADOSH) is notified with all pertinent information.