



DEATHS

1.0 General

- 1.1 The purpose of this policy is to provide direction to police officers in responding to reports of deaths, including those by natural causes, accidents, suicides, and homicides. The nature of the death will determine the level of response by the RNC.
- 1.2 For the purposes of this policy, unless otherwise directed, the Inspector i/c Crimes Against Persons Section or his/her designate will be assigned as the Major Case Manager.
- 1.3 “*Reportable death*” refers to those deaths that require a medical examiner or investigator to be notified pursuant to *Sections 5, 6, 7 and 8* of the [Fatalities Investigations Act](#).
- 1.4 Pursuant to the *Fatalities Investigations Act, Section 11*, all police officers of the RNC are medical examiner investigators and when authorized by a medical examiner shall assist the medical examiner in carrying out his or her duties under the Act.
- 1.5 The investigator assigned as an assistant to the Medical Examiner’s Office under The Fatalities Investigations Act shall not act as the primary investigator.

2.0 Duties at the Scene of a Death or a Suspected Death

- 2.1 A primary responsibility of the police officer is the preservation of life. Where life may exist, medical aid must be sought immediately.
- 2.2 All reportable deaths shall be treated as criminal until determined to be otherwise by the Major Case Manager.
- 2.3 A supervisor shall respond to the scene of all reportable deaths.
- 2.4 Investigation of non-criminal deaths is the responsibility of the Office of the Chief Medical Examiner. Police officers shall assist in the capacity of Medical Examiner Investigators as defined by the [Fatalities Investigations Act](#) and take direction from the Chief Medical Examiner (or designate).

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- 2.5 Responders shall submit detailed written reports, and investigations requiring further work will be assigned to the Major Crime Unit where investigators will provide assistance to the Office of the Chief Medical Examiner.
- 2.6 Arrange for the body to be pronounced dead by the Medical Examiner, or a qualified medical practitioner either at the scene or at the hospital, prior to placing the body in the morgue.

3.0 Non-Criminal Deaths at a Medical Facility

- 3.1 When a reportable death occurs in a medical facility, the issuing of the Medical Certificate of Death is the responsibility of the Office of the Chief Medical Examiner.
- 3.2 When a non-reportable death occurs in a medical facility, the issuing of the Medical Certificate of Death is the responsibility of the attending physician.
- 3.3 When a reportable death occurs in a medical facility, police response and investigation will be required only if requested by:
- a. the Office of the Chief Medical Examiner; or
 - b. a representative of the medical facility.

4.0 Non-Criminal Deaths Not at a Medical Facility

- 4.1 Non-reportable death
- a. When an officer responds to a non-reportable death outside a medical facility and the family physician is willing to sign the Death Certificate, the responding officer shall:
 - (1) conduct an investigation to determine that the death was non-criminal;
 - (2) notify an NCO;
 - (3) confirm with the family physician that the death was of natural causes and s/he will sign the Death Certificate;
 - (4) record the name of the physician and the time and method of contact; and

- (5) advise the family of the deceased that they may arrange to convey the remains to a hospital or funeral home of their choice.

4.2 Reportable death

- a. When a non-criminal but reportable death occurs outside a medical facility and the family physician is not willing to sign the Medical Certificate of Death, the responding officer shall:

- (1) notify an NCO and request his/her attendance;
- (2) notify the Medical Examiner of the situation so s/he can decide if s/he will attend the scene;
- (3) complete the ME1 Form in its totality, ME Body Tag and comply with RNC reporting procedures;
- (4) obtain a statement from the last person who saw the deceased person alive;
- (5) obtain statement from all witnesses;
- (6) notify the next-of-kin as soon as possible and inform the Medical Examiner's Office that the next-of-kin has been notified;
- (7) obtain a statement from the next of kin regarding the medical history of the deceased as it pertains to any and all illnesses and medications being taken at the time of death;
- (8) arrange to have the body transported to the morgue; and
- (9) ensure that all personal effects, all prescription drugs, non prescription drugs and property remain with the body pending the joint examination by the Chief Medical Examiner and the investigating police officer.

- 4.3 In a case where a suicide has occurred the responding officer shall follow the procedure outlined in section 4.2 of this policy and also request that Forensic Identification Section (FIS) attend the scene.

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- 4.4 Supervisors shall:
- a. respond to the scene of all reportable deaths; and
 - b. ensure from the responding officer that the Medical Examiner has been contacted.
- 4.5 Any valuables (ie. cash, jewellery) found in possession of the deceased shall be retained if required; if not required it shall be properly recorded and turned over to the immediate family and signed for. If it cannot be turned over to the appropriate person at this time it shall be placed in the PCC until it can be turned over.
- 4.6 Items of evidence (e.g., firearm or pill bottle) shall be retained. When a suicide note is found, and no suspicious circumstances are apparent, the investigating police officer will take possession of the note and will be responsible for establishing its authenticity. The Medical Examiner shall be provided with the original note and a copy of the note shall be retained for the file. All drugs found shall be passed over to the Medical Examiner by the investigating police officer for further investigation by the Medical Examiner.
- 4.7 The initial investigator of a non-criminal death shall query the victim's name on ICAN and CPIC. If the possibility exists that the deceased is the subject of local files or CPIC FPS files, the Forensic Identification Section shall attend. Confirmation of identity by fingerprinting the deceased will initiate the cancellation of the subject's FPS files.

5.0 Criminal Death Investigation Procedures

- 5.1 All criminal death investigations shall be investigated in accordance to the procedures outlined in the [Major Case Management](#) chapter in this manual.
- 5.2 All reportable deaths shall be treated as criminal deaths until determined otherwise by the Major Case Manager. Therefore the first officer on the scene is responsible to:
- a. view the body and make a preliminary assessment;
 - b. note and communicate observations that may impact the safety of other responders;
 - c. conduct a preliminary examination of the area to ensure that offender(s) are not present (be mindful of scene contamination and security);

- d. in cases where sufficient grounds exist, detain suspected offender(s);
- e. identify all potential witnesses, and ensure that their identities and contact details are recorded;
- f. secure and protect the scene;
- g. update Communications Centre and immediate supervisor, who will ensure that the Duty Officer or Divisional Commander is notified; and
- h. take detailed notes of all actions and observations.

5.3 The police officer detaining suspected offender(s) shall:

- a. immediately search the person(s) for weapons;
- b. ensure that the person is cautioned and informed of Charter rights, as appropriate;
- c. remove the detained person(s) from scene as soon as possible;
- d. prevent the person from having contact with others (except legal counsel as per Charter rights) and take notes of any contacts that do occur;
- e. document the person's mental and physical condition (including clothing description, comments and/or statements that may be made);
- f. ensure that the Major Case Manager and/or the Primary Investigator is informed of the detention as soon as possible; and
- g. maintain custody of the detained person and take direction from the Major Case Manager and/or Primary Investigator.

5.4 Scene Security

- a. The responding police officer shall ensure that the scene is secured, and shall allow access only to responders who are attempting to preserve life.
- b. As soon as practical, the senior police officer responding to a scene shall assign a police officer to take responsibility for scene security, and that police officer shall allow access to the scene only to persons as directed by the Primary Investigator or designate.

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- c. The police officer responsible for maintaining scene security shall make detailed notes of all persons entering or exiting the scene. That officer shall maintain the Crime Scene Continuity Register when it is provided.
- 5.5 Human remains requiring autopsies shall be accompanied by a police officer from the scene to the morgue via police transport.
- 5.6 The police officer assigned to accompany the body to the morgue shall take possession of and maintain continuity of the key to the body container, process it as an exhibit and place the key in the Property Control Centre (PCC). Complete the ME 1 Form, ME Body Tag and comply with RNC reporting procedures. Removal of the lock and identification of the body for the Medical Examiner shall be recorded by the police officer attending the post-mortem.
- 5.7 Supervisors shall:
- a. respond to the scene;
 - b. ensure that a police officer has been assigned to scene security; and
 - c. notify the Duty Officer or Divisional Commander.
- 5.8 The Platoon Commander/Duty Officer duties will include but are not limited to the following:
- a. ensuring the prompt notification of the Chief and Deputy Chiefs of Police as to the status of the complaint and investigation;
 - b. setting up a base of operations; and
 - c. notifying the Divisional Commander of the CID or designate for the assignment of a Major Case Manager.
- 5.9 The Inspector i/c Crimes Against Persons Section or his/her designate will be assigned as the Major Case Manager and follow the procedures outlined in the [Major Case Management](#) chapter in this manual. S/he will be responsible for the following:
- a. setting up the Major Case Management Investigative Team;
 - b. assigning an investigative team;

- c. protecting the scene;
- d. collection and dissemination of all information;
- e. canvassing;
- f. assigning an officer to liaise with the Forensic Identification Section (FIS) during the examination of the scene;
- g. assigning officers to take charge of suspect(s);
- h. assigning officers to interview suspect(s); and
- i. assigning officers to interview witness(es).

5.10 Questioning of Suspect(s):

- a. All suspects should be interviewed by the officers assigned by the Major Case Manager and shall be properly guarded until the officer issues instructions regarding relief, release, or incarceration. An officer detailed as a guard should recall any conversation with the subject and note it at the first opportunity.
- b. In the event that the suspect appears to be under the influence of alcohol or other drug, he should be given the opportunity to provide a sample of breath or blood. The officer i/c of the investigation will make the necessary arrangements.

5.11 Responsibility of the Forensic Identification Section (FIS)

- a. FIS shall utilize the protocol set out in the [Major Case Management](#) chapter in this manual.
- b. The responsibility of FIS is to examine and record the scene, body, and suspects. The information is recorded by means of photography, video, measurements and sketches in order to reconstruct the scene and determine the sequence of events to aid in the continuation of the investigation or for presentation at a trial.
- c. Personnel of the Forensic Identification Section assigned will:
 - (1) perform the crime scene examination;

- (2) collect, retain and process of all exhibits;
- (3) process the deceased and any suspects for evidence;
- (4) coordinate the removal of the body; and
- (5) report to the officer in charge of the investigation - Case Manager.

6.0 Police Shooting

- 6.1 If death occurs as a result of a police shooting incident it shall be investigated in accordance with the Shooting Incidents section in the [Firearms](#) chapter.

7.0 ME 1 Form - Scene Report

- 7.1 The ME 1- Scene Report form the basis for data resources that are essential to studies and research conducted by the Medical Examiner's Office.
- 7.2 Officers are required to fill out every question on the report. If pertinent information is unknown i.e. occupation, enter "unknown" in the occupational field.
- 7.3 Due to municipalities having similar civic addresses officers must also include the city or town in address line.
- 7.4 When responding to a DOA (death on arrival) at the emergency department of a hospital, officers must remember that this is not the scene. The scene is the location from where the person was taken i.e. residence, work, street etc. Officers shall respond to the scene location to ascertain the sequence of events which must be clearly indicated on the ME 1 form.
- 7.5 The Medical Examiner's Office requires immediate access to the ME 1 form and all statements. Officers can fax a copy of these documents directly to the ME's office at 777-6975. The originals and fax verification shall be retained with the RNC master file.

8.0 Notification of Next-of Kin

- 8.1 The notification of the next-of-kin is very sensitive in nature and should be conducted in a courteous and professional manner.
- 8.2 Where the faith of a deceased becomes readily known, a police officer shall, where possible, have a clergy of the same faith notify the next-of-kin.

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- 8.3 Where the attendance of a clergy cannot be accomplished, police officers should be aware of the following guidelines which are intended to minimize trauma for the bereaved:
- a. when possible, ensure the notification is made in person and not by telephone;
 - b. never rush the process or give the indication that they are "in a hurry";
 - c. leave their name and the telephone number where they can be reached; and
 - d. never leave the bereaved alone when leaving. Where possible, police officers should ensure someone is there, e.g., other family members, pastor, or friend.
- 8.4 In the case of the death of a child who is in the care and custody of the Director of Child, Youth, and Family Services, notification of next-of-kin must be made through the appropriate Regional Health Authority.

9.0 Attending Post-Mortem Examinations

- 9.1 In all cases where criminal activity is suspected, the Major Case Manager shall ensure that an officer from FIS attend the post-mortem examination.
- 9.2 A field Investigator shall be assigned to confirm identification of the body and communicate this to the police officer attending the post-mortem. The police officer attending the post-mortem shall communicate this information to the Medical Examiner conducting the post-mortem.
- 9.3 Procedures that may assist with identification may include:
- a. fingerprints;
 - b. facial reconstruction;
 - c. marks, scars, tattoos, surgical procedures, unique or unusual physical features;
 - d. clothing and possessions;
 - e. dental records;

- f. DNA analysis;
 - g. checking missing person reports;
 - h. media appeals;
- 9.4 The FIS officer shall document and properly record all property and potential exhibits recovered during the post-mortem examination in accordance with the [Property and Exhibit Handling Procedures](#) chapter in this manual. These will be turned over to the Medical Examiner upon request if not required for a criminal investigation.

10.0 Medical - Legal Autopsies

- 10.1 Where a reportable death occurs, under *Section 14 (1) of the Fatalities Investigations Act*, the Medical Examiner has the authorization to conduct an autopsy. The investigating police officer shall inform the relative that the case is reportable and an autopsy will be conducted at the discretion of the Office of the Chief Medical Examiner. Police officers are reminded this process is sensitive and must be conducted in a courteous and professional manner.

11.0 Skeletal Remains

- 11.1 When human skeletal remains have been discovered, other than at an archaeological dig, RNC shall respond and secure the scene.
- 11.2 All discoveries of skeletal remains will be investigated and treated as a homicide or crime related death until determined otherwise. The procedures outlined in Section 5 will apply.
- 11.3 Excavating skeletal remains demands strict excavation protocols. Wherever possible, a Forensic Anthropologist should be consulted to assist with the recovery.
- 11.4 In circumstances that are determined to be archaeological rather than forensic in nature, the Major Case Manager shall ensure that an investigator contacts the Provincial Archaeology Office (PAO), of the Culture and Heritage Division, Department of Tourism, Culture and Recreation, which is the regulatory agency for all archaeological sites within the Province of Newfoundland and Labrador.

12.0 Human Remains at Fire Scenes

- 12.1 Where human remains are found at fire scenes the death will be investigated as a crime related death as outlined in Section 5 if and until the investigation reveals death to be non-criminal in nature. At that point, the investigation of the death becomes the responsibility of the Office of the Chief Medical Examiner.

13.0 Autopsy Reports

- 13.1 Police officers requiring autopsy reports for investigative files shall submit a written request to the Office of the Chief Medical Examiner. In cases where the report has not been received by the assigned diary dates, the police officer shall contact the Medical Examiner's office and obtain a summary of the post mortem examination findings.

14.0 Media Releases

- 14.1 Homicides and deaths stimulate a great deal of interest by the media, who may seek information from many sources, official and unofficial. Media releases regarding homicides will be in accordance with the media relations section in [Major Case Management](#) chapter and the [Media Relations](#) chapter in this manual.

15.0 Release of Information – Suspected Suicide Cases

- 15.1 The name of the person who commits suicide shall not be released to the media except in certain circumstances.
- 15.2 The name of a suicide victim may be released to the media in circumstances that include:
- a. murder/suicide cases;
 - b. where the subject of an investigation, for example a missing person, has been identified to the media as a means of locating them and the person is subsequently found deceased as the result or suicide, the media release shall state: "foul play is not suspected." The media release shall not state that the person "committed suicide";
 - c. others, as approved by the regional MRO or designate.

- 15.3 In cases of suicidal death, the deceased person will often leave written correspondence or tape recordings of a testamentary character, or containing information about reasons for the act. Items of this nature have evidentiary value and, as exhibits, form part of the investigative file. Requests for access to this information from relatives or any other source must be reviewed carefully, bearing in mind the provisions of ATIPPA and the sensitivity of the information in question.
- 15.4 The investigating police officers will not, on his/her own initiative, release to any unauthorized person, any written correspondence or tape recordings left by a deceased person.
- 15.5 All requests for information of this nature will be directed to:
- a. Headquarters - Officer Commanding CID;
 - b. Corner Brook Region - Officer Commanding; and
 - c. Labrador West Region - Officer Commanding.
- 15.6 The Divisional Commander will review the request with the investigating police officer and/or the police officer's supervisor, to determine the feasibility of its release.
- 15.7 To comply with the provisions of ATIPPA, the RNC legal counsel will be consulted before deciding to release the information.
- 15.8 If the decision is made to release the information, only copies of the document or tape will be released.

16.0 Military Crashes

- 16.1 In the event of a military crash involving deaths within the geographic jurisdiction of the RNC, the Provincial *Investigation of Fatalities Act* is the governing legislation relating to deaths, including NATO crashes. In accordance with the NATO standing agreement representatives of the country of origin, may be permitted to have personnel observe the proceedings.

17.0 Labrador West and Corner Brook Regions

- 17.1 This policy is applicable to the Corner Brook and Labrador West Regions. References to the Major Crime Section are not applicable; however, there are officers responsible for these types of investigations in these Regions.

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- 17.2 Where specialized units and resources are not readily available, the responding police officers will utilize all available resources so as to comply with this Policy.
- 17.3 The Officer in Charge, upon assessment of the situation, will decide what specialized Units are required and request those resources.