



RICHMOND POLICE DEPARTMENT GENERAL ORDER



Subject: DEATH INVESTIGATION REPORTING, NOTIFICATION OF DEATH AND EMERGENCY MESSAGES		Chapter 7	Number 9	# Pages 8
Standards: CALEA 22.1.5, 55.2.6, 81.2.10	Related Orders: GO 03-12, 08-03		Effective Date: 09/17/2026 Revised By: Review Prv. Rev. Date: 08/28/2023	
<i>If any provision of this general order conflicts with any collective bargaining article, the collective bargaining agreement shall govern.</i>				
Chief of Police: 				

I. PURPOSE

The purpose of this directive is to establish the policy and procedure for handling death investigation calls and notification of the next of kin in death situations, traffic fatalities, serious bodily injuries, and illnesses. This directive consists of duties and responsibilities for members of the Richmond Police Department (**RPD**).

[CALEA 81.2.10]

II. SUMMARY OF CHANGE

This policy is due for triennial review. This directive includes updated instructions for communication with the Office of the Chief Medical Examiner, as well as updated procedures pertaining to next of kin. New language is denoted in bold and italicized text.

III. POLICY

It is the policy of the Richmond Police Department to complete an Incident Based Report (IBR) to include the Death **Report Summary** on all death investigations. It is also the policy of the Department to notify the Office of the **Chief** Medical Examiner (**OCME**) regarding any death, regardless of the cause.

The OCME will be notified of all non-hospital deaths by the Richmond Police Department. In certain situations where a person dies at a hospital as a result of an act that is being investigated by RPD (i.e., homicides and traffic fatalities), a member of the Police Department may notify the OCME. RPD will be responsible for locating and notifying next of kin (NOK).

[CALEA 81.2.10]

When members of the Richmond Police Department are called to a death investigation, it is important to remember that the body of a deceased individual (decedent) is the property of the **OCME**.

IV. ACCOUNTABILITY STATEMENT

All employees are expected to fully comply with the guidelines and timelines set forth in this General Order. Responsibility rests with the division commander to ensure that any violations of policy are investigated and appropriate training, counseling, and disciplinary action is initiated.

This directive is for internal use only and does not enlarge an employee's civil liability in any way. It should not be construed as the creation of a higher standard of safety or case in an evidentiary sense, with respect to third party claims. Violation of this directive, if proven, can only form the basis of a complaint by this Department, and then only a non-judicial administrative setting.

V. DEFINITIONS

- A. NEXT OF KIN (**NOK**) – The decedent's presumed legal spouse, child over 18 years of age, custodial parent, non-custodial parent, siblings over 18 years of age, appointed legal guardian of a minor child, appointed legal guardian of minor siblings and/or those entitled to take responsibility under statutory distribution of estates.
- B. DEATH INVESTIGATION TURNDOWN – A situation occurring when the **OCME** has determined that ***no autopsy, viewing, or examination will be*** performed and has given the officer on-scene permission to release the decedent to the next of kin.

VI. PROCEDURE

- A. Initial Contact:

Upon initial contact with any victim, if there is any doubt whatsoever as to whether that person is alive, Department members shall seek medical attention for the victim as soon as possible.

- B. Guidelines for Any Death Investigation:

- 1. ***Prior to calling the OCME, the log officer shall gather all basic details about the circumstances of the death, to include:***
 - a. ***Decedent's name, date of birth, and SSN;***
 - b. ***Medical history, to include all diagnoses and prescription medications;***
 - c. ***Primary care physician and their most recent doctor visit;***
 - d. ***Any recent hospitalizations;***

- e. *History of alcohol and illicit drug use;*
 - f. *Date and time they were last known alive;*
 - g. *Date and time they were discovered deceased;*
 - h. *Time pronounced dead, and by whom; and,*
 - i. *Next of kin, if known.*
2. ***Officers shall call the OCME Central District Office at (804) 786-3174 to report the death.***
 3. For cases accepted by the ***OCME*** or ***to provide*** any follow up information requested by them, the assigned detective or detective supervisor will forward them a copy of the investigation.
 4. Members of the Richmond Police Department are not to move or disturb the decedent without authorization from the ***OCME*** unless exigent circumstances exist, and/or the detective supervisor approves the movement of the decedent without authorization from the ***OCME***. All movement activity shall be documented in the detective's narrative.
 5. Department members will not remove any property from the decedent without approval from the ***OCME*** unless exigent circumstances exist. All property removal activity shall be documented in the report narrative.
 6. All medications, identification, and personal effects shall be ***photographed and documented in the IBR***. The reporting officer may be requested to photograph the decedent as well.
 7. Once property is removed from a decedent by, or at the direction of, the ***OCME***, it will be turned over to and become the property of the Richmond Police Department for safekeeping.
 8. Property removed from the decedent's body by the ***OCME***, will be inventoried on the OCME Evidence/Property receipt and will be signed by the ***OCME*** representative and the officer that is ***taking*** custody of those items.
 9. A copy of the property receipt will accompany the decedent's body to the ***OCME***.
 10. The reporting officer will witness the locking of the body bag by the removal service and the lock number will be recorded on the property receipt and noted in the IBR narrative.
 11. All evidence should be handled as outlined in General Order 03-12, Handling Property and Evidence.
 - 12.

C. Apparent Natural Deaths:

1. In many cases, the deceased will have a history of health problems such as heart disease, cancer, etc. The officer should determine the medical history, as much as possible, and then notify the ***decedent's primary care*** physician.
2. The officer shall notify the ***OCME*** of the circumstances of death and the willingness of the physician to sign the death certificate.
3. Patients in hospice care are receiving end-of-life palliative treatment for terminal illnesses. They will generally have a nurse assigned to them, along with medical directives. When a hospice patient dies outside of a hospital, RPD will still respond, conduct a death investigation, notify the OCME, and complete an IBR.
4. After the ***OCME*** has been notified and gives their instructions and someone assumes responsibility for the body, the officer shall offer whatever assistance is necessary. ***It may sometimes be necessary for the officer to wait until the funeral service provider has responded to take custody of the body.***
5. If the ***OCME*** turns down acceptance of the decedent and the next of kin cannot be contacted or cannot make arrangements with a funeral service provider, (case by case basis) the ***on-call*** Major Crimes Sergeant/Detective will attempt to locate next of kin. If they are unable to, they will call or authorize the officer to call the contracted removal service provider (H&S ***or Suburban Seven Rivers***) to respond to the location for transportation of the decedent to storage.
 - a. The on-scene officer will provide the contracted removal service with any requested information on the decedent. In addition, any decedent that is being transported to storage shall be checked for valuables. ***The officer will*** document ***their*** findings in the report and ***log the items into*** P&E before the end of shift. ***The*** officer shall compile the IBR and complete the ***Death Report Summary form (in the RMS)*** prior to the end of their tour.
 - b. ***In any case in which RPD is unable to identify and notify the next of kin of the decedent, or other person authorized by law to make arrangements for disposition of the decedent's remains within ten days of the date of contact by the person or institution having initial custody of the decedent OR the next of kin of the decedent or other person authorized by law to make arrangements for disposition of the decedent's remains fails or refuses to claim the body within ten days of receipt of notice of the decedent's death, the Homicide Lieutenant shall review completed reports and forward to the Office of Legal Affairs (OLA) recommending a court order for final disposition of the decedent.***

c. The **OLA** will notify the Anatomical Board pursuant to statute. If Anatomical Board declines, **OLA** will notify the City Attorney's Office and provide necessary information for securing an order for disposition.

6. If the **OCME** accepts the body for an autopsy or a viewing, the **on-call** Sergeant/Detective or authorized officer shall contact the removal service by phone. The on-scene officer and their supervisor shall follow procedures for completing the IBR and Death **Report Summary form** outlined in the preceding paragraph.

D. Suspicious, Unnatural or Accidental Deaths:

1. The responding officer shall **conduct** a preliminary investigation, protect the scene, and immediately notify their supervisor, who shall respond to the scene. The preliminary investigation shall include:

- a. Documenting pertinent conditions, events, and remarks;
- b. Maintaining and protecting the crime scene, if necessary;
- c. In the absence of a forensic detective or a detective assigned to the Major Crimes Division, the responding officer shall arrange for the collection of evidence, if necessary;
- d. Locating and identifying victim(s) and witnesses, if necessary; and,
- e. Interviewing the complainant, witnesses, and suspect(s), if appropriate.

NOTE: Only the investigating officer, detective, or those authorized by them, and Forensics personnel shall be allowed to enter the scene after the subject **has been pronounced** deceased.

2. The responding officer shall be responsible for giving the information that they have collected to the investigating detective.

3. ***The patrol supervisor shall notify the appropriate on-call Major Crimes supervisor, along with the watch commander or precinct lieutenant.***

4. The responding detective shall make every effort to safeguard the property or valuables found with the deceased. Any such property shall be **logged** into the Property and Evidence Unit, if not secured in another manner.

5. If the **OCME** turns down acceptance of the decedent, and next of kin cannot be contacted or cannot make arrangements with a funeral service provider, officers shall follow all procedures stated in the preceding Section **VI.C** in this general order pertaining to Apparent Natural Deaths.

6. In all cases, the **OCME** shall make the determination as to the disposition of the body.

7. In cases of traffic deaths, the **OCME** must be notified before the body is moved.

E. Identification of Deceased Persons:

1. ***For all persons with unknown or unconfirmed identities, the patrol supervisor shall notify the on-call Major Crimes Sergeant who will direct members of the Forensics Unit to assist with identifying the decedent.***
2. ***For decedents who are wholly unknown to police, notify the OCME that the subject is a “John Doe” or “Jane Doe.” For decedents with partially known, unconfirmed, or suspected identities, notify the OCME that the person is “presumed to be” (PTB).***
3. Relatives or other persons shall not be referred to the **OCME** for identification purposes. Any inquiries of this nature shall be referred to the detective assigned to the case or the supervisor in charge of the scene.
4. Relatives shall be advised to contact the funeral service provider of their choice. They also should be informed that the deceased person has been or will be taken to the **OCME** or in some cases to **RPD’s** storage facility
5. The funeral service provider will contact the **OCME** to make arrangements for disposition of the body.

F. Child Death Investigation (Youth and Family Crimes Team):

1. Whenever the police respond to a call or are notified about the death of a child, age ten or younger, the Youth and Family Crimes Team supervisor will be notified.
2. The only exceptions in which the Youth and Family Crimes Team would not investigate the death of a child, age ten or younger, include:
 - a. If the death is the result of a motor vehicle crash;
 - b. If the child was being treated by a physician for a disease that caused their death; ***or***
 - c. ***If the death is a result of a shooting/stabbing or obvious signs of homicide. The Youth and Family Crimes Team will investigate child abuse/neglect related homicides (i.e., abusive head trauma).***

G. Notification of Next of Kin:

[CALEA 55.2.6]

Notification is paramount to every death investigation. The Department is committed to delivering urgent and efficient notifications with the compassion and sensitivity death situations demand to ensure that valuable information is not lost and is accurately reported. The **Patrol** Services supervisor or the reporting officer’s supervisor shall ensure the accuracy of the IBR, Death **Report Summary**, Crime

Scene Integrity Roster, and any other applicable forms to include all pertinent information, e.g., next of kin, etc.

1. Official Notification:

- a. Upon arrival to the scene of any death investigation call, the investigating officer shall attempt to determine the next of kin. The next of kin shall be noted on the IBR and Death ***Report Summary*** and shall include the following:
 - 1) Name of next of kin;
 - 2) Next of kin's relationship to decedent;
 - 3) Notification date/time/location;
 - 4) Next of kin's address;
 - 5) Decedent's address, phone number(s); and,
 - 6) Any other contact information if next of kin is ***identified and located.***
- b. In all cases involving a death, Department personnel will not release the name(s) of the victim until notification of the next of kin.
- c. In cases of a death (excluding crash fatalities) when the next of kin must be notified by police, the Major Crimes Division on-call sergeant ***may be contacted if assistance is needed.***
- d. If the next of kin cannot be located and a Major Crimes Division detective is available, the watch commander shall request the available detective to assist with notification. Whenever a Major Crimes Division detective responds to the scene, it is their responsibility to notify the next of kin. If a Major Crimes Division detective is not available, the watch commander or the traffic investigator shall make notification.
- e. If the next of kin cannot be determined or notified, or is determined to be out of the area, it shall be clearly documented in the IBR and the Death Investigation tab. The ***officer's supervisor shall*** contact the ***on-call*** detective sergeant who will attempt to locate the next of kin and call or authorize the officer to call the contracted removal service to respond to the location for transportation of the decedent.

2. Notification in Traffic Fatalities:

[CALEA 81.2.10]

- a. In traffic fatalities, the traffic investigator and the traffic supervisor shall deliver the death notification(s) to the next of kin. The watch commander shall be notified after the official notification has been made.

- b. The traffic investigator shall compile the PD-016, Information for Traffic Fatality. In item #16, the investigator should include the name of the next of kin who was notified, the time and date of notification.
- c. Department personnel shall refer to General Order 08-03, Crash Investigations and Reporting, for additional traffic fatality procedures.

3. Notification for Serious Injury and Illness:

[CALEA 55.2.6, 81.2.10]

In cases involving serious injury, serious illness, or other bona fide emergencies involving the public interest, a sworn employee shall deliver an emergency message to the next of kin as soon as possible. Notification shall be done in person in all possible cases unless there is no reasonable alternative or time is of the essence.

NOTE: This is usually handled by the hospital. If they are unable to reach a family, they will request assistance from the Police Department.

4. Notification Outside of the Richmond-Metropolitan Area:

[CALEA 81.2.10]

If the deceased has no immediate family in the Metro-Richmond area, the investigating officer may choose to contact the jurisdiction in which the family member to be notified resides or works. The officer may call that jurisdiction by telephone; however, all requests for death notifications shall be supported with a teletype.

5. Requests from Other Jurisdictions:

- a. A teletype verifying the deceased's name, pertinent data and the name and address identifying the next of kin must be received prior to making notification for another jurisdiction.
- b. Every attempt should be made to notify the next of kin. It may be necessary to try more than once. If the detective is unable to make notification, the information should be passed on to their supervisor, watch commander, or designee(s).

VII. FORMS

- A. IBR, *to include* Death ***Report Summary***
- B. PD-016, Information for Traffic Fatality
- C. Property and Evidence ***Voucher***