

# Death Investigation

## 608.1 PURPOSE AND SCOPE

The investigation of cases involving death include those ranging from natural causes to homicide. Some causes of death may not be readily apparent and some cases differ substantially from what they appear to be initially. The importance of a thorough death investigation cannot be emphasized enough.

Death investigations shall be conducted pursuant to Wis. Stat. Chapter 979.

## 608.2 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., the person has been decapitated or the body is decomposed). Deputies are not authorized to pronounce death. A supervisor shall be notified in all death investigations.

### 608.2.1 MEDICAL EXAMINER REQUEST

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 the following (Wis. Stat. § 979.01):

- (a) All deaths in which there are unexplained, unusual or suspicious circumstances
- (b) All homicides
- (c) All suicides
- (d) All deaths following an abortion
- (e) All deaths due to poisoning, whether homicidal, suicidal or accidental
- (f) All deaths following accidents, whether the injury is or is not the primary cause of death
- (g) When there was no physician, or accredited practitioner of a bona fide religious denomination relying upon prayer or spiritual means for healing in attendance within 30 days preceding death
- (h) When a physician refuses to sign a death certificate
- (i) When, after reasonable efforts, a physician cannot be located or contacted to sign the death certificate
- (j) Unidentifiable bodies

### 608.2.2 SEARCHING DEAD BODIES

The Medical Examiner or an assistant and authorized investigators are generally the only persons permitted to move, handle or search a body. Should exigent circumstances indicate to a deputy that any other search of a known dead body is warranted prior to the arrival of the Medical Examiner, the investigating deputy shall first obtain verbal consent from the Medical Examiner when practicable.

### *Death Investigation*

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A deputy is permitted to make a reasonable search of an individual who it is reasonable to believe is dead, or near death, for a record of anatomical gift or other information identifying the individual as a donor or as an individual who made a refusal (Wis. Stat. § 157.06(12)). If a donor document is located, the Medical Examiner shall be promptly notified. If a donor record of gift or gift refusal is located, and the individual is transported to a hospital, the person responsible for conducting the search shall send the donor record of gift or gift refusal to the hospital.

Whenever reasonably possible, a witness, preferably a relative to the deceased or a member of the household, should be requested to remain nearby the scene and available to the deputy pending the arrival of the Medical Examiner. 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 Medical Examiner, a receipt shall be obtained. This receipt shall be attached to the death report.

#### 608.2.3 DEATH NOTIFICATION

When reasonably practicable notification to the next-of-kin of the deceased person shall be made, in person, by the detective 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. The Medical Examiner should be advised if notification has been made. Assigned detectives may need to talk to the next-of-kin.

If a deceased person has been identified as a missing person, this agency shall attempt to locate family members and inform them of the death and location of the deceased missing person's remains. All efforts to locate and notify family members shall be recorded in appropriate reports and properly retained.

#### 608.2.4 UNIDENTIFIED DEAD BODIES

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

#### 608.2.5 DEATH INVESTIGATION REPORTING

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

#### 608.2.6 SUSPECTED HOMICIDE

If the initially assigned deputy suspects that the death involves a homicide, any suspicious circumstances or the manner of death cannot be determined, the deputy shall take steps to protect the scene. The Criminal Investigation Division shall be notified to determine the possible need for a detective to respond to the scene for further immediate investigation.

#### 608.2.7 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 should ensure that the nearest office of the Wisconsin Department of Health Services (WDHS) is notified with all pertinent information.