

## Death Investigation

### 358.1 PURPOSE AND SCOPE

This policy provides guidelines for law enforcement response to calls involving the death of a person.

### 358.2 POLICY

The investigations 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 is critical.

### 358.3 MEDICAL RESPONSE

Medical personnel will respond to most calls involving death. In the event of a crime scene, medical response will stage until authorized to proceed by law enforcement personnel on-scene.

### 358.4 LAW ENFORCEMENT RESPONSE

Officers will respond to calls involving death as follows:

1. Suspicious or unexpected death
2. Deaths where Fire or Medical personnel or the Medical Examiner's Office determine a law enforcement response is necessary.
3. Homicide or Accidental Death
4. Suicide Death
5. Unless unusual or exceptional circumstances exist, officers will not respond to calls involving:
  - (a) Death at a Hospice facility.
  - (b) Death when a Physician Ordered Life Sustaining Treatment (POLST) or Do Not Resuscitate (DNR) exists.
  - (c) Death at a nursing home.
  - (d) Death at an independent care or home care facility involving five (5) patients or less.
  - (e) An expected death at home where the deceased was under hospice care.

#### 358.4.1 PROCEDURES FOR LAW ENFORCEMENT RESPONSE

Medical response shall be called in all suspected death cases unless the death is obvious (decapitated, decomposed, etc.).

Officers are not authorized to pronounce death. The medical examiner determines the manner and cause of death. A supervisor shall be notified in all death investigations.

When responding to a suspected death call, officers shall:

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1. **Check Life Signs:** The first responsibility of the responding officer is to check for life signs; if the officer's opinion is that the victim is deceased, the officer shall protect the scene and gather preliminary information.
2. **Suspicious Death:** In the case of any death which involves a homicide or other suspicious circumstances, a supervisor shall notify the VPD Major Crimes Unit.
3. **Homicides, Suicides or Accidental Deaths:** In cases involving homicide, suicide or accidental death, the following procedure will apply:
  - (a) The responding officer shall protect the scene.
  - (b) The responding officer shall notify the immediate supervisor.
  - (c) The supervisor will respond to the scene.
  - (d) The supervisor will notify the VPD Major Crimes Unit.
  - (e) All available information relating to the incident will be collected.
  - (f) Witnesses will be identified, separated, and detained. If it is not possible to detain a witness, an officer shall determine where, when and how they can be reached by follow-up personnel.
4. **Natural Death:** In apparent natural death cases, the responding officer is responsible for the following:
  - (a) Notifying a supervisor.
  - (b) Notifying the medical examiner.
  - (c) Attempting to determine the physical condition of the deceased prior to death and if the deceased was under the care of a doctor.
  - (d) Completing an incident report.
  - (e) Photographing the scene.

The body or human remains shall not be disturbed or moved from the position or place of death without permission of the coroner, medical examiner or their deputies (RCW 68.50.050).

### **358.5 DEATH NOTIFICATION**

The Clark County Medical Examiner's office will generally be responsible for notifying next of kin of deceased persons. At the request of the medical examiner's office, during exigent circumstances, or in the furtherance of an investigation VPD personnel may notify next of kin of a person's death. When VPD is responsible, notification should be made in person to the next of kin. If the next of kin lives in another jurisdiction, a law enforcement official from that jurisdiction may be requested to make the personal notification.

### **358.6 DEATH INVESTIGATION REPORTING**

All incidents involving a death where VPD responds to the scene shall be documented in a police report and on the Death Investigation Report Form. All photographs shall be entered into the

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evidence system. Access to viewing photos shall be restricted to those personnel having an investigatory need.

[See attachment: 358 Death Investigation Report.pdf](#)

## Attachments

## **358 Death Investigation Report.pdf**

