

	LANE COUNTY SHERIFF'S OFFICE POLICY	Number: G.O. 8.03
		Issue Date: March 21, 2005
		Revision Date: November 2, 2005; May 24, 2013; April 25, 2019
CHAPTER: Investigations		Related Policy: G.O. 8.04 (Deputy Medical Examiner Duties)
SUBJECT: Death Investigation		Related Laws: ORS 146.085, 146.090, 146.100, 146.103, 181.580

POLICY: In service to the people of Lane County, the Police Services Division of the Lane County Sheriff's Office exists to provide emergency response, policing, and mandated government functions to our jurisdiction commensurate with the level of resource provided.

RULE: None

PROCEDURE:

I. Deaths Requiring Investigation

A. This Sheriff's Office will investigate and prepare a report on all deaths that are:

1. Apparently homicidal. *
2. Suspicious in nature or under unusual circumstances (i.e., erotic deaths). *
2. Apparently suicidal.
3. Resulting from the unlawful use of controlled substances or the use or abuse of chemicals or toxic agents.
4. Occurring while incarcerated in any Jail, Correction Facility, or in police custody. *
5. Apparently accidental or following an injury.
6. Where the deceased was not under the care of a physician during the period immediately prior to death.
7. In which a human body apparently has been disposed of in an offensive manner. *
8. Resulting from an Industrial Accident or an Aircraft Crash. NTSB and OSHA notifications may need to be made.

* Notify the Criminal Investigation Section (C.I.S.) in these cases.

II. Responsibility for Notification

- A. The Medical-Legal Death Investigator shall be immediately notified of all deaths requiring investigation. In cases of homicide, suspected homicide or other criminal activity, the Lane County District Attorney's Office (DA) shall also be immediately notified. The CIS supervisor will make DA and ME notifications in homicide or suspected homicide cases.
- B. In a death requiring an investigation, no person shall move a human body or bodies suspected of being human, or remove any of the effects of the deceased or instruments or weapons related to the death, without the permission of a Medical Examiner, Medical-Legal Death Investigator, or the District Attorney unless failure to do will cause the loss of evidence and should only be done in extraordinary circumstances.
- C. All members of this Sheriff's Office shall cooperate with the Medical Examiner or the Medical-Legal Death Investigator by providing materials necessary to conduct the Death Investigation.

III. Deaths that Do Not Require an Investigation

- A. This Sheriff's Office will not normally investigate or prepare a report on deaths under the following circumstances:
 - 1. Where a physician attended the deceased during the period immediately prior to death.
 - 2. Where the deceased was receiving hospice care through a medical institution as prescribed by a physician.
- B. Investigation of these types of deaths requires the notification and approval of the on duty shift supervisor.

IV. Initial Response to the Scene/Prioritization of Efforts/Investigation

- A. The on duty shift supervisor shall be advised of the Death Investigation. The shift supervisor will respond to the scene, if at all possible.
- B. The initial responding Deputies shall promptly, yet cautiously, approach and enter death scenes, remaining observant of any persons, vehicles, events, potential evidence, and environmental conditions.

1. Treat the location as a crime scene until assessed and determined to be otherwise.
2. It is important for the initial responding Deputies to be observant when approaching, entering and exiting a death scene. Deputies should wear gloves and protective shoe covers to protect them and prevent contamination of the scene.
3. Evaluate the scene promptly to determine if a response from C.I.S. personnel will be required. If C.I.S. will be responding, Patrol Deputies shall:
 - a. Secure the scene and exclude all nonessential personnel from the scene.
 - b. Point out potential physical evidence to medical personnel, instruct them to minimize contact with such evidence (e.g., ensure that medical personnel preserve all clothing and personal effects without cutting through bullet holes, knife tears, knots), and document movement of persons or items by medical personnel. Do not allow medical personnel to clean up the scene.
 - c. Identify victims, suspects, and witnesses at the scene and secure and separate them.
 - d. Identify, establish, protect, and secure a crime scene boundary. Boundaries shall be established beyond the initial scope of the crime scene with the understanding that the boundaries can be reduced in size, if necessary, but cannot be as easily expanded.
 - e. Identify a scene custodian to initiate and maintain a crime scene log (Refer to General Order 8.05 [Major Crime Scene Log]).
 - f. As soon as possible, scene photographs should be taken.
 - g. Gather pertinent information such as the identity of the victim, brief statements from witnesses, etc.
 - h. When C.I.S. arrives, provide a detailed crime scene briefing and assist in controlling the scene until released by a supervisor or case Detective.
 - i. In the case of homicide or suspected homicide, it will be the responsibility of the C.I.S. supervisor or the detective assigned to the case to notify the Medical Examiner or the Medical-Legal Death Investigator and the on-call Homicide Deputy District Attorney. This should occur as soon as sufficient information regarding the scene and circumstances has been obtained.
 - j. The C.I.S. supervisor or the Detective assigned to the case will evaluate the need for crime lab personnel. If it is determined they are needed, the C.I.S. supervisor or the Detective assigned to the case will cause them to be called and coordinate the assignment of the personnel.

Note - Persons should not smoke, chew tobacco, use the telephone or bathroom, eat or drink, move any items including weapons (unless necessary for the safety of persons at the scene), adjust the thermostat, open windows or doors, touch anything unnecessarily, reposition moved items, litter, or spit within the established boundaries of the scene. Persons should maintain the scene as found and document any items moved.

4. If C.I.S. will not be responding, the investigating Patrol Deputies shall:
 - a. Utilize the Death Investigation Report Form as a guide and checklist to obtain all the required information to complete the form (Refer to Reporting System Manual, Section 13.).
 - b. As soon as the investigating Deputy knows the pertinent information, the Medical Examiner or the Medical-Legal Death Investigator shall be contacted and advised as to the circumstances present. The investigating Deputy may request a response from the Medical Examiner or the Medical-Legal Death Investigator if they believe it is appropriate.
 - c. Photograph the scene and the body. Take overall scene photographs as well as close up photographs of items of evidence, involved weapons and the body, with specific attention toward wounds or markings on the body.
 - (1) Two sets of close up photographs should be taken.
 - (2) One as the scene was originally found and;
 - (3) A second with a measuring device placed or held near the objects of focus.
 - (4) Overall scene photographs should include photographs of the approach to the scene, as well as the area surrounding the scene. In the case of a residence, overall photographs should be taken of each room in the house as well as the exterior of the house when possible.
 - d. After the Medical Examiner or the Medical-Legal Death Investigator authorizes removal of the body, but prior to removal, examine the body without unreasonably disturbing the clothing. The body should be examined for wounds, suspicious markings or any evidence of foul play or conditions unexplained (call car attendants will assist with this).
 - e. After the body has been moved, take photographs of the location from where the body was removed and photograph the side of the body the deceased was resting on.
 - f. Seize any items that may prove evidentiary in nature or may prove useful in establishing the cause or manner of death (e.g., notes, prescriptions, weapons, etc.).

- g. If the deceased's next of kin are not present at the death scene, every reasonable effort will be made to notify the next of kin in a timely manner. Members of this Sheriff's Office will not make notification via telephone unless extreme circumstances are present.

V. Reporting/Documentation

- A. All deaths investigated by this Sheriff's Office will be reported and documented using the Sheriff's Office Death Investigation Report Form (refer to Reporting System Manual, Section 13).
- B. In the case of non-criminal Death Investigations, the reports will be submitted to the on duty shift supervisor for review and approval upon completion. The report will then be forwarded to the records section.
- C. In the case of homicide, or at the direction of the C.I.S. supervisor, the report will be submitted to the C.I.S. supervisor for review and approval upon completion.
- D. Original Homicide Investigation Reports and all copies and related investigative materials will be held in C.I.S. while the case remains active. Once the case is no longer active, the complete original case file will be submitted per the CIS supervisor's instructions.
- E. If C.I.S. personnel respond to the scene, the C.I.S. supervisor or the detective assigned to the case will coordinate reports to be completed with Patrol Deputies.
- F. A copy of all Death Investigation Reports will be routed to the C.I.S. supervisor, Medical Examiner and District Attorney.
- G. Information related to any suspected criminal homicide this agency is investigating will be provided to the Oregon State Police via the HITS Unit reporting format. This will be the responsibility of the detective assigned to the case.