

EMERGENCY SUPPORT FUNCTION #8-4**MORTUARY SERVICES APPENDIX**

COORDINATING AGENCY: **District Attorney/Medical Examiner's
Office**

I. INTRODUCTION***A. Purpose***

The purpose of this Appendix is to outline a system by which victims of mass fatality incidents may be identified, cause and manner of death determinations made, families notified, and disposition of remains completed.

B. Scope

This Appendix has been developed as a guideline for responding to incidents that result in a significant number of deaths. For purposes of implementation of this plan, it is assumed that more than ten fatalities in a single incident will severely tax available resources of the Clackamas County Medical Examiner and may require implementation of this procedure. A declaration of an emergency, activation of the County Emergency Operations Center and partial or full implementation of the County Emergency Operations Plan may be required.

II. ASSUMPTIONS

- A.*** Under ORS 146, the County Medical Examiner (ME) is responsible for investigating the cause and manner of any death unattended by a physician.
- B.*** During a mass fatality incident, the County may have insufficient personnel, equipment, and storage capacity to handle significant numbers of deceased victims. Assistance from other public and private agencies may be required to respond to an incident to assist in tagging, removing, and identifying victims and determining

final disposition of remains. Additional investigative resources may also be required to supplement those available within the County.

- C. Mass fatality incidents may be the result of criminal acts or transportation or industrial accidents. Such incidents will require further investigation to determine the cause of the incident and/or the perpetrator. This investigation is conducted by local, state, or federal law enforcement or safety officials and is not the responsibility of the Medical Examiner.

III. ORGANIZATION

A. County

ORS 146 establishes the Medical Examiner system within the state of Oregon and mandates designation and assignment of that function at the County level. Within Clackamas County, the Medical Examiner function is supervised by the District Attorney, an elected official within the County. Clackamas County staffs the Medical Examiner's Office with a Deputy ME available 24 hours per day through use of two full time staff and two part-time contract investigators available for call back. For purposes of this plan, the title Medical Examiner (ME) is used to designate Deputy MEs and ME Investigators, as well as contracted employees.

B. Incorporated Cities

In an incident involving unattended death, City emergency services providers are required to notify the County ME and secure the scene of death. Cities have no responsibility in identifying victims or determining cause or manner of death, but may have resources available to assist the County ME in these tasks. City police or fire agencies may be responsible for investigation of criminal acts or fire cause.

C. Support Agencies

The Oregon Funeral Directors' Association, in conjunction with its national organization, may provide resources to assist during local mass fatality incidents. Acquisition of these resources does not require a declaration of an emergency.

The American Red Cross is tasked with providing support to families of victims in aviation disasters and may assist in that function during other emergencies including those involving mass fatalities.

D. State Government

The State Medical Examiner's Office, a division of the Department of State Police, serves as a resource to Clackamas County in determining cause of death, identifying victims, and issuing

death certificates. In addition, the State ME may respond to the incident site at the request of the County to assist in on-scene operations. Other state agencies may be involved in the investigation of suspicious deaths (i.e. those involving criminal acts, fire, industrial accidents, etc.)

E. Federal Government

The Federal government may provide assistance to state and local governments in a mass fatality incident under Emergency Support Function #8 (Health & Medical Services) to the Federal Response Plan. Under this plan, National Disaster Mortuary Teams have been established that may be dispatched to the scene of an incident to assist state and local governments in the identification of victims, determination of cause of death, and disposition of remains. Other federal agencies may be involved in the investigation of suspicious deaths and will take the lead in determining the cause of aviation and other transportation disasters.

In addition, under the Aviation Disaster family Assistance Act of 1996, the National Transportation Safety Board, in addition to other responsibilities, is charged with designating an NTSB Family Support Services Director who will:

1. Perform as a point-of-contact between the federal government and the families of passengers; and
2. Serve as liaison between the air carrier and families of passengers.

The Federal Bureau of Investigation is the lead investigative agency in those incidents involving suspected terrorist activities. In addition, they provide law enforcement and investigative support to the NTSB in aviation disasters.

This Act also specifically tasks the American Red Cross as a federal resource to coordinate the emotional care and support of families of passengers and surviving passengers. They have teams available who will:

1. Provide mental health and counseling services in coordination with the air carrier.
2. Provide a private environment for families to grieve.
3. Meet families traveling to the incident site and communicate with those who cannot travel.
4. Provide information on the roles of agencies, organizations, and air carriers involved with the accident.
5. Arrange for a suitable memorial ceremony.

IV. CONCEPT OF OPERATIONS

Mass fatality incidents require that a number of activities, both on-scene and off-scene be considered. For purposes of this plan, these activities are divided functionally into **On-scene Operations, Morgue Operations and Family Service Center (FSC) Operations.**

A. On-scene Operations

When a mass fatality incident occurs in the County, emergency responders will take appropriate actions to save lives, assure prompt notification of the County ME, and secure the scene. First responders will treat the mass fatality site as a crime scene and, once viable patients are removed, will prohibit entry until the ME's arrival. Care should be taken to limit disturbance of the scene to those activities critical to the removal of living victims for transport to medical facilities.

On notification of a mass fatality incident, the ME will notify the State ME and the District Attorney's Office immediately. On arrival at the incident site, the ME will contact the on-scene Incident Commander, conduct an initial size up, and establish an investigative command post from which ME activities will be coordinated.

The first priority at an emergency scene is the safe removal and treatment of the survivors. The ME should provide assistance and advice, as needed, to assure the incident scene is minimally disturbed during this process. Once the survivors have been removed, the ME may assume control of the scene until the decedents are removed.

Depending on the nature of the incident, the initial Incident Commander will probably be a Law Enforcement or Fire official. The ME may assume Command of the incident once all life saving activities have been accomplished, survivors removed, and hazards on-site stabilized. More likely, the ME will request that Command be maintained by the initial IC or transferred to a more appropriate agency or jurisdiction and the ME's functions on scene will be accomplished through designation as a Branch Director or Group Supervisor.

On-scene operations will include activities to secure and document the scene; tag and flag, remove and transport victims, property and evidence; and investigate the cause of the incident.

In emergencies where multiple deaths occur in a number of locations within the County, the resources available to the ME may be inadequate to respond to all death scenes. In such instances, law enforcement personnel will be dispatched to each death scene. They will secure the scene, conduct a detailed investigation as to the circumstances surrounding the death (as the situation allows), document all information, and arrange for removal of the victim to a location designated by the ME.

B. Morgue Operations

Morgue operations will be initiated on the recommendation of the County ME in coordination with the State ME. Establishing a temporary morgue will normally be a last course of action. Use of temporary storage facilities, with victim processing conducted at the State Morgue, will be done whenever possible. When the number of victims far exceeds local capabilities, a temporary morgue may be established at which identification, processing and

disposition activities can be accomplished. Morgue operations will include activities to receive, examine, and identify decedents and associated property or evidence; locate and assure notification next of kin; and arrange for final disposition of decedents and their personal property.

C. Family Services

A Mass Fatality Incident can draw hordes of family and friends of possible victims. An estimate is that for every victim, ten interested parties will need to be provided support. These people are very important to the identification process and successful handling of the incident. Advance planning is required to assure that a Family Service Center is quickly established to meet their needs. This facility should provide the necessary space and logistics to provide for interviewing, counseling, and provision of basic human services.

The Family Service Center should be established away from the scene, but close enough to be convenient and make the people feel they are involved. Care should be taken to assure that on-scene personnel know where to direct the family and friends arriving at the scene. Family Service operations will include activities to receive, register and interview family and friends; provide a secure location for families away from the scrutiny of the media in which they can receive information about their loved ones; and coordinate a system for meeting the physical and emotional needs of victims' families.

V. EXECUTION OF OPERATIONS

A. First Response

First responders to the scene of a mass fatality incident will usually be Law Enforcement or Fire officials responding under the County's Mass Casualty Incident protocol. They will establish a command post, stabilize the hazard area, and triage, treat and transport injured victims. They will assure that the ME is notified if fatalities are apparent.

First responders must realize that a mass fatality incident will be a long-term incident that presents risk to responders from the presence of biohazards. Immediate consideration must be given to limiting and documenting access to the incident site and establishing a decontamination area. In addition to establishing staging areas to keep the scene from being overrun, a Rehab Area must be established.

B. Scene Security

A death scene should always be treated as a crime scene. The scene should be maintained and minimally disturbed during the removal of survivors. No property, body parts, or other items will be removed unless they can be positively identified and/or are critical to the full recovery of a survivor in which case they may be transported to the hospital with the victim. Once all survivors

have been removed, the incident scene will be secured and access restricted to facilitate further investigation and removal of decedents.

A two-zone perimeter should be established with the inner perimeter designated to include all areas in which victims, evidence or property may be found. Entry into the inner perimeter must be strictly controlled and documented and should be limited to those personnel authorized by the ME. Entry into the inner perimeter should be by specific identification only and should be documented on an individual level. An outer perimeter should be immediately established at the maximum distance from the incident that can be secured. The outer perimeter can always be moved in, but it's very difficult to move it back if it is established too close. No one other than assigned emergency workers should be allowed within the outer perimeter.

C. Biohazard Protection

Because of the possibility of contact with body fluids, all mass fatality scenes will be treated as biohazard sites. The Incident Commander must take all precautions for infectious disease control. This must include the requirement for proper personal protection equipment for all personnel working within the inner perimeter and establishment of a system for decontamination of workers, equipment and supplies.

D. Extrication/Evacuation of Deceased Victims

The removal of decedents must be handled in accordance with investigative needs for identification of the victim, determination of cause and manner of death, notification of next of kin, and further investigation into the cause of the incident. Care should be taken not to remove decedents until photographed, diagrammed, and video taped in place to assist in the identification process. If a major disruption of the scene is necessary for recovery, associated investigative agencies should be present at the time that the scene is altered significantly.

See Tag & Flag Procedure maintained as Tab 1 to Attachment A (On-Scene Operations Protocol to the ME's Mass Fatality Incident Plan)

E. Staging & Transport

Under implementation of the Incident Command System, a designated staging area should be established and maintained to control the resources necessary to respond to a mass casualty incident. The ME may also establish a Transport Area to which bodies are removed to be loaded into vehicles once all on-scene investigative actions pertinent to that victim are completed. An evidence collection point should also be set up in the transport area to assure that all property and evidence are properly tagged and transported for safekeeping.

See Transport Procedure maintained as Tab 2 to Attachment A (On-Scene Operations Protocol to the ME's Mass Fatality Incident Plan)

F. Incident Morgue

There is limited body storage space in Clackamas County's Morgue and in that of the State Medical Examiner. During a mass fatality incident, it may be necessary to identify a centrally located Incident Morgue. An Incident Morgue is the location where victims are identified, cause of death is determined, property is identified and secured, and disposition decisions are made. Local funeral homes and other private funeral services may be able to provide temporary holding facilities until the victims can be transferred to the Incident Morgue. Refrigerated trucks may be required to serve as cold storage facilities at the Incident Morgue location.

See Incident Morgue Protocol maintained as Attachment B to the ME's Mass Fatality Incident Plan

G. Identification

Positive identification of victims is essential to the investigative process. Actions to be taken to assure the greatest success in determining the true identity of victims are outlined in the *ME's Mass Fatality Incident Plan*.

H. Personal Effects/Property

Personal effects or property should be removed from the victim at the morgue once photographs are taken and an assessment has been made of the usefulness of the property in identifying the victim. Jewelry is often important in the identification process and, once removed, should be examined for initials or other identification marks. As they are removed, personnel effects should be treated as evidence and should be inventoried, processed and disposed of in accordance with ORS 146.

I. Disposition of Remains

Identified remains will be released to family members or disposed of following normal release procedures. In cases where a victim cannot be identified, the ME will hold the body for later identification or bury the body after all means of identification have been tried and photographs have been taken.

Mass burial will be considered only when the number of remains are unmanageable, overwhelm available resources, cannot be adequately stored, and become a public health concern. Considerations for locating a mass burial site include:

1. Existing cemeteries;
2. Federal, state or locally owned property or right of ways;
3. Appropriate privately owned properties, such as a large open field.

4. Sites with adequate access and egress to allow for future exhumation, identification, and return to next of kin.

J. Families

Word of a possible mass fatality incident will spread quickly. Families and friends of possible victims will arrive at the scene, as will others who want to help. A designated location for families to gather should be established as a Family Service Center in an area away from the scene. Perimeter security must be maintained and guards briefed on the location to which they should direct family.

A team of knowledgeable personnel should be assigned to identify family members and friends and conduct detailed interviews to assist in the identification of victims. The National Transportation Safety Board (NTSB), in conjunction with the American Red Cross, has the responsibility for providing support to families following aviation disasters. County resources will be responsible for initially dealing with any families or friends that arrive on-scene, as well as assisting in on-going operation of the Family Service Center.

See additional information see the Family Service Center Protocol maintained as Attachment C to the ME's Mass Fatality Incident Plan

K. Media

There is a great deal of public interest in mass fatalities; therefore, the media will be on scene as soon as they find out about the incident. The on-scene Incident Commander will be responsible for assigning an Information Officer to meet the needs of the media. A press area will be established away from the scene to prohibit the media from photographing or filming any victims. Once victims are removed, and on the approval of the Incident Commander and ME, the media may be escorted into the incident scene for photographs. The media will not be allowed into the designated family area or Family Service Center, however, media requests for interviews will be forwarded to the involved families for their private consideration. The media will not be allowed in or around the Incident Morgue, if one is established.

Names of the deceased will not be released to the media without approval of the Incident Commander and the Medical Examiner.

L. Critical Incident Stress Debriefing

Stress is a natural reaction to a mass fatality incident. Case studies of critical incidents involving numerous injuries or fatalities have revealed that a significant number of rescue personnel experienced some form of stress related symptoms following the incident. Critical incident stress debriefing involves a group process designed to mitigate the impact of a critical incident on personnel and to accelerate their normal recovery process.

Critical incident stress debriefing sessions will be conducted for all County personnel involved in the response to a mass fatalities incident. This will include personnel working On-scene, at an Incident Morgue, at the Family Service Center, or other locations such as dispatch centers. These debriefings may be initiated on an ad hoc basis through normal providers such as Chaplains; however, at such time that formalization of the process is needed, County Mental Health will have responsibility for organizing such programs.

M. Branch Support

Mass Fatality incidents will require full implementation of the Incident Command System. While this plan focuses on the Operations Section, it will be critical that Section Chiefs are assigned to Planning, Logistics and Finance. Because a Mass Fatality Incident may require operations at a number of separate locations, assignment of personnel may be required to coordinate activities at each location. This may be best solved by the establishment of a Branch Support Group for On-Scene Operations, Morgue Operations, and Family Service Center Operations. Common functions to be centralized may include:

1. Staging
2. Rehabilitation
3. Decontamination
4. Records
5. Ordering

VI. DIRECTION AND CONTROL

A. Coordination

The County Emergency Operations Center may be activated to serve as a coordinating facility in the case of a mass fatality incident. A request to activate the EOC may come from the Incident Commander or the ME.

B. Executive Actions

If the incident is such that a declaration of emergency is required, the Board of Commissioners may declare an emergency to permit emergency actions not otherwise authorized or to request additional resources from higher levels of government.

C. Lines of Succession of Authority

1. Succession of authority for the ME shall be as appointed by the District Attorney with concurrence of the State ME.
2. Succession of authority for the District Attorney shall be as elected by the citizens of Clackamas County or as appointed by the Governor, if required.

VII. TASK ASSIGNMENTS**A. General**

1. Preservation of life and safety of emergency workers and the public will take precedence over all activities addressed in this Appendix. All personnel will assure that the mass fatality incident site is cleared of all hazards prior to initiating body extrication and identification activities.
2. Personnel handling bodies or body parts will wear disposable latex gloves and other personal protective equipment to avoid contact with blood or body fluids that may be present. Any exposure must be documented and personnel decontaminated in accordance with OSHA requirements.

B. Specific**1. Medical Examiner**

- a. Make appropriate notifications and report to incident scene to provide advice and assistance to IC while survivors are rescued.
- b. Analyze resource needs and request assistance, as required.
- c. Establish and supervise Tag & Flag Teams.
- d. Identify, set up, and supervise Transport Area.
- e. Identify, set up and coordinate activities at Incident Morgue to include victim tracking, fingerprints, physical examination, withdrawal of blood and body fluids, forensic examination, victim identification, preparation for final disposition, release of remains.
- f. Determine identification and cause of death, complete reports, and work with State ME for issuance of death certificate.
- g. Arrange for release or disposition of personal effects.

2. District Attorney

- a. Supervise and oversee the function of the County ME.
- b. Assume or assign the responsibilities of the ME in the event the County ME is unavailable.
- c. Assist in cause of death investigation, as required.
- d. In cases where criminal activity is suspected, investigate and prosecute as appropriate.

3. Sheriff's Department

- a. Provide perimeter control and scene security.
- b. Provide personnel to assist in documenting death scene to include photographing, videotaping, and diagramming of incident site.
- c. Assist in fingerprinting of decedents.
- d. Assist in reconstruction and investigation of death scene.
- e. Coordinate PIO and law enforcement functions on scene.

- f. Assist in collection, processing, storage and release of evidence and personal property.
- g. Support Family Service Center set up and operation through assignment of Chaplain Services.

4. County Emergency Management

- a. Assist in operation of EOC, if activated.
- b. Provide logistics coordination, as required.
- c. Recommend declaration of emergency and request additional resources from state and/or federal agencies.

5. Department of Human Services

- a. Coordinate the delivery of mental health services to survivors, families of victims, and emergency service workers, as required.
- b. Monitor incident site with attention to public health.
- c. Coordinate with Red Cross to meet the emergency human service needs of survivors and families of the victims.
- d. Facilitate Critical Incident Stress Debriefings.

6. Fire Departments & EMS Agencies

- a. Respond to scene of mass casualty incident and assume Command if viable patients are present.
- b. Stabilize incident scene.
- c. Rescue, triage, treat and transport survivors.
- d. Determine Mass Fatality Incident and make appropriate notifications.
- e. Assist in protection of incident site.
- f. Provide personnel and resources for search and recovery, as requested.

7. Public Works, Utilities

- a. Provide facilities, equipment, personnel, and other resources for scene stabilization, security, heavy rescue operations, decontamination, and or/traffic control.

8. Volunteers

- a. Established volunteer groups associated with police and fire agencies, including chaplains, may provide assistance in any number of tasks outlined in this Appendix. Volunteers will work under the supervision and auspices of their parent organization. Young volunteers will not be used.

9. Oregon Funeral Directors Association

- a. Aid in body recovery.
- b. Assist in setting up and operating Incident Morgue.
- c. Provide transportation resources and storage facilities.
- d. Provide assistance to victim's families.
- e. Assist in disposition of decedents.

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- f. Access the cache of disaster mortuary supplies and equipment maintained by National Funeral Directors' Association.

10. Other Agencies

Depending on the cause of the incident, a number of other County departments, State and/or Federal and public or private agencies may become involved in a mass fatality incident. These may include the National Transportation Safety Board, Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, & Firearms, Federal Bureau of Investigation, Occupational Health & Safety Agency, American Red Cross. etc. At the time that local investigative needs are met, the incident scene may be turned over to another agency for further investigation.

VIII. ADMINISTRATION

A. Coordination

The Mortuary Services Appendix will be administered by the County Medical Examiner's Office with support from the District Attorney's Office. Periodic review of this Appendix and associated protocols will be initiated by the ME on a bi-annual basis.

B. Investigative Reporting

Although a Mass Fatality Incident represents multiple casualties, the normal system for reporting the death and meeting investigative report requirements should be followed with one exception. In an effort to permit the usual flow of telephone traffic on the State ME's RAIL system, Investigators at the scene of a MFI should draft and dictate RAIL reports on a hand held cassette recorder using a separate report for each victim. The cassette tapes should be forwarded to the State ME as soon as possible after the incident. The tapes can then be transcribed and connected to reports prepared by the State ME staff to allow for the issuance of a death certificate. All tapes must be labeled to reflect their content and the author's name, title, and agency. The tape will include all information required on the RAIL report (ME Form 2, maintained as part of the ME's Mass Fatality Protocol).