
Death Investigation

316.1 PURPOSE AND SCOPE

The purpose of this policy is to provide guidelines for situations where public safety officers initially respond to and investigate the circumstances of a deceased person.

Some causes of death may not be readily apparent and some cases differ substantially from what they appear to be initially. The thoroughness of death investigations and use of appropriate resources and evidence gathering techniques is critical.

316.2 POLICY

It is the policy of the Kalamazoo Department of Public Safety to respond to, document and investigate incidents where a person is deceased. Investigations involving the death of a person, including those from natural causes, accidents, workplace incidents, suicide and homicide, shall be initiated, conducted and properly documented.

316.3 INVESTIGATION CONSIDERATIONS

Emergency medical services shall be called in all suspected death cases unless death is obvious (e.g., decapitated, decomposed).

A supervisor shall be notified as soon as possible to assist and provide appropriate personnel and resources. The on-scene supervisor should determine whether follow-up investigation is required and will advise the Shift Commander if it is necessary to notify the Criminal Investigations Division Commander. The Shift Commander will make notification to command staff in accordance with the Major Incident Notification Policy.

316.3.1 REPORTING

All incidents involving a death shall be documented.

316.3.2 MEDICAL EXAMINER REQUEST

Public Safety Officers are not authorized to pronounce death. The Medical Examiner shall be called for all deaths that occur outside a medical facility. State law requires that the Medical Examiner be notified when the death/decedent was (MCL 52.203; MCL 52.205a):

- (a) Sudden, unexpected, accidental, violent or the result of any suspicious circumstance.
- (b) Not seen by medical personnel in the preceding 48 hours, unless the decedent's attending physician is able to accurately determine the cause of death.
- (c) The result of an abortion, either medically performed or self-induced.
- (d) Of a child two years of age or younger when the death is sudden, unknown or the child is found dead.

Where two or more individuals involved in a single incident had similar physical attributes, including being of approximately the same age, sex, height, weight, hair color, eye color or race the Medical Examiner must also be notified.

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If one or more of the involved individuals survived the incident, the Medical Examiner must also be notified of which treating facility the surviving individual was taken to for treatment and notification of the similarity must also be made to the treating facility (MCL 52.203)

316.3.3 SEARCHING DEAD BODIES

- (a) The Medical Examiner, his/her assistant and authorized investigators are generally the only persons permitted to move, handle or search a dead body.
- (b) A public safety officer may make a reasonable search of an individual who it is reasonable to believe is dead, or near death, for the purpose of identification or for information identifying the individual as an anatomical donor. If a donor document is located, the Medical Examiner or his/her assistant shall be promptly notified.
- (c) The Medical Examiner, with the permission of the Department, may take property, objects or articles found on the deceased or in the immediate vicinity of the deceased that may be necessary for conducting an investigation to determine the identity of the deceased or the cause or manner of death.
- (d) Should exigent circumstances indicate to a public safety officer that any other search of a known dead body is warranted prior to the arrival of the Medical Examiner or his/her assistant; the investigating public safety officer should first obtain verbal consent from the Medical Examiner or his/her assistant when practicable.
- (e) 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 public safety officer pending the arrival of the Medical Examiner or his/her assistant. The name and address of this person shall be included in the narrative of the death report.
- (f) Whenever personal effects are removed from the body of the deceased by the Medical Examiner or his/her assistant, a receipt shall be obtained. This receipt shall be attached to the death report.

316.3.4 SUSPECTED HOMICIDE

If the initially assigned public safety officer suspects that the death involves a homicide or other suspicious circumstances, the public safety officer shall take steps to protect the scene. The Criminal Investigations Division shall be notified to determine the possible need for an investigator to respond to the scene.

If the on-scene supervisor, through consultation with the Shift Commander or Criminal Investigations Division supervisor, is unable to determine the manner of death, the investigation shall proceed as though it is a homicide.

The investigator assigned to investigate a homicide or death that occurred under suspicious circumstances may, with the approval of his/her supervisor, request the Medical Examiner to conduct physical examinations and tests, and to provide a report.

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316.3.5 EMPLOYMENT-RELATED DEATHS OR INJURIES

Any member of this department 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 regional Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) office is notified of all pertinent information. The Chief of Public Safety or designee shall make all pertinent notifications.

316.4 UNIDENTIFIED DEAD BODY

If the identity of a dead body cannot be established, the handling public safety officer will request from the Medical Examiner a unique identifying number for the body. The number shall be included in any report.

After a preliminary investigation, a member of the Department shall immediately enter the required data into the National Crime Information Center (NCIC) and the National Missing and Unidentified Persons System (NamUs) (MCL 28.258; MCL 333.2844a).

If the body is that of a child, the required information shall also be entered into the Michigan's Missing Child Information Clearinghouse.

If a missing person has not been found within 30 days of a report, this department shall request that the missing person's family or next of kin provide written consent to obtain the missing person's dental records pursuant to the Missing Persons Policy and enter these records into NCIC.

If a person who has been reported missing is subsequently found, this department shall cancel the entries into NCIC.

316.5 DEATH NOTIFICATION

When reasonably practicable, and if not handled by the Medical Examiner's Office, notification to the next-of-kin of the deceased person shall be made, in person, by the command officer with the most knowledge of the incident, if available, or another command officer who has been briefed in detail about the circumstances of the death. Death notifications should always be made in pairs. Consideration should be given to having the departmental chaplain go with the command officer to make the notification. If the use of the departmental chaplain is warranted, the command officer shall make the request to the Shift Commander who will notify the chaplain and request his/her assistance. If the next-of-kin lives in another jurisdiction, a law enforcement official from that jurisdiction shall be requested to make the personal notification.

If a deceased person has been identified as a missing person with KDPS, this department 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. For other jurisdictions, KDPS shall notify the police agency having jurisdiction to make notifications.