

Death Investigation

326.1 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 CRS § 30-10-606.

326.2 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). A supervisor shall be notified in all death investigations.

326.2.1 CORONER REQUEST

The Coroner shall be called as soon as practical after the scene is safe and secure in all deaths. Investigating officers shall investigate and work in cooperation with the Coroner involving any of the following circumstances (CRS § 30-10-606(1)):

- (a) The death is, or may be, unnatural, as a result of external influences, injury or violence.
 1. It is due to the influence of, or is the result of, intoxication by alcohol, drugs or poison.
 2. It is the result of an accident, including an accident at the workplace.
 3. It involves the unexpected or unexplained death of an infant or child.
- (b) There is no physician in attendance, or when the physician is at the scene but is unable to certify the cause of death.
- (c) The death occurs within 24 hours of admission to a hospital.
- (d) The death is the result of a criminal abortion, including any situation where such abortion may have been self-induced.
- (e) It is the result of a disease that may be hazardous or contagious, or may constitute a threat to the health of the public.
- (f) The death results from the action of a peace officer, or while the person was in the custody of law enforcement officials or incarcerated in a public institution.
- (g) The death was sudden, and happened to a person who was in apparent good health.
- (h) The body is unidentifiable, decomposed, charred or skeletonized.
- (i) The death occurs under circumstances that the Coroner determines may warrant further inquiry in order to determine the cause and manner of death, or that requires further law enforcement investigation.

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In cases involving any of the above mentioned circumstances, the body of the deceased shall not be removed from the place of death prior to the arrival of the Coroner. This restriction shall not apply if the Coroner grants permission for removal or removal is necessary to identify the victim, protect property from damage, preserve evidence, or protect life, health or safety.

When the Coroner arrives at the scene, law enforcement personnel will make all reasonable accommodations to allow him/her to collect time-sensitive information.

If a suicide note is found at the place of death, either the investigating officers or the Coroner shall take custody of the note based on agreement.

326.2.2 SEARCHING DEAD BODIES

The Coroner or an assistant and authorized investigators are generally the only persons permitted to move, handle or search a body. Should exigent circumstances exist, that warrant any other search of a known dead body prior to the arrival of the Coroner, the investigating officer should advise the Coroner when practical.

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 officer pending the arrival of the Coroner. 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 Coroner, a receipt shall be obtained. This receipt shall be attached to the death report.

326.2.3 DEATH NOTIFICATION

The Coroner will make notification to the next-of-kin of the deceased person. 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 the relatives live outside this county, the Coroner will make the notification. The Coroner needs to know if notification has otherwise been made through other means.

If a deceased person has been identified as a missing person, the Coroner shall attempt to locate family members and inform them of the death and location of the deceased missing person's remains.

326.2.4 DEATH INVESTIGATION REPORTING

All incidents involving a death will be documented.

326.2.5 SUSPECTED HOMICIDE

If the initially assigned officer suspects that the death involves a homicide or other suspicious circumstances, the officer will take steps to protect the scene and the on-call investigator will be notified to respond to the scene and determine the need for additional resources.

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

Colorado State University Police Department

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

326.2.6 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 will notify the Colorado State University Environmental Health Services (EHS).