

BERKELEY POLICE DEPARTMENT

DATE ISSUED: June 16, 1989

GENERAL ORDER O-1

SUBJECT: DEAD BODY REPORTS, INVESTIGATION OF

PURPOSE

- 1 - The purpose of this General Order is to outline procedures for the investigation of incidents where a death has occurred.

POLICY

- 2 - Officers are expected to carefully evaluate the circumstances surrounding reports of dead body incidents and follow the guidelines described in this General Order.

PROCEDURES

- 3 - A dead body is the physical remains of a human being pronounced dead by a licensed physician or bearing unmistakable evidence of death.
 - (a) Any doubt concerning death shall be resolved by removing the body to the emergency hospital for medical determination.
- 4 - A licensed physician qualified to sign the death certificate is one who has been treating the deceased and has seen him/her as a patient within 20 days prior to death.

DEATH FROM NATURAL CAUSES

- 5 - If death results from natural causes and a licensed physician will sign the death certificate, **contact the Coroner. Advise the Coroner's Office of the circumstances and follow their directions.**

SUSPICIOUS DEATH

- 6 - If death results from suicide, a non-criminal cause or natural cause when no licensed physician is qualified to sign the death certificate, the assigned officer shall:
 - (a) Investigate the circumstances surrounding the death.
 - (b) Consult with a Patrol Sergeant at the scene.
 - (c) Notify the Coroner.
 - (d) Witness the search of the body by the Deputy Coroner and obtain a receipt for the body and personal effects.

DEATH FROM CRIMINAL ACTS

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- 7 - If death results from any criminal act, the assigned officer shall:
- (a) Immediately notify the on-call Homicide Inspector or Detective; if neither can be reached, the Detective Division Captain or the senior Inspector available.
 - (b) Pending arrival of the Inspector/Detective, investigate the circumstances surrounding the death, including but not limited to photographs and diagrams, obtaining statements, securing the scene, gathering evidence and making arrests.
- 8 - Upon arrival the Inspector/Detective shall assume charge of the investigation and shall:
- (a) Notify the Coroner.
 - (b) Witness the search of the body by the Deputy Coroner and obtain a receipt for the body and personal effects.

GENERAL INVESTIGATION

- 9 - A dead body shall not be moved until the investigation has progressed to the extent which will allow such removal without loss of physical or photographic evidence.
- 10 - Government Code Section 27491.3 states, "In any death into which the Coroner is to inquire...it shall be unlawful for any person to search for or remove any papers, moneys, valuable property, or weapons...from the person of the deceased or from the premises, prior to arrival of the Coroner or without his permission..."
- (a) However, subsection (d) of that law states, "A peace officer may search the person or property...whose death is due to a traffic accident, for a drivers license or identification card to determine if an anatomical donor card is attached...shall immediately furnish such information to the coroner..."
- 11 - The assigned Inspector/Detective shall prepare the crime report, Offense Form, in all cases described in paragraph 5.
- 12 - The assigned Inspector/Detective shall copy the case for Alameda County Coroner, in all cases described in paragraphs 4 and 5.
- 13 - The Homicide Inspector/Detective shall review all dead body reports to determine that the investigation is adequate and complete.
- 14 - All receipts shall be attached to the master case.

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DOCUMENTARY EVIDENCE

- 15 -** In all cases described in paragraphs 4 and 5 all notes, letters or other documents apparently written by the deceased shall be given to the Deputy Coroner with the body and a receipt shall be obtained. The Coroner will provide this Department with facsimile copies of such documents which include those:
- (a) Tending to indicate an intention by the writer to take his/her life.
 - (b) Containing directions for the disposition of his/her property or the disposal of his/her remains.
- 16 -** Any notes, letters or other documents discovered subsequent to the removal of the body shall be given to the assigned Inspector/Detective, who will forward them to the Coroner and obtain a receipt.

NOTIFICATION

- 17 -** The Coroner is responsible for notifying relatives or friends of the deceased, but we shall assist as requested.

References: General Orders D-2, **E-9**, and R-31
Government Code Section 27491