

OFFICE OF OPERATIONS

ORDER NO. 2

January 28, 1981

TO: All Personnel, Office of Operations
FROM: Director, Office of Operations
SUBJECT: GUIDELINES FOR THE INVESTIGATION AND REPORTING OF
NATURAL DEATHS BY FIELD SERVICES DIVISION PERSONNEL
EFFECTIVE: Immediately

INFORMATION

This order assigns the responsibility for the preliminary investigation and completion of reports of obvious natural deaths to uniformed officers. This procedure will provide a savings in uniformed and detective resources while maintaining the quality of the preliminary investigation.

DEFINITIONSI. Obvious Natural Deaths

For purposes of this order, obvious natural deaths are all deaths except deaths from homicide, suicide, narcotic overdose, infant death, unknown cause, possibility of foul play, accident or any other death which may require follow-up investigation.

II. Attending Physician (Death Report not required)

Attending physicians who may sign a death certificate are: Doctors of Medicine (M.D.), Doctors of Osteopathy (D.O.) and Doctors of Chiropractics (D.C.).

III. Coroner's Case (Death Report required)

- A. The death is an obvious homicide; or,
- B. Under such circumstances as to afford reasonable grounds to suspect that the death was caused by the criminal act of another; or,
- C. The deceased has not been attended by a physician within 20 days preceding death; or,
- D. The attending physician is unable or unwilling to sign the death certificate; or,
- E. Suicide is suspected; or,
- F. Following an injury or an accident.

PROCEDURE

I. Uniformed Officers

- A. Uniformed officers assigned to a dead body call shall request the presence of a field supervisor when available.
- B. The officers shall be guided by the advice of the field supervisor when determining if the death is an obvious natural death.
- C. The uniformed officers investigating a dead body call shall notify the concerned geographic investigators, without delay, of the circumstances surrounding the death. The notification shall be made to Detective Headquarters Division if the concerned geographic investigators are not available. The officers shall be guided by the instructions of the concerned detective.
- D. If the death is determined to be an obvious natural death and is to be handled as a coroner's case, the concerned officer shall contact the Coroner's Office (telephone: 226-8011), and provide them with the following information:

- * Full name (if available) of deceased, sex, descent, and age.
- * Location, date and time of death.
- * Name of person/unit who pronounced the person dead.
- * Whether any extra coroner personnel or special equipment, i.e., plastic coverings, etc., will be required.
- * Any next of kin notified.
- * Name of reporting officer and a call-back telephone number.

The officers shall then secure the premises and stand by until the arrival of the coroner's investigator.

1. If the uniformed officer(s) and the coroner's investigator agree the death is an obvious natural death, the officers shall complete a Death Report, Form 3.11, and relinquish responsibility to the coroner's investigator.
 2. If the coroner's investigator indicates the death is other than an obvious natural death, the officer shall immediately notify the concerned detectives and remain at the scene until the detectives arrive and assume responsibility for the investigation.
- E. An obvious natural death which is not a coroner's case shall be the responsibility of the assigned uniformed officers pending disposition by the attending physician or a responsible relative of the decedent.

- F. In non-coroner natural death cases where a relative cannot be located to assume responsibility for the dead body, officers shall contact the Los Angeles County U.S.C. Medical Center Mortuary (telephone: 226-7161), and provide them with the following information:

- * Name of officer and agency.
- * Briefly explain circumstances regarding unavailable relative.
- * Name of deceased, location and call-back telephone number.
- * The name and telephone number of any attending physician.

Officers will remain at the scene until the County Mortuary Unit arrives for the body. The Mortuary Unit has the responsibility for securing and sealing the premises. No Death Report, Form 3.11, is required in this procedure.

- G. When the natural death case involves an infant death and no doctor has been in attendance for 20 days preceding death, officers shall contact Abused Child Unit, Juvenile Division, for advice. When the Abused Child Unit is unavailable, geographic detectives shall be called. If geographic detectives are unavailable, Detective Headquarters Division shall be contacted for advice.

II. Uniformed Supervisor

- A. The uniformed supervisor at the scene of a dead body shall ensure that an investigation is conducted to determine if death was due to obvious natural causes.
- B. If the death is an obvious natural death, the supervisor shall direct the officers to assume responsibility for the investigation unless directed otherwise by the concerned detective.
- C. The uniformed supervisor shall ensure that proper notification of next of kin is made as delineated in Manual Section 4/238.43 when the investigation is completed by uniformed personnel.
- D. In all cases where doubt exists that the death was natural, the supervisor shall direct the officers to immediately notify and discuss the case with the concerned detective. If the latter assumes responsibility for the investigation, the officers shall remain at the scene until a detective arrives.

III. Detective

- A. When a detective receives a notification that uniformed officers are investigating a death, the detective shall determine the circumstances of the case and advise the officers.
1. If the death is an obvious natural death and is not a coroner's case, the uniformed officers shall be assigned responsibility for the investigation of the death.
 2. If the death is an obvious natural death and is a coroner's case, the uniformed officers shall be given responsibility for the investigation of the death. They shall secure the scene pending the arrival of the coroner's investigator.
 3. In any case where doubt exists that the death is a natural death, the detective shall advise the officers to secure the scene pending arrival of a detective. The detective may assume responsibility for the investigation and the completion of a Death Report, Form 3.11.0, if it is determined the circumstances do not indicate a natural death.

NOTE: The detective may request the assistance of uniformed officers at the scene until his examination is complete.

- B. The detective shall be responsible for the notification to the next of kin of the deceased person in cases where he has assumed investigative responsibility.

IV. Reports

A. Death Report, Form 3.11.0

This order does not change the use of the Death Report, Form 3.11.0. The following is required when the report is to be completed by uniformed officers:

- * The name and serial number of the advising uniformed supervisor; and,
- * The detective notified; and,
- * The identity of the coroner's representative.

B. Officer's Notebook, Form 15.03.0

Where no Death Report is required, ample and appropriate notes shall be documented by the assigned uniformed officer in his Officer's Notebook, Form 15.03.0. Such notes shall include:

- * The date, time and location of call; and,
- * The deceased's name and physical description; and,
- * A brief statement regarding the circumstances of death; and,
- * The identity of the supervisor at the scene; and,
- * The identity of the physician willing to sign the death certificate; and,
- * The identity of the physician/relative present who assumed custody of the deceased.

In addition, the name of the deceased shall be noted in the Uniformed Officer's Daily Field Activities Report, Form 15.52.

- V. This order does not alter the investigation of deaths which are not obvious natural deaths.


W. S. HARVEY, Assistant Chief
Director
Office of Operations

DISTRIBUTION "0"