

OFFICE OF OPERATIONS

NOTICE

September 13, 2021

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TO: All Office of Operations Personnel

FROM: Director, Office of Operations

SUBJECT: UPDATED PROTOCOLS INVOLVING MULTIPLE DEATH OVERDOSES;
MANDATORY RESPONSE OF THE CORRESPONDING HOMICIDE TEAM

The purpose of this Notice is to inform patrol and investigative personnel of updated protocols when responding to a suspected overdose death investigation involving multiple deaths. Furthermore, this Notice establishes notification requirements when multiple overdose deaths have occurred. For the purposes of this Notice, “multiple” is defined as two or more.

Background

Drug overdose deaths continue to significantly rise across the nation. The loss of life is substantial in the Los Angeles region, predominately affecting a younger demographic. While it is often assumed that such ingestions are accidental, the presumption of such can result in an unsubstantiated conclusion, particularly made by first responders with varying degrees of investigative and narcotic expertise.

Moreover, the troubling cases of multiple deaths at the same location has been a cause for significant concern. When two or more individuals have died of what may appear to be a drug or alcohol overdose, the need to identify witnesses, possible suppliers, and the development of information must occur. This will further the ability of the Department to trace supply chains when dealing with evidence of illegal substances.

Procedures

Department personnel responding to or investigating an apparent incident involving multiple overdose deaths shall be guided by the following directives:

- Department Manual Section 4/201, *Notifications to Investigating Officers*;
- Department Manual Section 4/238, *Dead Bodies*;
- Department Manual Section 4/258, *Narcotics and Dangerous Drugs*;
- Department Manual Section 4/500, *Booking, Custody and Disposition of Property*;
- Department Manual Section 4/709, *Deaths*;
- Field Notebook Divider Form 18.37.01, *Death Investigations*;
- Field Notebook Divider Form 18.39.01, *Booking Property*; and,
- Chief of Detectives Notice, *Overdose Death Investigations*, dated June 24, 2021.

Effective immediately, patrol and investigative personnel shall be guided by the following, delineated protocol when responding to an incident involving multiple overdose deaths or multiple individuals experiencing severe overdose symptoms.

Officer Responsibilities

Officers are reminded that these cases should be treated as criminal death investigations. The initial goal is to identify who supplied the narcotics to the decedent(s) or individual(s) suffering from overdose symptoms. Officers assigned to respond to the initial report of an apparent overdose involving multiple deaths shall follow the established aforementioned investigative and reporting procedures in prior publications and request the following personnel to the scene:

- Supervisor;
- Night Watch Detective (when deployed);
- Coroner's Office; and,
- Corresponding Bureau Homicide Investigator.

The following personnel shall be notified, and will determine if their response is necessary on a case-by-case basis:

- Emergency Services Division, Hazardous Materials Unit;
- Corresponding Narcotics Enforcement Detail;
- Gang and Narcotics Division (GND) via the Department Operations Center (DOC); and,
- Watch Commander (notification only).

Note: In all cases, Department personnel are reminded to be aware of conditions at such scenes which may impact their own health and safety, such as the presence of fentanyl.

Supervisor Responsibilities

Upon notification of multiple overdose deaths, the advising supervisor shall, at minimum:

- Verify proper safety protocols are being followed;
- Verify proper notifications have occurred;
- Ensure the watch commander has been notified; and,
- Ensure preservation of Body Worn Video, or other discoverable materials.

Homicide Investigator Responsibility

Upon notification of an incident of multiple overdose deaths, the responding investigator shall:

- Respond to the scene, when notified;
- Determine if a criminal investigation is warranted;
- Identify, interview, and document statements of witnesses;
- Ensure evidence is properly identified, documented, seized, and booked;
- Determine the need for warrants, orders, preservation letters, etc.;

- Coordinate evidence holds with the Coroner's Office or other involved entities; and,
- Notify GND High Intensity Drug Trafficking Area (HIDTA) and the Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA) task force of any high-profile investigations.

Watch Commander Responsibility

Upon notification of an incident of multiple overdose deaths, the watch commander shall:

- Ensure proper notifications are made (i.e., Area or Patrol Commanding Officer, Bureau Homicide, etc.); and,
- Document an entry into the Watch Commander's Log.

Reverence for Human Life

The loss of life we have been witnessing may have been, in some cases, self-induced, but the possibility remains that in many situations, this may not have been the case. Opportunities may be missed to provide due regard for human life when a diligent preliminary investigation does not occur. Regardless, identifying and bringing those to justice who are profiting off the poor judgment, addiction, or vulnerability of others is our responsibility.

While the decedent or injured party may have ingested the substance(s) that caused their death or injury, they do not always do so knowingly, as in the case of counterfeit pills or over-prescribed medication. The tragedy is often driven by the burden of addiction created under a myriad of circumstances. However, multiple overdose deaths should be viewed with a lens where criminal aspects are almost always connected to ongoing distribution of substances by culprits who could be responsible for many deaths or injuries. Department personnel should focus on the potential to target distributors, prevent deaths, and reduce the occurrence of other crimes often connected to these events. Other points to consider include:

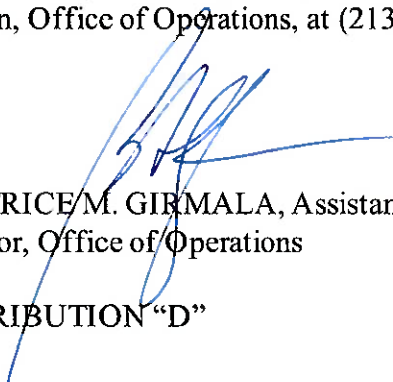
- Bureau Commanding Officers have the discretion to assign Homicide detectives for response to single overdoses when warranted by unusual or suspicious circumstances;
- Prosecution is possible for great bodily injury/hospitalization cases as well;
- Seek Federal prosecution for furnishing narcotics that result in fatal overdoses;
- Prosecution/enhancements apply to other dangerous drugs (cocaine, heroin, methamphetamine, etc.);
- Counterfeit pills may appear pharmaceutically produced; always consider fentanyl handling safety precautions;
- Cases involving medical professionals require special DEA handling, coordinated by GND;
- Illicit trafficking is often social media/App-based (Offer Up, Snapchat, Craigslist, etc.);
- Couriers may pose as ride services (Uber, Lyft, etc.); and,
- Linking a decedent with a supplier via security video or phone global positioning systems is crucial.

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If you have questions regarding this matter, please contact the Evaluation and Administration Section, Office of Operations, at (213) 486-6050.



BEATRICE M. GIRMALA, Assistant Chief
Director, Office of Operations

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