

## OFFICE OF THE CHIEF OF POLICE

ADMINISTRATIVE ORDER NO. 4

January 7, 2025

**SUBJECT: DEATH INVESTIGATION FIELD NOTEBOOK DIVIDER,  
FORM 18.37.01 – REVISED**

**BACKGROUND:** On September 27, 2024, Governor Gavin Newsom signed California Senate Bill (SB) 989 – Domestic Violence: Deaths into law. Senate Bill 989 adds new responsibilities and provides new tools for investigating deaths of individuals, without evidence of foul play, that have a history of domestic violence victimization. The Bill aims to prevent situations where homicide victims are denied justice due to tampered crime scenes.

**PURPOSE:** The purpose of this Order is to inform Department personnel about SB 989, revise the Death Investigation Field Notebook Divider, Form 18.37.01, and ensure Department compliance with the Bill.

Senate Bill 989 introduces new responsibilities when investigators or officers respond to death investigations, and encounter certain circumstances. When responding to non-homicide death investigations, the primary unit at the scene shall make a reasonable effort to determine whether the deceased was previously a victim of domestic violence. For decedents with a known history of domestic violence, the primary unit, shall investigate to the best of their ability whether three or more of the following factors are present:

- The decedent died prematurely or in an untimely manner;
- The scene of the death gives the appearance of death due to suicide or accident;
- The decedent or their partner wanted to end the relationship;
- There is a history of the decedent being victimized by domestic violence that includes abusive behavior used to gain or maintain control over the decedent;
- The decedent is found dead in their home or place of residence;
- The decedent is found by a current or previous partner;
- There is a history of being victimized by domestic violence that includes strangulation or suffocation;
- The last to see the decedent alive was:
  1. The current or previous partner of the decedent; or,
  2. The child of the decedent.
- The partner had control of the scene before law enforcement arrived; and,
- The scene appears to have been tampered (i.e., the body of the decedent has been moved or the scene or other evidence is altered in some way).

If the officers' investigation reveals that the decedent was previously a victim of domestic violence, combined with three or more of the above criteria, the primary unit shall attempt to interview friends and family of the deceased. Officers shall attempt to gather relevant information

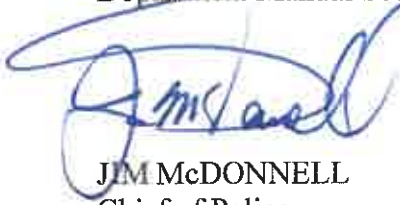
regarding the history of domestic violence and document any statements collected in the narrative of the Death Investigation Report, Form 03.11.00.

Detectives assigned to review Death Investigation Reports for individuals with a history of domestic violence and three or more of the above factors may request an autopsy in accordance with California Government Code Section 27521 to further investigate the cause of death and ensure that no foul play was involved.

**PROCEDURE:** The Death Investigation Field Notebook Divider, Form 18.37.01, has been revised. Attached is the revised form with the revisions indicated in italics.

**FORM AVAILABILITY:** A copy of the revised Death Investigation Field Notebook Divider, Form 18.37.01, is attached for immediate use and duplication. Additionally, the form is available on the Department's Local Area Network (LAN) in E-Forms. All other versions of this form are now obsolete and shall be disposed of in Area/divisional recycling bins.

**AUDIT RESPONSIBILITY:** The Commanding Officer, Audit Division, shall review this directive and determine whether an audit or inspection shall be conducted in accordance with Department Manual Section 0/080.30.



JIM McDONNELL  
Chief of Police

Attachment

DISTRIBUTION "D"

# DEATH INVESTIGATION FIELD NOTEBOOK DIVIDER

## I. AT-SCENE INVESTIGATION REQUIREMENTS

For non-homicide death investigations, the primary unit shall attempt to determine if the decedent was previously a victim domestic violence. The results of the query shall be documented in the narrative of the Death Report.

**NOTE:** For homicide investigations, the investigator shall have this responsibility.

When the deceased has an identifiable history of being a domestic violence victim, **and** three or more of the following factors are present:

- The decedent died prematurely or in an untimely manner;
- The scene of the death gives the appearance of death due to suicide or accident;
- The decedent or their partner wanted to end the relationship;
- There is a history of the decedent being victimized by domestic violence that includes abusive behavior used to gain or maintain control over the decedent;
- The decedent is found dead in their home or place of residence;
- The decedent is found by a current or previous partner;
- There is a history of being victimized by domestic violence that includes strangulation or suffocation;
- The last to see the decedent alive was:
  1. The current or previous partner of the decedent.
  2. The child of the decedent.
- The partner had control of the scene before law enforcement arrived; and,
- The scene appears to have been tampered (i.e., the body of the decedent has been moved or the scene or other evidence is altered in some way).

The primary unit at scene shall attempt to contact friends and family to gather further information related to the history of domestic violence. Detailed statements collected in subsequent interviews shall be included in the narrative of the Death Investigation Report. If no friends or family are available for interview, the primary unit shall document their efforts in the narrative of the Death Investigation Report.

## II. USE OF FORM

The Death Investigation Report shall be used to report all dead bodies except when the death is natural, AND a responsible relative is present to take charge of the deceased, AND a qualified doctor is willing to sign the death certificate.

**NOTE:** A qualified doctor may sign a death certificate when they have attended the deceased within twenty days preceding death and has been in attendance sufficient time to form a professional opinion that the death resulted from natural causes. Doctors who may sign a death certificate are: Doctors of Medicine (M.D.); Doctors of Osteopathy (D.O.); and Doctors of Chiropractic (D.C.).

## III. REPORTS REQUIRED

Each death requires a separate report.

## IV. CASE NUMBERS REQUIRED

Each report requires a separate Case number, EXCEPT that when more than one death occurs as the result of a

single incident or series of directly connected incidents, all reports shall bear the same Case number.

- A. When death results from a traffic accident, the death report shall bear the same Case number as the traffic reports.
- B. When death results from an illness or injury previously reported on another type of report, the death report shall bear the same DR or Case number as the previous report.

## V. NOTIFICATIONS REQUIRED

- A. Medical Examiner's Office (formerly known as the Coroner's Office)
  - When the deceased died while under arrest, while being temporarily detained or while under the care or control of an officer of the Department.
  - When a physician has not attended the deceased within twenty days preceding death.
  - When the deceased committed suicide.
  - When the attending physician is unable to state the cause of death.
  - When the deceased died as the result of an accident.
  - When there is any suspicion that the death resulted from the use of narcotics.
  - Under such circumstances as to afford a reasonable ground to suspect that death was caused by the criminal act of another.

### Medical Examiner's Office Contact

1104 N. Mission Rd., Los Angeles, CA 90033

To report a death call (323) 343-0711

24-hour Investigation Hotline (323) 343-0714

### The notification shall include:

1. Date, time, and location of death.
2. Full name, sex, descent, and age of deceased.
3. Probable or possible cause of death.
4. Attending doctor's name, business address, and telephone number.
5. Whether the doctor will sign the death certificate.
6. Whether relatives are present to take charge of the deceased.

- B. The Area Watch Commander in EVERY case. (seek advice from Division detectives if necessary)
- C. TID Units when photographs, casts, latent print investigations, etc., are required. (Obtain DR or Case number prior to notification.)
- D. Department Operations Center Regional Crime Center (DOC) when the deceased person is a member of the armed forces, including civilian members.

**The notification (and death report) shall, when practicable, include:**

- Division reporting.
- Reporting officer's name and serial number.
- Location where reports made.
- Name, rank or rate, and serial number of deceased.
- Complete mailing address of the deceased, or:
  - Branch of service.
  - Name and location of deceased's organization.
- Commanding officer's name.

(Continued on Page 2)

- Whether wearing civilian clothes or uniform.
  - Whether deceased has a pass, furlough papers, or leave papers.
  - Location, date, and time of death.
  - Where the body was taken.
- E. Missing Persons shall be notified re: John Doe dead bodies, (213) 996 - 1800.

### SPECIFIC ENTRIES

**NAME OF DECEASED:** When the identity cannot be established at the time the report is made, obtain a "John Doe or Jane Doe" number from the Medical Examiner's investigator at the scene, e.g., Doe, Jane, No. 12.

**TYPE:** All reported deaths MUST be classified as either natural, suicide, accidental, traffic, homicide, or undetermined. Check the appropriate box and justify in the narrative.

**REPORTING DISTRICT:** (Of original illness or injury) When NOT within City, enter "Outside."

**IDENTIFYING MARKS AND CHARACTERISTICS:** E.g., scar or tattoo on left forearm.

**DATE/TIME REPORTED TO P.D.:** Date and time formal report is taken by interviewing officers.

**CLOTHING AND JEWELRY WORN:** Describe each article.

**DATE/TIME DECEASED DISCOVERED:** Date and time person was found dead, NOT necessarily time of confirmation by doctor.

**DATE/TIME DEATH OCCURRED:** Give the EXACT date and time death occurred. When UNKNOWN, give the entire period during which the death might have occurred; e.g., 10-5-2024. 1700/0830.

**RELATIVES NOTIFIED BY:** Name, and if possible, title and serial number, of specific person who notified relatives.

**REMOVED TO:** Address of mortuary. When removed to Medical Examiner's Office, enter "Medical Examiner."

**REMOVED BY:** Name of mortuary or identity of the ambulance unit. When removed to the Medical Examiner's Office, enter "Medical Examiner."

**DECEASED'S RESIDENCE ADDRESS:** If unknown, enter "Unknown."

**PROBABLE CAUSE OF DEATH:** Direct cause of death; e.g., gunshot wound, electrocution, multiple injuries, etc.

**OIS:** Box checked if Officer-Involved Shooting.

**IN CUSTODY DEATH:** Box checked if death occurred in-custody.

**INCIDENT NUMBER:** Communications generated number.

**TID "C#":** C-number is used to track TID crime scene photos – assigned by TID Photographers.

**DECEASED'S BUSINESS ADDRESS:** If unknown, enter "Unknown."

**NEAREST RELATIVE.** When UNKNOWN, enter "Unknown."

**DOCTOR IN ATTENDANCE:** Doctor who attended the deceased during the illness or injury that caused, or contributed to, the death. When no doctor was in attendance, enter "None."

### NARRATIVE:

- (1) Enter a DETAILED NARRATIVE ACCOUNT of the events

leading to death, beginning with the first known incident, and whenever possible, recording subsequent incidents in proper sequence. Describe exactly what witnesses saw, heard, etc. Refer to witnesses by identifying numbers; e.g., W-1, W-3, etc. Describe peculiar physical symptoms (gasping for air, vomiting, etc.). Describe treatment administered.

- (2) Describe body position (supine, head in northerly direction, feet spread, etc.). Was rigor mortis present or not? Was post mortem lividity present and, if so, was it consistent with the body position?
- (3) Describe evidence of foul play or trauma (injuries, clothing disarray, etc.).
- (4) If suicide note is involved, quote pertinent statements. Attempt to obtain sample of deceased's handwriting to book as evidence. (Actual note goes with the Medical Examiner's Investigator.)
- (5) **Poisons and Drugs.** All poisons, drugs, and their containers suspected of being connected with a suicide shall accompany the body to the Medical Examiner's Office.
- (6) **Firearms.** All firearms suspected of being suicide weapons shall be booked as evidence to provide the opportunity to test such firearms.
- (7) **Medications.** If the death is classified as undetermined, or if it is a suicide or homicide in which medications may be involved, list medications found by type and amount left. If prescription, also list date, dosage, doctor, prescription number and pharmacy.
- (8) When details appear in another report, so state; give such other report as reference. In traffic deaths, state how deceased was involved (ped, driver, passenger, etc.) and the type accident (auto vs. ped, auto vs. auto, auto ran off roadway, etc.).
- (9) Summarize any OTHER DETAILS not known to be definitely connected with the death, but which MIGHT be; e.g., suspicions of witnesses or officers, neighborhood gossip, suspicious circumstances.
- (10) Explain DISPOSITION OF DECEASED'S PROPERTY. Officers, for their own protection, should itemize and describe articles of obvious value that may become misplaced or misappropriated. Do not itemize if a receipt is obtained from the Medical Examiner's investigator, but attach receipt to this report.
- (11) Describe physical evidence, location found and by whom, and give disposition.
- (12) State the reason why the type of death was selected.

### RELATED PROCEDURES

**4/238.83 HOMICIDE.** The first officer to arrive at the scene of a homicide shall immediately isolate the vicinity where the crime was committed, or the body was found. It shall be *their* responsibility to see that no one be permitted to approach the scene until investigating officers arrive and take charge of the investigation. Officers assigned to any duty at the scene shall remain until the investigating officers relieve them.

**4/238.10 DETERMINING DEATH.** Except when a person is obviously dead, it shall be the responsibility of the emergency ambulance crew to determine if death has occurred.

**4/238.20 AMBULANCE REQUESTED AT SCENE OF APPARENT DEATH.** An ambulance shall be requested at the scene of an apparent death when:

- There is no doctor in attendance.
- There is a possibility, even if remote, that the person may be alive.

If death has occurred, a Rescue Report, Form F-660, shall be obtained from the ambulance crew and attached to the Death Report.

**4/238.23 DEAD BODIES EXPOSED TO PUBLIC VIEW.**

When a dead body, which does not come within the jurisdiction of the Medical Examiner (4/238.46), is exposed to public view, an ambulance shall be requested. The body shall be released as directed by the investigating officers.

When a dead body, which comes within the jurisdiction of the Medical Examiner (4/238.46), is exposed to public view, the investigating officers shall notify the Medical Examiner as soon as practicable. The investigating officers shall be guided by the instructions of the Medical Examiner's investigator dispatched to the scene.

When a supervisor at the scene of a death determines that a dead body exposed to public view would probably create an adverse incident, *they* shall notify the Medical Examiner's Office, who will arrange to have the body removed immediately by ambulance. The instructions of the Medical Examiner's investigator shall be given to the ambulance crew.

*NOTE: In all cases where the decedent is in public view, the Crime Scene Canopy shall be deployed. (See Office of Operations Order No. 1, Deployment of the Crime Scene Canopy – Established; and, Crime Scene Canopy Tracking Log – Activated, dated February 23, 2016.)*

**4/238.26 TRANSPORTATION OF DEAD BODIES.** A dead body, which comes under the jurisdiction of the Medical Examiner's Office (4/238.46), shall not be removed to a funeral establishment except on instructions of a Medical Examiner's investigator.

**4/238.30 SEARCHING DEAD BODIES.** The officer in charge at the scene of a dead body shall prevent any person, other than a Medical Examiner's investigator, from searching the body. Whenever possible, a witness, preferably a relative of the deceased or a member of the household, shall be requested to remain at the scene with the officer. The name and address of this person, and a statement verifying *their* presence, shall be included in the Death Report. Whenever the Medical Examiner's investigator takes personal effects and possessions of the deceased, a receipt shall be obtained (4/238.48). This receipt shall be attached to the Death Report.

**4/238.40 NOTIFICATION TO INVESTIGATING OFFICERS OF DEATH.** Officers assigned a death investigation shall telephone, without delay, the concerned geographic Watch Commander (WC), and the Bureau Homicide Unit to notify them of the circumstances. The WC and Bureau Homicide Unit shall be informed if there is any indication that the death might be the result of a suicide or homicide. Department Operations Center (DOC) shall be notified of the circumstances if the concerned Bureau Homicide Unit is not available. Officers shall abide by instructions of the Bureau investigating officers.

**Exceptions.** Officers do not have to notify the Bureau Homicide Unit when:

- There are no signs of foul play;
- The decedent was under the care of a physician who is willing to sign the Death Certificate;
- There are no questionable circumstances surrounding the death; and,
- The Geographic Night Watch Detective and/or WC concur with the officers' assessment.

**NOTE:** Officers assigned to a death investigation shall take into account the totality of circumstances at the scene when determining the questionable nature of a death (e.g., the age of the decedent, presence/absence of physical evidence, PR statements, etc.).

**4/238.43 NOTIFICATION TO RELATIVES OF DECEASED PERSON.**

Whenever practicable, notification to the next of kin of the deceased person shall be made by the investigating officers in person. If the next of kin lives in another Area, a police unit of that Area shall be requested to make the personal notification. If the relatives live outside the City, the Medical Examiner's Office shall be requested to make the notification.

Generally, an in-person notification is the preferred method of informing the next of kin of a death. However, circumstances may indicate a need for an alternative method of making such a notification (e.g., telephonically). Officers should use their best judgment in making a determination as to the method of notification to the next of kin of a deceased person.

**4/238.48 PROPERTY TO MEDICAL EXAMINER'S OFFICE.**

An officer at the scene of a death requiring a death report shall obtain an itemized receipt from the Medical Examiner's investigator for all property, including the contents of wallets and purses, removed from the scene by such investigator. The receipt shall be stapled *or uploaded* to the original of the Death Report.

**Suicide Notes.** Original suicide notes shall accompany the body to Medical Examiner's Office. Portions of suicide notes pertaining to the suicidal act shall be quoted in the Death Report when practicable. When a copy of the original suicide note is desired by investigating officers, a photocopy may be obtained from the Medical Examiner's Office. When the original note is needed for crime laboratory study, it shall be obtained from the Medical Examiner's Office by a member of *Technical* Investigation Division.

**Poisons and Drugs.** All poisons, drugs, and their containers suspected of being connected with a suicide shall accompany the body to the Medical Examiner's Office.

**Firearms.** All firearms suspected of being suicide weapons shall be booked as evidence to provide the opportunity to test such firearms. The investigating officer shall be responsible for determining the final disposition of the firearm (Manual Section 4/560.40).