

Death Scene Investigation

Procedural Guide



Second Edition

with Dick Warrington's - *Death Scene Checklist*

Michael S. Maloney, MFS



CRC Press
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Foreword

Every death scene tells a story. The scene must be properly and thoroughly examined, evidence collected, and everything carefully documented. The investigator(s) has (have) only one opportunity to properly process the death scene. Realizing that every investigation will involve a number of professionals from different disciplines (coroner, medical examiner, crime scene investigator, criminal investigator, etc.)—with varying levels of education and experience in death investigation—it is vitally important that all parties involved conduct the most complete and thorough scene examination and documentation as possible.

Michael Maloney, the author of the second edition of *Death Scene Investigation: Procedural Guide*, has used his vast experience to write a wholly comprehensive procedural guide to assist those involved in the profession of death investigation, whatever their role. This well-organized publication may be used as a field guide for all parties involved in an investigation. This guide will provide easy reference as to the proper procedures to follow in investigating all the various modes of death that will be encountered. With the addition of new chapters, it will also be a valuable study guide for all those planning to take the American Board of Medicolegal Death Investigators (ABMDI) Diplomat and Fellow certification examination for Medicolegal Death Investigator.

Coroner Lynn Reed, F-ABMDI

*Moultrie County, Illinois and Director of Training, Illinois Coroners
and Medical Examiners Association*



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Foreword, 1st Edition

Death Scene Investigation: Procedural Guide is the answer to a long recognized dilemma—how to have every death investigated by an experienced death investigator. Using his considerable experience in death investigations and forensics, Mr. Maloney has created a procedural guide that gives everyone, including the medical examiner’s investigator, coroner, crime scene investigator, or detective, an on-scene guide for processing the death scene. This field guide will assist in understanding the story the scene tells as well as developing the investigative direction. The Death Investigation Decision Tree is an innovative, easy-to-use tool that ensures the scene investigation is focused, directed, and complete while prompting the investigator to see the “red flags” that are present but sometimes overlooked. This should be the first tool used on the scene after familiarization with the scene and basic facts. Easy-to-follow chapters and complete bulleted procedures are presented in a manner that minimizes the need to flip back and forth through the guide. The spiral bound format is designed to fit in a cargo pocket for easy access and transport to the scene. Unlike textbooks, this guide stands out because it is specifically designed for use in the field. The medical examiner, coroner, and homicide detective should not overlook this guide; it is a handy reference for proper procedures to employ in a wide variety of death scenes.

Tom Bevel

President of Bevel, Gardner & Associates, Inc.



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Preface

This book is meant to be used at the scene as a practical field guide when responding to a death investigation. Some information in the various chapters of the guide may seem repetitious; this is meant to facilitate its field use by minimizing the need to flip back and forth for information while processing the scene. The guide is separated into the following sections for ease of use:

- *Section I*, Death Scene Investigations, includes procedures for preparing and responding to the scene. Chapter 1 provides for the initial response and evaluation required for all death scenes. The death scene investigation decision tree is provided as an easy-to-follow process to lead the investigator to a preliminary indication of manner of death. From there, the investigator goes to the specific chapter in Section I for accidental, natural, suicidal, or homicidal death to facilitate a thorough scene investigation.
- *Section II* covers the Medicolegal Death Investigation. This includes the roles of the medicolegal death investigator, coroner, and medical examiner. It covers the determination of identity, cause, and manner of death. The forensic autopsy as well as the investigator's role at the autopsy are discussed.
- *Section III* covers the Recovery of Human Remains from an open field, aquatic, expedient grave, sub-surface remains or the; exhumation of buried remains; as well as search techniques to locate clandestine graves.
- *Section IV* details Wound Dynamics and the evidence they may present at the scene and on the body.
- *Section V*, Special Death Scene Investigations, is used to supplement death investigations involving child or infant deaths, sexual deaths, or multiple victims.
- *Section VI*, Death Scene Management, Tasks, and Responsibilities, covers the responsibilities, duties, and necessary techniques to accomplish death scene management, documentation, evidence processing, and death scene procedures. This section serves as a ready reference for the death scene investigator assigned to photography, videography, sketching, and processing or as the scene observer.

- *Section VII*, Death Scene Evidence Processing, details the specific procedures to be followed when bloodstain patterns or a shooting scene are encountered, as well as in handling specific evidence types such as entomological, biological, trace, friction ridge, or impression evidence.
- *Section VIII*, Death Investigation Checklist and Worksheets, incorporates Dick Warrington's popular Death Scene Investigation Checklist with a supplemental series of customized checklists developed for this procedural guide. The checklists are also available in a digital form fill format through a download key offered with this text.

A note on additional content available: Dick Warrington's popular Death Scene Investigation Checklist is available in its entirety (over 30 pages of checklists to cover almost every conceivable scene!). With an additional 15 forms specific to documenting tasking suggested through this procedural guide, these forms have been made available for download to purchasers of this book. Purchasers of this book, and any agency individuals may work for, are free to use such forms in the course of their work and customize them for their purposes. You may go to the publisher's maintained Web site—and register to gain access to download the forms—here: www.crcpress.com/cw/maloney.

Acknowledgments

The foundation for the first edition of this procedural guide was established in 1996 while I was involved in co-authoring a government publication, *The Field Guide for Crime Scene Processing*, for the Naval Criminal Investigative Service (NCIS) with Special Agent Donald Housman. That guidebook covered not only basic crime scene investigation techniques but also chapters dealing with death investigations. My first edition, focusing on death investigations, was well received and used in a series of national and international death investigation seminars. The procedures laid out in the first edition were accepted as best practices by law enforcement and medical examiners offices both internationally and nationally. In the time since the first edition, there have been advances in the approach and processing of death scenes. Touch DNA and other advances in technology called for a second edition. In addition, this gave me the opportunity to incorporate suggestions, additional subjects, and techniques that had been suggested through training classes and seminars over the last several years. I would like to thank NCIS Special Agent (Retired) Donald Housman, NCIS Special Agent (Retired) William Herzig, NCIS Special Agent (Retired) Thomas Brady, Federal Law Enforcement Training Center (FLETC) Senior Instructor Ted McDonald, FLETC Senior Instructor Chris Stewart, FLETC Senior Instructor Michael Hulihan, Ms. Kim Duddy of the Washington State Patrol Laboratory, the membership of the Association for Crime Scene Reconstruction, the membership of the International Association of Bloodstain Pattern Analysts, and the countless students I have worked with that have contributed so greatly to the body of knowledge used in this procedural guide.

I would also like to thank Detective Lou Camelbeek, Tom Green County Sheriff's Office (Retired), for teaching me what it meant to be a law enforcement officer; Paul Susanbach of FLETC, who knows what he has done. I would also be remiss if I did not thank the special agents of the NCIS for the incredible professional relationship that I had as I worked among them on crime scenes throughout the world.

Last, but not least, I would like to thank my loving wife Maxine and my children Michael, Gabriel, and Tia, who put up with my frequent absences, no-notice deployments, and missed birthdays, anniversaries, basketball games, and soccer games during my career. I would also like to thank Michael, Gabe, and Tia, who, in whole or in body part, appear in various photographs in this book.



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Author



Michael Maloney is an independent forensic consultant, trainer, and author. He holds a master of forensic science degree from George Washington University with a fellowship in forensic medicine from the Office of the Armed Forces Institute of Pathology. He has 20 years' experience as a special agent with the Naval Criminal Investigative Service and senior instructor at the Federal Law Enforcement Training Center for Death Investigations and Sex Crimes.

Mr. Maloney has undergone extensive training and is considered a subject matter expert in a variety of forensic disciplines including death/crime scene reconstruction, death/crime scene processing, wound dynamics/evidence of injury, shooting reconstruction, and bloodstain pattern analysis. He is the former president of the Association for Crime Scene Reconstruction and has held membership with the American Academy of Forensic Science, International Association of Bloodstain Pattern Analysts, International Crime Scene Investigators Association, and the International Association for Identification.

Mr. Maloney has been responsible for providing forensic investigation, coordination, and reconstruction for incidents involving death investigations, serial crimes, and crimes of extreme violence. He processed and reconstructed the terrorist attack on the North Arabian Gulf Oil platforms during Operation Iraqi Freedom. He served with the International War Crimes Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia in Bosnia, where he led the forensic processing and reconstruction on two sites of mass execution. He also served as an onsite forensic consultant to the Weapons of Mass Destruction Task Force at the Olympic Games in Atlanta, Georgia, and the Summit of Eight Conference in Denver, Colorado. He processed and reconstructed the events surrounding the deaths of 24 Iraqi citizens in Haditha, Iraq. He was recognized for his innovative approach to this scene as the 2008 co-recipient of the August Vollmer Award presented by the International Association of Chiefs of Police. He has served as a trainer for the South Africa Police Service

Forensic Laboratories on shooting scene response and served as the senior forensic advisor for the Justice Sector Project for the Palestinian Civil Police.

Mr. Maloney is a sought-after public speaker offering dynamic presentations to law enforcement, medical examiner, coroner, and forensic nursing groups on a wide variety of forensic topics. He provides training seminars and classes throughout the law enforcement community both nationally and internationally on death investigations, crime scene investigations, crime scene reconstruction, and shooting incident scenes and reconstruction.

New to the Second Edition of Death Scene Investigation Procedural Guide contains

- Dick Warrington's popular Death Investigation Checklist has been added to the second edition! This checklist has been the standard for many departments for the last decade and is now available in this guide in an updated format. The checklist has been supplemented with a series of worksheets for use while processing the scene. Readers are also provided with access to download these forms and all other worksheets in easy digital form fill formats.
- A sleeker format that allows for rapid assessment of the scene and seamless transition to the investigation at large, including a foldout Death Scene Investigation Decision Tree from the back cover.
- An expanded section on the medicolegal death investigation specifically addresses the role of the coroner, medical examiner, and medicolegal death investigator.
- Sections on death notification and the proper method to accomplish this often daunting task is now included.
- Chapters on drug-related deaths, poisoning, and sexual activities resulting in death (noncriminal) have been added.
- The "Recovery of Human Remains" section now includes guidance on grave exhumation.
- The very important skill of death scene videography has been moved to its own chapter and expanded considerably with the help of law enforcement video expert Wadi Sawabini.
- Revised and edited chapters based on feedback from readers and seminar students over the last 5 years!
- Lastly, Dick Warrington's popular Death Scene Investigation Checklist is available in its entirety (over 30 pages of checklists to cover almost every conceivable scene!), with an additional 15 forms specific to documenting tasking suggested through this procedural guide. These forms, presented in this edition, have

been made available for download to purchasers of this book. Purchasers of this book, and any agency individuals may work for, are free to use such forms in the course of their work and customize them for their purposes. You may go to the publisher's maintained Web site—and register to gain access to download the forms—here: www.crcpress.com/cw/maloney.



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Death Scene Investigation

I



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Death Scene Response

1

This chapter details the notification and response for the death scene investigator (DSI). The DSI may be a law enforcement crime scene investigator, detective, medical examiner's investigator, or coroner's investigator. No matter the title, how DSIs respond to and handle the death scene is a reflection on their agency's professionalism. Though it is recognized that at routine death scenes or in smaller departments DSIs may also serve as the on-site manager/supervisor, the duties specific to managing the death scene have been explained in Chapter 32, "Death Scene Management." This chapter will focus solely on the procedural aspects of the death scene response.

Initial Notification

The first receipt of information of a death or possible death by a DSI formally begins the death scene investigation. Death scenes are documented through notes, photography, and sketching. Documentation begins with note taking—the Death Scene Investigation Checklist included as Section VIII provides a template for thorough death scene documentation. The checklist may be downloaded from the publisher's website at (www.crcpress.com/cw/maloney) as a digital fill-in form for tablets and PCs or may be printed as hard copy forms. Information initially documented will include the following:

- Method of notification.
- Person making notification.
- Time of notification.
- Description of death scene (outdoor, indoor, residential, commercial area, etc.).
- Who will have investigative jurisdiction, or lead, in a multiagency response?
- People present at death scene (law enforcement, medical, coroner, family, etc.).
- Reported crime (suspicious death, murder, sex crime, child abuse, burglary, etc.).

- Identification and security of scene (agency currently in charge).
- Body at scene (if not at scene, where is it?).
- Authority who pronounced victim dead.
- Safety hazards or unique considerations at scene (electrocution, poisonous gases, unstable terrain, civil insurrection, etc.).
- Information about suspects and witnesses still in area.
- Other agencies notified and responding.

Preparation

- Initial information will almost certainly be wrong or incomplete. Expect this when you arrive at the scene.
- Get mentally prepared. No matter how seasoned you may be, you may encounter a scene that you find disturbing.
- Get yourself ready for what you are about to do. The time to get focused and oriented is *not* at a scene with witnesses, bystanders, and perhaps suspects standing around.

Coordination en Route

It may be possible en route to determine the following or make the following notifications. If not, complete this list as soon as possible after your initial actions. Coordination efforts are more thoroughly detailed in Chapter 32.

- Who has jurisdiction and will be lead on the investigation?
- Will other jurisdictions be responding to assist? If so, what assets are they sending?
- Who is in charge of the scene now?
- Has the medical examiner's office or coroner been notified? Are they sending investigators or responding?
- Is the victim still at the scene? If not, where have they been transported to? Ensure a response to the body.
- Does the initial scope and description of the death scene indicate a need for external or interagency assistance?
 - Is there a need for auxiliary lighting?
 - Is there building or structural instability?
 - Is this an aquatic scene requiring boats or divers?
 - Did the death occur in a fatal fire?

Arrival at the Scene

Initial arrival at the scene may often be chaotic. The presence of first responders, law enforcement, fire or rescue, emergency medical services, and agencies from multiple jurisdictions will impact order at a scene. During the initial response, the primary concerns are as follows:

- Mitigate any immediate threat to victims, bystanders, or first responders.
 - Tactical threats
 - Scene hazards
 - Toxic environment
- Render aid to those injured to the ability of your training while summoning emergency care if needed.
- Get a briefing from whoever controls the scene.
- Identify witnesses.

NOTE: If emergency medical services are present on scene and treating the victim(s), immediately photograph the location and position of the injured. Take immediate steps to document and collect perishable items of evidence that may be disturbed through their lifesaving efforts.

Establish a Perimeter

- If the first responders have established a perimeter, quickly assess it to determine if it needs to be expanded.
- The perimeter should include all areas associated with the primary scene in which evidence is expected to be found.

Immediate On-Scene Coordination

Receive a brief from whoever controls the scene. Coordinate with the following agencies if represented:

- Law enforcement agencies
- Emergency medical services
- Fire department
- Security agencies

Identify everyone who has entered the scene. Determine if they have changed the conditions within the scene (lights, doors, etc.), if they have safed

or unloaded any weapons, what they have touched, and where they have walked. Photograph footwear patterns if appropriate.

Initial Scene Evaluation: Walk-Through (with Preservation of Perishable Evidence)

After establishing death scene perimeters and ensuring death scene security, the DSI should take the opportunity to walk through the scene and examine the body to become familiar with the evidence present and its interrelationship to the scene.

- The walk-through should be conducted with personal protective equipment (PPE) appropriate to the scene—at a minimum, gloves and shoe covers.
- Paths of travel should be those least likely to have been traversed by the perpetrator or victim.
- It is appropriate to videotape, digitally record, or take general photographs during the initial walk-through. The recording may be accomplished by the death scene photographer or videographer accompanying the lead DSI on the walk-through.
- It is also appropriate to note observations of scene conditions that may have been, or could be, changed inadvertently, for example, doors that were opened or closed, locked or not locked, lights on or off, and other general conditions.
- If during the walk-through an item of perishable evidence is discovered (a hair on a broken window, a footwear impression outside when inclement weather is likely, etc.), the item should be immediately safeguarded or expeditiously documented and processed.

Initial Approach to the Body

- Within the scene, determine a path of approach that is least likely to disturb evidence associated with the body.
 - Avoid, if possible, entering or exiting through the doors a perpetrator may have used.
 - Avoid, if possible, any path of travel that may have been used by a perpetrator.
- Rapidly conduct a point-to-point search along the determined path while marking and safeguarding physical evidence. Conduct of a point-to-point search is detailed in Chapter 10.

Preliminary Determination of Death

If not already established, determine that the decedent is in fact dead and does not require emergency medical care. Some physical signs indicating that death is presumed (until legal determination) are:

- Absence of pulse and respiration
- Fixed and dilated pupils that are unresponsive to light
- No signs that indicate cardiopulmonary resuscitation is required
- Obvious injury inconsistent with life such as decapitation, traumatic head injury with evacuation of brain content, massive blood loss, body cut in two or more pieces, and obvious decomposition

Documentation, Preservation, and/or Collection of Perishable Evidence

- Photograph discrete bloodstain patterns on the victim's body, clothing, or adjacent to the body before they are obscured by further blood flow.
- Collect hairs and fibers on the victim's clothing or body that may be lost through air movement or exposure to the elements.
- Collect foreign fluids or stains (such as semen) on the body may be obscured by blood flow.

Document Postmortem Indicators

Examine the body and document the stage of development of livor, rigor, and algor mortis as soon as practical. The status of these indicators should be noted every hour while the body remains at the scene. Chapter 14 provides guidance. A Postmortem Indicator (PMI) worksheet is provided as Supplemental Worksheet 1.

***Livor Mortis*—Purplish Discoloration in Dependent Areas**

- Is livor mortis present?
- Is its location consistent with the body position?
- Is the livor mortis fixed or fluid?
 - Can it be blanched with the pressure of a gloved finger?

***Rigor Mortis*—Stiffening of Muscles and Joints**

- Is rigor mortis present?
- Is it consistent with the body position?

- Is it partially or fully developed in all muscles and joints of the body?
 - Check fingers and jaw for partial development.
 - Check leg at hip and knee for full development.

***Algor Mortis*—Reduction in Body Temperature**

- Is the body warm or cool to the touch?
- Record body temperature via method authorized by medical examiner.
 - Digital thermal scan of forehead.
 - Digital thermal scan of tympanic membrane (eardrum).
 - Digital or mercury thermometer temperature of armpit.
 - Temperature of liver (invasive procedure to be used only by properly trained practitioners and authorized by medical examiner).
- Record ambient temperature at elevation of the body.
- Record temperature of surface on which the body rests.
- Repeat all recordings hourly until the body is removed from the scene.

NOTE: Further processing of the body should be held in abeyance until all physical evidence surrounding the body and in a clear path leading to the body has been documented, preserved, and collected.

Assessing and Establishing the Perimeter

Primary Scene: Inner Perimeter

- The inner perimeter should be extended to include all areas associated with the primary scene in which evidence is expected to be found. Determine if the scene has been adequately identified and its perimeter secured. If not, enlarge perimeter as necessary (Figure 1.1).
- Determine the likely areas through which a perpetrator would have entered or exited the scene and any subsequent paths of travel. If noted, ensure they are within the inner perimeter.

Primary Scene: Outer Perimeter

- This is a clearly marked border around the inner perimeter that allows access to locations within the inner perimeter without having to constantly traverse the scene.
- This includes a DSI staging area for donning Tyvek suits and gathering equipment if needed (Figure 1.2).

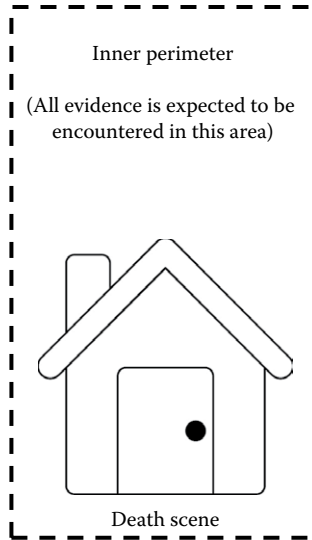


Figure 1.1 Establishing death scene inner perimeter.

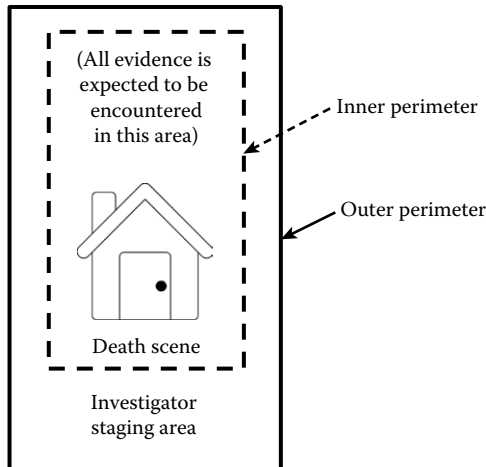


Figure 1.2 Establish death scene outer perimeter.

Identifying Ancillary Scenes

- Determine if the initial information would indicate the possibility of ancillary, or secondary, death scenes.
- See specific guidance under chapters 2. natural death, 3. accidental death, 4. suicide, and 5. homicide.
- Properly secure these areas until they can be processed.

Establishing Scene Controls

- Identify a point of entry and exit for those working the scene and establish an entry control point and a controller (preferably someone from law enforcement) using a Death Scene Entry Log, provided as Supplemental Worksheet 2.
- Determine the level of security required and task appropriate personnel.
- Determine what level of PPE is required for the scene and establish PPE guidelines for entry (Appendix A).
- Once a scene's perimeter is established, designate an area outside the perimeter for DSIs to work in (e.g., sketching, processing scene evidence, changing PPE, trash collection, or for breaks) (Figure 1.2).
- DSIs or other law enforcement personnel should never take food, drinks, or tobacco products into a death scene area!

Legal Concerns

The initial response to the call and determination that there is no one that requires aid and that there is no threat present are typically covered under a search exception called *exigent circumstances*. Once the threat is removed and aid has been rendered, the presence of law enforcement moves from the public safety realm (exigent circumstances) to the investigative realm. Under the investigative realm, it is important to ensure you have the authority to search for and seize evidence. Chapter 32 provides a detailed explanation of search and processing legal concerns.

Scene Assessment, Planning, and Investigative Strategy

At the conclusion of the walk-through, the evidence and body are assessed within the context of the scene. The videotape from the walk-through (or pictures) may be helpful during this process. The Death Scene Investigation Decision Tree (inside of back cover) will aid the investigator in making an evidence-based decision on initially handling the scene as a homicide, suicide, accident, or natural death. This method defaults in ambiguous situations to the more conservative investigative approach.

Scene processing steps are continued in the following chapters:

- For investigations of suspected *natural death*, refer to Chapter 2 for detailed processing guidance.
- For investigations of suspected *accidental death*, refer to Chapter 3 for detailed processing guidance.

- For investigations of suspected *suicidal death*, refer to Chapter 4 for detailed processing guidance.
- For investigations of suspected *homicidal death*, refer to Chapter 5 for detailed processing guidance.

This is an opportunity to *slow down* and determine investigative priorities, tasking, and assignments. Once an investigative direction is developed, it should remain sufficiently flexible to allow for unforeseen developments.



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Natural deaths are often indicated through scene findings but not confirmed until the autopsy is complete. This poses a special challenge to the DSI to thoroughly document the scene and carefully look for red flags that might move the death toward a homicide, suicide, or accident.

The following considerations and activities are listed in an order conducive to efficiently processing a death scene. Individual circumstances may dictate a different order. This procedure should be used when the Death Scene Investigation Decision Tree (inside of back cover) indicates a preliminary investigative direction for natural death.

NOTE: The procedures and steps that allowed the DSI to identify, secure, and perform the initial walk-through of the scene were covered in Chapter 1, “Death Scene Response.” The analysis from the evidence within the context of the scene allowed for the investigative direction to be established. If this initial assessment has not been completed, return to the procedures detailed in Chapter 1, “Death Scene Response,” and the Death Scene Investigation Decision Tree (inside of back cover).

Definition of *Natural Death*

A natural death results from a medically observable disease or medical condition for which the expected outcome is death.

Worksheets and Documentation

The following documentation guides, forms, logs, and worksheets are provided in Section VIII, “Death Scene Investigation Checklist and Worksheets,” and may be used in documenting this scene. Additional forms, other than those noted, may also be used as dictated by your scene. These forms may be preprinted from the publisher’s website (www.crcpress.com/cw/maloney) or photocopied from this procedural guide.

- *Death Investigation Checklist*
 - Section 1: Death Scene Information

- Section 2: Civilians Who Entered the Death Scene
- Section 3: Death Scene
- Section 4: Coroner/Medical Examiner Notification
- Sections 5–8: Appropriate Body Location When Discovered
- Section 10: Identification/Notification
- Section 11: Scene Processing
- Section 12: Death Scene Release Information
- Section 13: Narrative Report
- Section 14: (appropriate forms and logs)
- *Worksheets*
 - Worksheet 1: Postmortem Indicators
 - Worksheet 2: Death Scene Entry Log
 - Worksheet 3: Photography Head Slate
 - Worksheet 4: Photography Log

Initial Scene Response

The following tasks should have already been completed; if not, please see Chapter 1, “Death Scene Response.”

- Initial notification
- Initial scene coordination
- Arrival at the scene
- Establishing a perimeter
- Initial scene evaluation—walk-through
- Initial examination of the deceased
- Scene assessment, planning, and investigative strategy

Legal Concerns

The initial response to the call and determination that there is no one that requires aid and that there is no threat present are typically covered under a search exception called “exigent circumstances.” Once the threat is removed and aid has been rendered, the presence of law enforcement moves from the public safety realm (exigent circumstances) to the investigative realm. Under the investigative realm, it is important to ensure you have the authority to search for and seize evidence. Chapter 1, “Death Scene Response,” provides a detailed explanation of search and processing concerns.

Scene Considerations

Although a death may initially appear natural, the circumstances as ascertained through a thorough and complete investigation may indicate that the cause was an accident, suicide, or homicide. Examples include suicide by overmedication, accidental death due to unintentional overmedication, and physician- or medical professional–assisted suicide.

- The medical examiner or coroner who has jurisdiction for the body should be notified as soon as possible. The intent is to inform authorities of the investigation and coordinate any on-scene responses, not request removal of the body.
- Except to protect fragile evidence from potential destruction, there is no need to rush the processing of a death scene without first establishing a plan.
- If the body has already been removed to a medical facility or funeral home, an investigator should respond to the receiving facility to gather physical evidence and process the body.

Death Scene Processing

Death scenes are often highly complex and require skilled care and methodical processing. There is no requirement to have a body removed immediately from a scene, and removal may be detrimental if it occurs before a scene is thoroughly examined for evidence. The steps are detailed below.

Identifying Primary and Secondary Death Scenes

Reassess the original scene perimeter to determine if it is adequate. This inner perimeter should contain all items of evidence or expected items of evidence or evidentiary areas within the scene. The outer perimeter is established to allow access to all areas within the inner perimeter without having to excessively traverse the inner perimeter. It also includes staging areas for DSIs working the scene. These are established as applicable to all primary and secondary scenes.

Primary Scene

- The body of the deceased generally constitutes the primary death scene.
- The area directly around the body or room in which it is discovered also becomes part of the primary death scene.

- Any medicines or medical paraphernalia/equipment attached to, adjacent to, or near the body should also be considered part of the primary scene.

NOTE: Any indication of forced entry or a violent struggle should move this investigation to Chapter 5, “Homicidal Deaths.”

Secondary Scenes

- All areas where medicine and medical supplies are kept
- Victim’s in-home medical records, medical appointment records, and treatment notes
- Smartphone, tablet, computer containing Internet searches on medical equipment, maintenance issues, etc.
- Social media accounts containing images or entries involving medical treatment or end-of-life considerations
- Social media accounts containing images or entries involving termination of life, suicide, and/or assisted suicide
- Social media accounts containing indications of depression or suicidal ideation

NOTE: Any indication of suicide, suicidal ideation, or suicide attempt should move this investigation to Chapter 4, “Suicidal Deaths.”

NOTE: Any indication of assisted suicide or medically assisted suicide should move this investigation to Chapter 5, “Homicidal Deaths.”

Take Control of Scene

- Start documentation of the scene via notes, sketching, and photography. Documentation is an ongoing process.
- Establish an investigators/DSI staging area.
- Extend death scene perimeter if necessary. Consider media presence and ranges of lenses (see Figure 2.1).
- Establish log of all persons entering or exiting death scene (Supplemental Worksheet 2, “Death Scene Entry Log”).

Scene Organization

- Use protective booties, gloves, and mask at a minimum. Full PPE may be appropriate (Appendix A).

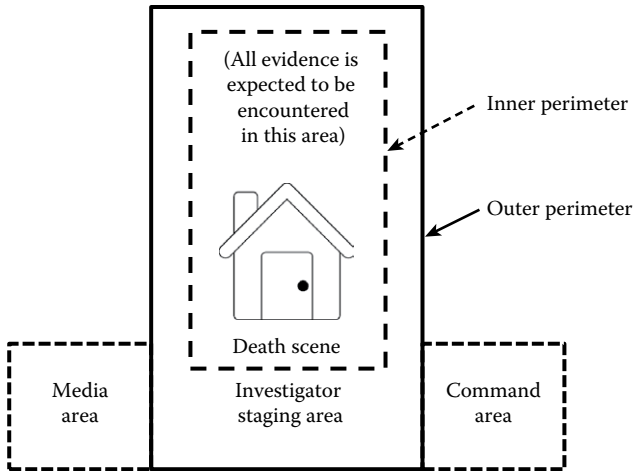


Figure 2.1 Establish locations for death scene command and control functions.

- Establish investigator paths of entry and exit separate from those used by the victim.
- Establish investigator path of travel to and from the body. Use the point-to-point search method to clear the path of evidence and avoid both the victim and perpetrators route of ingress or egress.
- Document and safeguard perishable evidence.

Legal Determination of Death

If not already accomplished, have the body pronounced dead by the proper legal authority.

Plan Development

- Evaluate results of walk-through.
- Evaluate available assets.
- Determine whether additional or specialized personnel are required, for example, a medical examiner, sexual assault response team, explosive ordnance disposal (EOD), forensic anthropologist, or scuba divers.
- Determine whether additional or specialized equipment is required, for example, lighting, ladders, evidence collection supplies, and metal detectors
- Formulate a processing plan.