



IM20

SUDDEN DEATHS

IM20

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POLICY

1. The Delta Police Department (Department) will provide initial response and investigation of all sudden deaths in cooperation with the B.C. Coroners Service, including the notification of the next of kin.

REASON FOR POLICY

2. To provide consistent initial investigation of all sudden deaths so that deaths involving causes other than natural are detected and investigated forthwith, in accordance with existing law, policies, standards and best practice.

RELATED POLICIES

- EA30 – Reportable Incidents of Injuries or Death (B.C. Police Act)
- IM10 – Criminal Investigations
- IR22 – Forensic Identification Services



PROCEDURES

General

3. In accordance with the *Coroners Act*, members shall report to and investigate with, the B.C. Coroners Service for all deaths, including those:
 - a) as a result of violence, accident, negligence, misconduct or malpractice;
 - b) as a result of self-inflicted illness or injury;
 - c) suddenly or unexpectedly, when the person was apparently in good health and not under the care of a medical practitioner;
 - d) from disease, sickness or unknown cause, for which the person was not treated by a medical practitioner;
 - e) during pregnancy, or following pregnancy in circumstances that might reasonably be attributable to pregnancy;
 - f) while detained by or in the custody of a member or facility; and
 - g) resulting from an act of a member performed in the course of duty.
4. A member shall not move or alter, without authorization from a Coroner:
 - a) the body, or its immediate environment, in any way; or
 - b) any wreckage of a structure, vehicle, device, embankment or other thing in which the body is or may be located, or anything connected with the wreckage, except to prevent loss of life or to relieve human suffering.
5. The B.C. Coroners Service has jurisdiction over all deaths defined in the *Coroners Act*, but may authorize a member to exercise their powers, and it is the responsibility of the Coroner to decide if an Inquest is necessary.
6. In all instances of a deceased person, the Duty NCO shall be notified, who shall make the determination if Integrated Forensic Identification Services (IFIS) is required to attend, and if not, document the reasons thereof in PRIME.



7. In cases where the cause of death is uncertain or where death may have been caused by an illegal act:
 - a) the Duty NCO shall attend the scene and make an assessment as to what further resources may be required;
 - b) the Coroner shall assume responsibility and possession of the body and any subsequent forensic medical examinations;
 - c) members shall assume responsibility for the containment and investigation of the scene of death and investigation of all other aspects of the case; and
 - d) where the Coroner orders an autopsy, IFIS and/or a member shall attend the autopsy and collect any exhibits for subsequent examination or testing.
8. If there are suspicious circumstances or possible foul play surrounding death, and death is obvious, the body shall not be disturbed, and:
 - a) the Duty NCO and Duty Officer shall be notified;
 - b) the Supervisor shall assign a member(s) to contain the scene; and
 - c) the Duty Officer may request a member(s) from Investigative Services and IFIS to attend the scene and conduct the investigation, with the assistance of Patrol Services.
9. Persons who are the victim of a homicide or a suspected homicide are to be declared dead by an Advanced Life Support (ALS) British Columbia Emergency Health Services member, or the on scene Coroner, where no legal requirement exists for pronouncement of death by a physician in any other sudden deaths reported to the B.C. Coroners Service.
10. If the cause of death is established to be non-criminal, the Coroner shall assume full responsibility for the case, and the investigating member may conclude the Department's file, unless requested by the Coroner to provide further assistance.

Identification of Deceased

11. Investigating members assisting the Coroner shall attempt to obtain information on the deceased including, but not limited to:



- a) name and date of birth;
 - b) address and telephone number;
 - c) location and position of death;
 - d) next of kin;
 - e) recent medical history or health complaints, including family doctor information, any medications found or recent fall or injury;
 - f) activities prior to collapse;
 - g) witnesses to where they were last seen; and
 - h) alcohol or drug intake, if applicable.
12. Where practicable, identification shall be made by the next of kin, other relatives, close friends, or known associates, in that order.
13. Where no person can identify the deceased, identification may be temporarily made by documents among the deceased's effects, and the method of identification shall be included in the report.
14. In cases of delayed identification, IFIS shall, at direction of the coroner, photograph and fingerprint the body to assist in identification, and IFIS shall obtain a Flinders Technology Associates (FTA) card at the post mortem to assist in DNA identification.

Next of Kin

15. Prior to body removal in a non-suspicious death, members shall have valuable personal items removed from the deceased for safekeeping, or if appropriate, turn the items over to the next of kin.
16. The member shall record in their notebook the action taken and description of items involved, including any direction received from the next of kin.
17. When a death is investigated by the Department, members shall notify the next of kin by:
- a) immediately notifying the Chief Constable, Deputy Chief i/c Community Policing Bureau, and/or Duty Officer;



- b) if there is a lack of information, advising the Duty Officer and taking action to attempt to obtain this information;
 - c) seeking assistance from the police force with jurisdiction if the next of kin live outside Delta, except when an employee is subject to an investigation relating to the death, in which case the Department shall notify next of kin; and
 - d) initiating an 'Assistance to Outside Agency' occurrence when requested to notify the next of kin.
18. Members shall request assistance from Victim Services with the notification of next of kin and follow-up care, where necessary.

Suicide

19. Members investigating suicides should initially proceed in the same manner as if the death was a homicide, and shall notify their supervisor to attend the scene, including locating and seizing any written or otherwise recorded information relating to the death or any items that may have contributed.
20. If the suicide appears suspicious in any manner, or any doubt remains after initially examining the scene that the death may not have been an unaided suicide, the scene shall be contained pending the arrival of Investigative Services and IFIS.
21. If the death is reasonably determined an unaided suicide, the assigned patrol officer shall investigate the incident as a sudden death.

Infant Deaths

22. Members investigating infant deaths shall respect the sensitive nature of the case, and consider that causes may not be immediately evident.
23. Members shall consider that Sudden Infant Death Syndrome SIDS deaths may display any number of the following external characteristics:
- a) child appears to be a healthy looking baby;
 - b) skin is pale and colour has disappeared from lips and nails;
 - c) blood tinged, frothy fluids in the mouth and nostrils;
 - d) vomit may be found on the face and bedding;



- e) diaper is usually wet and full of stool;
 - f) limbs are very limp;
 - g) if the body is moved, the head may dangle;
 - h) blood may settle in pools, leaving areas of discoloration that can be mistaken for bruises; or
 - i) found in unnatural positions.
24. The body of an infant who died as a result of Shaken Baby Syndrome will likely not exhibit any external indicators as to the cause of death, and evidence of Shaken Baby Syndrome can only be confirmed through autopsy.
25. Members shall consult Investigative Service for incidents in which the suspected cause of death is Shaken Baby Syndrome, and Investigative Services will assume the investigation.
26. The Ministry of Children and Family Development shall be notified on any unexplained death involving an infant or child.

Media Releases

27. No media release identifying the deceased shall be issued by the Department until such time as next-of-kin have been notified.
28. In cases where death is sudden, and not caused by an illegal act, a media release may be issued if such a release is in the public interest but only with the permission of next-of-kin.

*Revised Dates:
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