

Death Investigation

328.1 PURPOSE AND SCOPE

Best Practice NYSLEAP- 8.7 - 40.2

The purpose of this policy is to provide guidelines for situations where officers initially respond to and investigate the circumstances of a deceased person.

Some causes of death may not be readily apparent and some cases differ substantially from what they appear to be initially. The thoroughness of death investigations and use of appropriate resources and evidence gathering techniques is critical.

328.2 POLICY

Best Practice

It is the policy of the Syracuse Police Department to respond, document and investigate incidents where a person is deceased. Investigations involving the death of a person, including those from natural causes, accidents, workplace incidents, suicide and homicide, shall be initiated, conducted and properly documented.

328.3 INVESTIGATION CONSIDERATIONS

Best Practice NYSLEAP- 8.7 - 40.2

Emergency medical services shall be called in all suspected death cases unless death is obvious (e.g., decapitated, decomposed).

A supervisor shall be notified as soon as possible to assist and provide appropriate personnel and resources. The on-scene supervisor should determine whether follow-up investigation is required and notify the Investigations Bureau Commander as necessary. The Watch Commander will make notification to command staff in accordance with the Major Incident Notification Policy.

328.3.1 REPORTING

Best Practice MODIFIED NYSLEAP- 8.7 - 51.1

All incidents involving a death shall be documented on the appropriate forms.

328.3.2 MEDICAL EXAMINER REQUEST

State MODIFIED NYSLEAP- 8.7 - 58.2 (C)

Officers are not authorized to pronounce death. The Medical Examiner shall be called in all sudden or unexpected deaths or deaths due to other than natural causes. State law requires that the Medical Examiner be notified in any of the following cases (County Law § 671; County Law § 673):

- (a) Violent death, whether by criminal violence, suicide, or casualty
- (b) Death caused by unlawful act or criminal neglect
- (c) Death occurring in a suspicious, unusual, or unexplained manner

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- (d) Death while unattended by a physician or where no physician is able to certify the cause of death
- (e) Death, whether natural or unnatural, of a person confined to a correctional facility or other public institution other than a hospital, infirmary, or nursing home

328.3.3 SEARCHING DEAD BODIES

Best Practice **MODIFIED** NYSLEAP- 8.7 - 51.1

- (a) The Medical Examiner, his/her assistant and authorized investigators are generally the only persons permitted to move, handle or search a dead body.
- (b) A member should not search a dead body, unless exigent circumstances exist.
- (c) Whenever reasonably possible, a witness, preferably a relative to the deceased or a member of the household, should be requested to remain nearby the scene and available to the officer pending the arrival of the Medical Examiner or his/her assistant. The name and address of this person shall be included in the narrative of the death report.

328.3.4 SUSPECTED HOMICIDE

Best Practice **MODIFIED** NYSLEAP- 8.7 - 51.1

If the initially assigned officer suspects that the death involves a homicide or other suspicious circumstances, the officer shall take steps to protect the scene. The Criminal Investigation Division shall be notified.

328.3.5 EMPLOYMENT-RELATED DEATHS OR INJURIES

Best Practice

Any member of this department who responds to and determines that a death, serious illness or serious injury has occurred as a result of an accident at or in connection with the victim's employment should ensure that the regional Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) office is promptly notified of all pertinent information.

328.4 UNIDENTIFIED DEAD BODY

Best Practice **MODIFIED**

If the identity of a dead body cannot be established, the investigating detective shall enter a description of the unidentified body into the eJusticeNY Integrated Justice Portal.

328.5 DEATH NOTIFICATION

Best Practice **MODIFIED** NY_CALEA6.13 - 55.2.6 NYSLEAP- 8.7 - 43.7

When reasonably practicable, and if not handled by the Medical Examiner's Office, notification to the next-of-kin of the deceased person shall be made, in person, by the officer assigned to the incident. If the next-of-kin lives in another jurisdiction, a law enforcement official from that jurisdiction shall be requested to make the personal notification.

If a homicide, then a CID Supervisor should be notified before next-of-kin notification.

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If a deceased person has been identified as a missing person, this department shall attempt to locate family members and inform them of the death and location of the deceased missing person's remains. All efforts to locate and notify family members shall be recorded in appropriate reports.