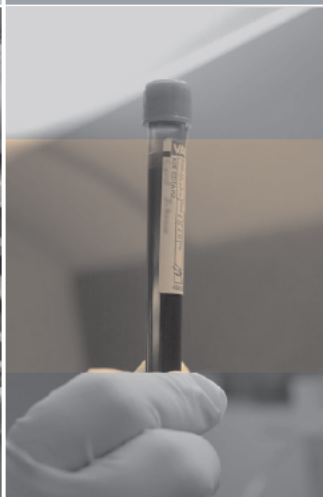




NIJ

Research

Report



Death Investigation: A Guide for the Scene Investigator

Technical Update

www.nij.gov

**U.S. Department of Justice
Office of Justice Programs**

810 Seventh Street N.W.

Washington, DC 20531

Eric H. Holder, Jr.

Attorney General

Laurie O. Robinson

Assistant Attorney General

John H. Laub

Director, National Institute of Justice

This and other publications and products of the
National Institute of Justice can be found at:

National Institute of Justice

www.nij.gov

Office of Justice Programs

Innovation • Partnerships • Safer Neighborhoods

www.ojp.usdoj.gov

JUNE 2011

Death Investigation: A Guide for the Scene Investigator

Technical Update

Original Guide Developed and Approved by the
National Medicolegal Review Panel

Executive Director
Steven C. Clark, Ph.D.
Occupational Research and Assessment, Inc.
Big Rapids, Michigan
Associate Professor
Ferris State University
November 1999

Technical Update Developed and Approved by the
Technical Update Review Committee
March 2010
U.S. Department of Justice
Office of Justice Programs

The original project was supported under grant number 96–MU–CS–0005 by the National Institute of Justice, Office of Justice Programs, U.S. Department of Justice, and by the Bureau of Justice Assistance and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

The technical update was supported under grant number 2007–MU–BX–K008 by the National Institute of Justice, Office of Justice Programs, U.S. Department of Justice.

This document is not intended to create, does not create, and may not be relied upon to create any rights, substantive or procedural, enforceable at law by any party in any matter civil or criminal.

Opinions or points of view expressed in this document are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the official position of the U.S. Department of Justice.

NCJ 234457

Original Guide: National Medicolegal Review Panel

The National Medicolegal Review Panel (NMRP) represents a multidisciplinary group of content area experts, each representing members of his or her respective organization. Each organization has a role—be it active involvement or oversight—in conducting death investigations and in implementing these guidelines.

United States Conference of Mayors

The Honorable Scott L. King
(Chairman, NMRP)
Mayor
Gary, Indiana

American Academy of Forensic Sciences

Joseph H. Davis, M.D.
Retired Director, Dade
County Medical Examiner
Department
Miami, Florida

American Bar Association

Bruce H. Hanley, Esq.
Partner, Hanley & Dejoras,
P.A.
Minneapolis, Minnesota

American Medical Association

Mary E.S. Case, M.D.
Chief Medical Examiner
St. Louis, St. Charles,
Jefferson, and Franklin
Counties, Missouri

St. Louis University School of Medicine, College of American Pathologists

Jeffrey M. Jentzen, M.D.
Medical Examiner
Milwaukee, Wisconsin

International Association of Chiefs of Police

Chief Thomas J. O’Loughlin
Wellesley, Massachusetts

International Association of Coroners and Medical Examiners

Halbert E. Fillingier, Jr., M.D.
Coroner
Montgomery County,
Pennsylvania

National Association of Counties

*Douglas A. Mack, M.D.,
M.P.H.*
Chief Medical Examiner and
Public Health Director
Kent County, Michigan

**National Association of
Medical Examiners**

*Richard C. Harruff, M.D.,
Ph.D.*

Associate Medical Examiner
Seattle/King County Depart-
ment of Public Health
Seattle, Washington

**National Conference of
State Legislatures**

*Representative Jeanne
M. Adkins*

Colorado State Legislature
House Judiciary Committee
Denver, Colorado

**National Governors'
Association**

*Richard T. Callery, M.D.,
F.C.A.P.*

Chief Medical Examiner
Wilmington, Delaware

**National Sheriffs'
Association**

Donald L. Mauro
Commanding Officer,
Homicide Bureau
Los Angeles County Sheriff's
Department
Los Angeles, California

**Colorado Coroners'
Association**

Elaine R. Meisner
Logan County Coroner
Sterling, Colorado

**South Dakota Funeral
Directors' Association**

George H. Kuhler
Elected Coroner
Beadle County, South Dakota

Technical Update: Review Committee

American Academy of Forensic Sciences

Julie A. Howe, M.B.A.
Medicolegal Death Investigator
St. Louis University, Division
of Forensic Pathology
St. Louis, Missouri

American Board of Medico- legal Death Investigators

Roberta Geiselhart, R.N.
Supervisor of Investigations
Hennepin County Medical
Examiner's Office
Minneapolis, Minnesota

International Association of Chiefs of Police

Major Rustin Price
Commander, Criminal
Investigation Division
Baltimore County Police
Department
Towson, Maryland

International Association of Coroners and Medical Examiners

O'dell Owens, M.D., M.P.H.
President
Cincinnati State Technical
and Community College
Cincinnati, Ohio

National Association of Medical Examiners

Jeff Jentzen, M.D.
Director of Autopsy and
Forensic Services
University of Michigan
Ann Arbor, Michigan

National Sheriffs' Association

Sergeant Michael Price
DuPage County Sheriff's
Office
Wheaton, Illinois

Acknowledgments

NIJ wishes to thank the original Technical Working Group for Death Investigation (TWGDI). This 144-member reviewer network gave of their time to review guideline content, providing the researcher feedback from a national perspective. Additional thanks to the TWGDI executive board: Mr. Paul Davison, Kent County M.E. Office, Grand Rapids, Michigan; Mr. Bill Donovan, Jefferson Parish Coroner's Office, Harvey, Louisiana; Mr. Cullen Ellingburgh, Forensic Science Center, Orange County, California; Ms. Roberta Geiselhart, R.N., Hennepin County M.E. Office, Minneapolis, Minnesota; Dr. Elizabeth Kinnison, Office of the Chief M.E., Norfolk, Virginia; Mr. Vernon McCarty, Washoe County Coroner, Reno, Nevada; Mr. Joseph Morgan, Fulton County M.E. Office, Atlanta, Georgia; Mr. Randy Moshos, M.E. Office, New York, New York; Mr. Steve Nunez, Office of the Medical Investigator, Albuquerque, New Mexico; Ms. Rose Marie Psara, R.N., St. Louis County M.E. Office, St. Louis, Missouri; and Mr. Michael Stewart, Denver City

and County Coroner's Office, Denver, Colorado, whose combined commitment to the field of death investigation is a tribute to the quality of this document. In addition, the offices that employ each member of the group share in this endeavor. Through their support, each member was given the flexibility they needed to support the project.

NIJ also wishes to thank its technical advisors: John E. Smialek, M.D., Chief Medical Examiner, State of Maryland; Randy L. Hanzlick, M.D., Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and Emory University School of Medicine; Ms. Mary Fran Ernst, Director of Medicolegal Education, St. Louis University Medical School; and Ms. Mary Lou Kearns, Coroner, Kane County, Illinois. Each made significant contributions to the project's inception, eventual funding, and timely completion. Their dedication to the science of death investigation and to the members of the investigative community is apparent throughout this document.

The former Director of NIJ, the Honorable Jeremy Travis; the Director of NIJ's Office of Science and Technology, Mr. David G. Boyd; and NIJ's Forensic Science Program Manager, Richard M. Rau, Ph.D., each share responsibility for the success of this project. Credit also goes to R. Gib Parrish, M.D., of CDC, for his support of and commitment to the research.

In addition, the true strength of these guidelines is derived from the stamina of the National Medicolegal Review Panel (NMRP), whose members represented 12 national organizations intimately involved in the investigation of death and its outcomes. The panel also included two representatives of elected coroners. NMRP's contribution was invaluable. And finally, thanks go to the leadership

of Joseph H. Davis, M.D., Medical Examiner Emeritus, Dade County, Florida, and Mr. Donald Murray, National Association of Counties, for their unrelenting efforts to get this job done and improve their profession, every scene, every time.

In 2010, NIJ convened a committee to perform a technical update to the guidelines. NIJ extends its thanks to the members of the Technical Update Review Committee for their work. NIJ also thanks Ms. Carolyn Allen, Consultant, National Forensic Science Technology Center; Brigid O'Brien, Ph.D., Program Manager, NIJ; and Ms. Robin Jones, Forensic Science Policy and Strategy Consultant, Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives, for their assistance in the technical update.

John H. Laub, Ph.D.

*Director, National
Institute of Justice*

Contents

Original Guide: National Medicolegal Review Panel	iii
Technical Update: Review Committee	v
Acknowledgments	vii
Introduction to Technical Update	1
Introduction to the Original Guide	1
Purpose and Scope of the Study	1
Study Design	2
Notes	8
Section A: Investigative Tools and Equipment	9
Section B: Arriving at the Scene	11
1. Introduce and Identify Self and Role	11
2. Exercise Scene Safety and Security	12
3. Confirm or Pronounce Death	13
4. Participate in Scene Briefing (With Attending Agency Representatives)	14
5. Conduct Scene “Walk Through”	15
6. Establish Chain of Custody	16
7. Follow Laws (Related to the Collection of Evidence)	18
Section C: Documenting and Evaluating the Scene	19
1. Photograph Scene	19
2. Develop Descriptive Documentation of the Scene	20
3. Establish Probable Location of Injury or Illness	21

4. Collect, Inventory and Safeguard Property and Evidence 23

5. Interview Witness(es) at the Scene 24

Section D: Documenting and Evaluating the Body 27

1. Photograph the Body 27

2. Conduct External Body Examination (Superficial) 28

3. Preserve Evidence (on Body) 30

4. Establish Decedent Identification 31

5. Document Post-Mortem Changes 32

6. Participate in Scene Debriefing 33

7. Determine Notification Procedures (Next of Kin or Interested and Authorized Individuals) 35

8. Ensure Security of Remains 36

Section E: Establishing and Recording Decedent Profile Information..... 39

1. Document the Discovery History 39

2. Determine Terminal Episode History 40

3. Document Decedent Medical History 41

4. Document Decedent Mental Health History 42

5. Document Social History 43

Section F: Completing the Scene Investigation 45

1. Maintain Jurisdiction Over the Body 45

2. Release Jurisdiction of the Body 46

3. Perform Exit Procedures 47

4. Assist the Family or Authorized Individual(s) 48

Introduction to Technical Update

Death investigation has evolved greatly in the years since the 1999 release of *Death Investigation: A Guide for the Scene Investigator*. This revised and updated edition is the result of a collaborative effort to present the most up-to-date information about the issues confronting death investigators today. The death investigator is the eyes and ears of the forensic

pathologist at the scene. It is hoped that these guidelines, reflecting the best practices of the forensic community, will serve as a national standard.

The following introduction describes the original study that focused on the establishment of guidelines for conducting death investigations.

Introduction to the Original Guide

Purpose and Scope of the Study

The principal purpose of the study, initiated in June 1996, was to identify, delineate, and assemble a set of investigative tasks that should and could be performed at every death scene. These tasks would serve as the foundation of the guide for death scene investigators. The Director of the National Institute of Justice (NIJ) selected an independent review panel whose members represented international and national organizations whose constituents are responsible for the investigation of death and its

outcomes. The researcher organized two multidisciplinary technical working groups (TWGs). The first consisted of members representing the investigative community at large, and the second consisted of an executive board representing the investigative community at large.

The study involved the use of two standardized consensus-seeking research techniques: (a) the Developing A Curriculum (DACUM)¹ process and (b) a Delphi² survey. In this report, the author does not attempt to assign responsibility for task (guideline) performance to any one

occupational job title (e.g., Guideline D4 is performed by law enforcement personnel). Research design and selected methodology focused on the establishment of performance guidelines for death-scene investigations. The research design did not allow TWGs to assume investigative outcomes during the development phase of the project; therefore, no attempt was made to assign a “manner” of death to individual guidelines (e.g., Guideline C2 applies to homicide scenes), to maintain objectivity and national practicality. The author does not claim to be an expert in the science and/or methodology of medicolegal death investigation. This research was based on the collective knowledge of three multidisciplinary content area expert groups. The focus was on the death scene, the body, and the interactive skills and knowledge that must be applied to ensure a successful case outcome. The balance of this introduction outlines the study design and provides basic background information on the selection of the National Medicolegal Review Panel (NMRP) and TWG memberships and the research methodology, its selection, and application.

The study findings (investigative guidelines) follow this introduction.

Study Design

The methodology selected for this occupational research required collection of data from a sample of current subject matter experts, practitioners from the field who perform daily within the occupation being investigated. This “criterion” was used to identify members of the various multidisciplinary groups that provided the data for this research.

The following groups were formed for the purpose of developing national guidelines for conducting death investigations.

National Medicolegal Review Panel

NMRP members represent an independent multidisciplinary group of both international and national organizations whose constituents are responsible for investigating death and its outcomes. Each member of NMRP was selected by the Director based on nominations made by the various associations. The rationale for their involvement was

twofold: (a) they represent the diversity of the profession nationally and (b) their members are the key stakeholders in the outcomes of this research. Each organization has a role in conducting death investigations and in implementing these guidelines.

Technical Working Group for Death Investigation

1. National Reviewer Network

Technical Working Group for Death Investigation (TWGDI) members represent a sample of death investigators from across the country. They are the content area experts who perform within the occupation daily. The following criteria were used to select the members of the TWGDI reviewer network:

- Each member was nominated/selected for the position by a person whose name appeared on the most recent (1995) Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) national database of death investigation.³
- Each member had specific knowledge regarding the investigation of death.

- Each member had specific experience with the process of death investigation and the outcomes of positive and negative scene investigations.
- Each member could commit to four rounds of national surveying over a 6-month period.

A 50-percent random sample (1,512) of death investigators was drawn from the CDC database.⁴ A letter was sent to each member of the sample, inviting him or her to participate in the national research to develop death investigative guidelines or to nominate a person who participates in death investigations. Two hundred and sixty-three individuals were nominated (17 percent). Nominees were contacted by mail and asked to provide personal demographic data, including job title, years of experience, and educational background, in addition to general information (name, address, etc.) necessary for participation in the research.

The TWGDI national reviewer network consisted of 263 members from 46 states and representing 5 regions, as seen in table 1.

The educational backgrounds of the national reviewer network members are presented in table 2.

The types of investigative systems represented in the reviewer network are shown in table 3.

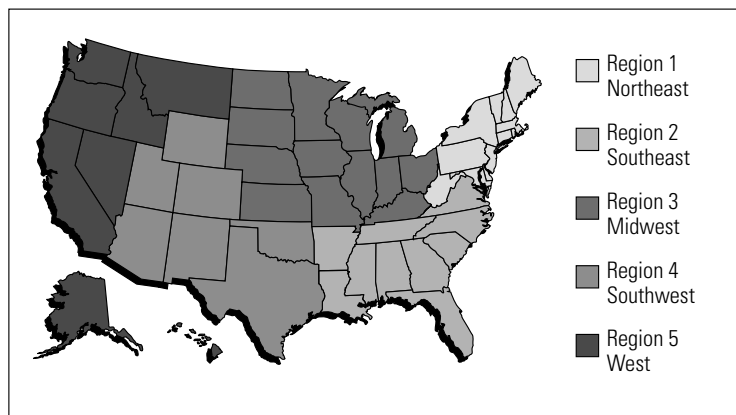
The average age of TWGDI members was 47.6 years. They had an average of 10.5 years of experience. There

were 80.6 percent (212) males and 19.4 percent (51) females in the group.

2. Executive Board

Representatives from each region were selected to maintain consistency within regions across the United States. These representatives made up the TWGDI executive board. Criteria for selection to the TWGDI

Table 1. Membership of the Technical Working Group on Death Investigation National Reviewer Network



Region	Location	Number of Participants	Percentage
1	Northeast	32	12%
2	Southeast	56	21%
3	Midwest	94	36%
4	Southwest	47	18%
5	West	34	13%

Table 2. Educational Background of the National Reviewer Network

Education	Number	Percent
Law Enforcement	82	31%
Medical	157	60%
Unknown	24	9%

Table 3. Systems Represented by the National Reviewer Network

System	Number	Percent
Medical Examiner	44	17%
Coroner	161	61%
Mixed ME/Coroner	58	22%

executive board were as follows:

- Each member had specific knowledge regarding the investigation of death.
- Each member had specific experience with the process of death investigation and the outcomes of positive and negative scene investigations.
- Each member could commit to attend four workshops held within the grant period.

TWGDJ Executive Board DACUM Workshop. In November 1996, the TWGDJ

executive board met in St. Louis to begin developing the national Delphi survey. The survey content was to reflect “best practice” for death-scene investigation. DACUM is a process for analyzing an occupation systematically. The 2-day workshop used the investigative experts on the executive board to analyze job tasks while employing modified brainstorming techniques. The board’s efforts resulted in a DACUM chart that describes the investigative occupation in terms of specific tasks that competent investigators must be able to perform “every scene, every time.”⁵ A task was defined

Thank You for previewing this eBook

You can read the full version of this eBook in different formats:

- HTML (Free /Available to everyone)
- PDF / TXT (Available to V.I.P. members. Free Standard members can access up to 5 PDF/TXT eBooks per month each month)
- Epub & Mobipocket (Exclusive to V.I.P. members)

To download this full book, simply select the format you desire below

