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NAME OSAC UPDATE #4: OSAC 2022-N-0027

Medicolegal Death Investigation Response to Death Locations and Incident Scenes: Best Practice Recommendations

This Best Practice Recommendation was developed by the OSAC subcommittee Medicolegal Death Investigation. While a Standard defines required practices, this document contains recommendations only. This OSAC document should be useful to NAME members as a training document for investigators, or as a reference when writing policies about scene response. The **Forward** to this document states that the medicolegal death investigation should be an independent investigation, parallel to that conducted by law enforcement, and further states that the investigation should be performed by credentialed medicolegal death investigators.

This is a brief summary of OSAC 2022-N-0027, and as such may leave out or misinterpret important details. See link to full document (below).

SCOPE: If in accordance with jurisdictional law, scene response serves to allow for preliminary body examination, but also for the collection and documentation of evidence and property, and provides an opportunity to obtain medical history, contextual history, and demographic information from family and other witnesses. The investigative information obtained is essential for decisions such as case triage, and determination of type of autopsy examination, if any, is performed.

Determination as to whether a scene or incident response is needed is based on multiple factors, including the initial presumptive manner of death and circumstances. The document recommends a timely scene response in these circumstances, or if the decedent has already been transported elsewhere: first to the location of the body, then to the incident scene if it has not been cleared:

- Deaths by homicide or with suspicious circumstances
- Suicides
- Accidents to include drowning and electrocution

- Traffic related incident
- Work related deaths
- In custody and/or during law enforcement interaction
- Fire related deaths
- Multiple deaths
- Suspected overdose or drug-related

For surgical complication deaths, contagious diseases, and natural deaths this best practices document suggests a more nuanced approach based on circumstances.

Beyond the above scenarios, it is best practice to perform scene investigations in these **decedents**:

- Infants and children (when death is unexpected)
- Persons in custody
- Bones/specimens
- Decomposed or charred remains
- Unidentified remains
- High profile circumstances
- No physician or medical history

Scene response is recommended for decedents in certain **locations**:

- Emergency departments in suspected unnatural deaths
- When someone dies alone at a residence
- Incarceration settings
- Sober living and/or drug/alcohol rehabilitation facilities
- Hotels/motels
- In vehicles
- In public view
- Child day care settings

Full Document: <https://www.nist.gov/document/osac-2022-n-0027-medicolegal-death-investigation-response-death-locations-and-incident-0>