

PBP FORM 290  PITTSBURGH BUREAU OF POLICE <i>"...accountability, integrity and respect."</i>		SUBJECT: "POLICE RESPONSE TO NATURAL AND/OR SUDDEN DEATHS"	ORDER NUMBER: 40-21
		PLEAC STANDARD: NONE	PAGE 1 OF 4
ISSUE DATE: 07/30/14	EFFECTIVE DATE: 07/30/14	ANNUAL REVIEW DATE: JULY	RESCINDS: NONE
			AMENDS: NONE

1.0 POLICY

It is the policy of the Pittsburgh Bureau of Police to respond to any instance of an unattended death that occurs within the City of Pittsburgh. This policy establishes guidelines and procedures for the response by members of the Pittsburgh Bureau of Police to this type of incident. Additionally, this policy establishes procedures for the response to and handling of the scene of an unattended death.

2.0 PURPOSE

- 2.1 To ensure the timely and efficient investigation of incidents involving the unattended death of any person, while preserving any potential evidence of a crime until it has been determined to be something other than a criminal event;
- 2.2 To protect the dignity of persons who have died, and to attempt to lessen the effects of the death on members of the deceased person's family;
- 2.3 To ensure the timely transfer of information between the Pittsburgh Bureau of Police and the Allegheny County Office of the Medical Examiner;
- 2.4 To ensure the proper handling of property and/or evidence in cases involving deceased persons.

3.0 DEFINITIONS:

- 3.1 **Unattended Death** – Any death that occurs outside of a medical facility, skilled nursing facility, or other care facility, and where no medical professional is on scene at the time of the death.
- 3.2 **Natural Death** – Death from apparently known and natural causes, in which a definite diagnosis can be made, either from hospital records or by the family physician that attended the deceased prior to death.
- 3.3 **Sudden Death** – Unexpected death, or occurrence of death, the cause of which is unknown (e.g. – a death where the deceased has not recently been under care of a physician, or where no illness exists).
- 3.4 **Death by Suicide** – The taking of one's own life voluntarily and intentionally.
- 3.5 **Suspicious Death** – Death with questionable circumstances (e.g. – overdoses, homicides, children/infants).
- 3.6 **Accidental Death** – Death by an unexpected occurrence.

4.0 REPORTING PROCEDURES FOR NATURAL DEATHS

- 4.1 Upon responding to the scene of an unattended death, where family members and/or next of kin are either on scene or available, the reporting officer shall:
 - 4.1.1 Provide immediate medical assistance if it is needed.
 - 4.1.2 Cooperate with/assist medical personnel on the scene.
 - 4.1.3 If no possibility of life exists, do not move or touch the body.

- 4.1.4 Secure the scene.
 - 4.1.5 Notify the shift supervisor of the facts and circumstances found at the scene of the death.
 - 4.1.6 Notify the Homicide Unit or Night Felony Unit to ensure that the Detective Bureau does not need to perform an on-scene investigation.
 - 4.1.7 Attempt to determine the identity of the deceased’s physician and contact the doctor to see if he/she will sign the death certificate.
 - 4.1.7.1 If the doctor agrees to sign the death certificate, the body can be released to the funeral home.
 - 4.1.7.2 If the doctor refuses to sign the death certificate, or he/she cannot be reached, the Medical Examiner’s Office will be notified. The investigators from the Medical Examiner’s Office will determine whether or not they will sign the death certificate and release body to the funeral home or if they will pick up the body to continue the investigation.
 - 4.1.8 Notify the Medical Examiner’s Office.
 - 4.1.9 Once the Medical Examiner’s Office releases the body, the Reporting Officer will personally make contact with the Funeral Home and/or Funeral Director to ensure that they are en route to complete the removal of the deceased’s body.
 - 4.1.10 Reporting Officer will gather all of the information necessary to complete the Incident Report (PBP form 2.0) and an Investigative Report (PBP form 3.0). Upon completion of the report, a copy will be faxed to the appropriate Detective Unit. Please refer to the D.O.A. Information Sheet (PBP Form #10.30) located in the Police Officers’ Toolkit as a guide as to the information that is necessary for the reports.
 - 4.1.11 Once contact has been made with the funeral home, and arrangements have been made for the removal of the body, the Reporting Officer may clear the scene. The Reporting Officer shall document the fact that the scene was secured and the name, address and telephone number of the responsible party that was left to await the arrival of the funeral director.
- 4.2 Upon responding to the scene of an unattended death, where family members and/or next of kin are either NOT on scene or are NOT available, the reporting officer shall:
- 4.2.1 Provide immediate medical assistance if it is needed.
 - 4.2.2 Cooperate with/assist medical personnel on the scene.
 - 4.2.3 If no possibility of life exists, do not move or touch the body.
 - 4.2.4 Secure the scene.
 - 4.2.5 Notify the shift supervisor of the facts and circumstances found at the scene of the death.
 - 4.2.6 Attempt to determine the name and contact information for the deceased’s family and/or next of kin so that this information can be given to the Medical Examiner’s Office for notification purposes.
 - 4.2.7 Notify the Homicide Unit or Night Felony Unit to ensure that the Detective Bureau does not need to perform an on-scene investigation, and note the name of the Detective who makes that determination.
 - 4.2.8 Notify the Medical Examiner’s Office.
 - 4.2.9 Once the Medical Examiner’s Office releases the body, the Reporting Officer will personally make contact with the Funeral Home and/or Funeral Director to ensure that they are en route to complete the removal of the deceased’s body.

- 4.2.10 Reporting Officer will gather all of the information necessary to complete the Incident Report (PBP form 2.0) and an Investigative Report (PBP form 3.0). Upon completion of the report, a copy will be faxed to the appropriate Detective Unit. Please refer to the D.O.A. Information Sheet (PBP Form #10.30) as a guide as to the information that is necessary for the reports.
- 4.2.11 Reporting Officer will stay on scene until the body of the deceased is removed from the scene by either the funeral home or the Medical Examiner’s Office, or until a responsible party can be identified to release the scene. If the scene is released, the Reporting Officer shall document the fact that the scene was secured and the name, address and telephone number of the responsible party that was left to await the arrival of the funeral director.

5.0 REPORTING PROCEDURES FOR SUDDEN, SUICIDE AND SUSPICIOUS DEATHS

- 5.1 Upon responding to the scene of a Sudden Death, Death by Suicide, or Suspicious Death, the reporting officer shall:
 - 5.1.1 Provide immediate medical assistance if it is needed.
 - 5.1.2 Cooperate with/assist medical personnel on the scene.
 - 5.1.3 If no possibility of life exists, do not move or touch the body.
 - 5.1.4 Secure the scene and preserve evidence.
 - 5.1.4.1 Reporting and Responding Officers should not touch or move any firearms, drugs or drug-related items, or any other evidence unless there is a possibility that medical intervention may be necessary;
 - 5.1.4.2 If the Responding Officers find it necessary to move any evidence at the scene, they will immediately notify the Responding Detective and document the action on a Supplemental Report.
 - 5.1.5 Notify the shift supervisor of the facts and circumstances found at the scene of the death.
 - 5.1.6 Detain all witnesses to the incident, keep them separated if possible.
 - 5.1.7 Take the suspect into custody if possible. Responding officers SHALL NOT advise the suspect of their rights or make any attempt to question them, beyond gathering basic biographical information, unless directed to do so by a Detective or Supervisor. However, responding officers SHALL take care to record any and all statements made by the suspect.
 - 5.1.8 Prevent unnecessary police personnel and civilians from entering the scene. Maintain a written log to record the names and ranks of all people on the scene.
 - 5.1.9 Notify the Homicide Unit or Night Felony Unit to ensure that the Detective Bureau is responding to perform an on-scene investigation, and note the name of the Detective(s) who will be responding.
 - 5.1.10 Reporting Officer will begin to gather all of the information necessary to complete the Incident Report (PBP form 2.0) and an Investigative Report (PBP form 3.0).
 - 5.1.11 Upon arrival of Major Crimes personnel, relay all information gathered and any actions taken to them.
 - 5.1.12 Render whatever assistance is requested by homicide personnel.
 - 5.1.13 If the deceased’s body is to be removed by the Medical Examiner’s Office, the shift supervisor will designate one or more of the responding officers to stay on scene until the deceased’s body has been removed. If Major Crimes Detectives and the Medical Examiner decide to release the deceased’s body to a funeral home, and once contact has been made with the funeral home arrangements have been confirmed for the removal of the body, the Reporting Officer may clear the scene. The Reporting Officer shall

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document the fact that the scene was secured and the name, address and telephone number of the responsible party that was left to await the arrival of the funeral director.

Approved By:

Regina McDonald
Acting Chief of Police

Date: