
**NEVADA COUNTY
SHERIFF'S OFFICE**



CORONER'S DIRECTIVE

17
Effective Date 05/30/99
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SUBJECT

SUICIDES

POLICY

To establish a protocol for the handling of suicides and provide information on the various types of suicides

PURPOSE

To provide the investigator with basic information about the investigation of suicide cases

CODE REFERENCE

CASE LAW

DEFINITIONS

PROCEDURE

A. General Information

1. An apparent suicide should be investigated as thoroughly as any other death by violence. Some are concealed homicides and some are accidents. The indication of suicide on a death certificate has serious social and economic consequences for the survivors.
2. There are several factors to be considered before deciding that a given situation is suicide:
 - a. Did the victim intend to kill himself/herself
 - b. Could the victim have killed himself/herself?

In a shotgun/rifle death, be sure to measure the barrel of the weapon to be sure it is physically possible for the decedent to have committed the act.

3. Knowledge of the victim's emotional status prior to the incident is quite important, but cannot always be obtained. Surviving relatives and friends may be reluctant to discuss these matters. Physicians' records and police records may document previous unsuccessful attempts. Evidence of previous attempts may be present as scars/hesitation marks.
4. Either the Patrol Supervising Shift Sergeant or Investigations Supervisor on duty **shall respond to all** suicide cases.

B. Patterns and Characteristics

These are certain patterns or characteristics associated with a suicidal death of which the investigator must remain aware:

1. Is the victim right-handed or left-handed?
2. Are there hesitation marks or old scars (neck, wrist, or abdomen)?
3. Is there a mirror nearby? If so, check for autoerotic paraphernalia.
4. Has any clothing been removed or raised in the area of the fatal wound
5. Has the death been premeditated (suicide note)?

C. Notes

1. Remember that a suicide note is an indication of intent. It must be treated with care as any other form of evidence. Samples of the decedent's handwriting on other documents should be used for the comparison. If the circumstances do not correlate well, it may be necessary to enlist the aid of a document examiner or a latent print examiner. Because of the stigma associated with suicides, family members may have altered the scene or even concealed the suicide note. Family statements must be carefully evaluated. The final act is usually the culmination of prior attempts or warnings.
2. Government Code §27464 – Delivery of Document Directing Disposition of Property and remains of Deceased; Filing of Copy; Delivery of Original

Whenever the death of any person shall have been referred to the coroner for investigation, there shall be delivered to the coroner any note, letter, or other document apparently written by the deceased which may tend to indicate an intention by the writer to take his life, including directions for disposition of his property or disposal of his remains. A facsimile copy thereof shall be placed in the coroner's records, and if an inquest be held, a true copy shall be read into the record and transcribed into the notes of the official stenographer. Upon completion of legal proceedings arising from such death, the original instrument shall be delivered by the coroner to the

addressee or to the legal representative of the estate of the decedent; provided, however, that if the instrument purports to be testamentary in nature, it shall be filed with the county clerk as provided by law.

3. All items on or around the body are coroner's evidence. Therefore, all items used in conjunction with death fall under the jurisdiction of the coroner, not the investigating law enforcement agency. This includes notes, letters, weapons, ropes used in hangings, drugs, et cetera.
4. The deputy coroner shall take photographs of the decedent, the surroundings, and the wound(s).
5. X-rays
 - a. Cases in which a penetrating wound was inflicted are to be x-rayed. Bullet wounds that are not through-and-through, and gunshot wounds where massive tissue destruction was not inflicted are to be x-rayed.
 - b. Other penetrating wounds (knife, et cetera) are to be x-rayed.
 - c. All burn victims in suspicious cases are to be x-rayed.

D. Specific Considerations

1. Consider these areas of stress associated with suicide:
 - a. Death of a spouse;
 - b. Mental illness;
 - c. Marital problems;
 - d. Job loss;
 - e. Death of a close friend;
 - f. Retirement;
 - g. Personal illness;
 - h. Legal problems;
 - i. Financial problems;
 - j. Breakup with boyfriend/girlfriend.

2. In considering the self-inflicted injury, the multiplicity of wounds does not eliminate the possibility of the suicide, but raises the question of attack by another person. In that situation, evidence of defensive moves or of a struggle would probably remain. Multiple bullet wounds, stab wounds, cutting wounds, even blunt injury wounds can be inflicted by a person intent on his/her own destruction.