
**NEVADA COUNTY
SHERIFF'S OFFICE**



CORONER'S DIRECTIVE

19
Effective Date ~~05/30/99~~
2/6/18

SUBJECT

HANGING

POLICY

It is the policy of the Sheriff-Coroner to handle all hanging deaths as a possible suspicious death and proceed with a standard protocol

PURPOSE

To provide the investigator with a general understanding of the type of hangings and special considerations in hanging deaths

CODE REFERENCE

CASE LAW

DEFINITIONS

PROCEDURE

A. General Information

1. Death from hanging is caused by the compression of the neck by a ligature with the weight of the body supported in whole or part by the ligature. The blood vessels are closed by the pressure of the ligature, particularly the carotid artery, causing cerebral anoxia. Unconsciousness takes place within a few seconds and death shortly thereafter.
2. Hanging cases may involve one of three categories:
 - a. Suicide
 - b. Accident
 - c. Homicide

Of the three, suicide is the most common and homicide the least. Frequently, it is difficult to distinguish between suicide and accident. Could the victim have killed himself in this manner, and if he did, was it suicide or accidental? Accidents can occur with children at play, falling, or during autoerotic sexual

behavior. Therefore, great care should be exercised in investigating a hanging death.

B. Mode

Study the whole scene carefully. Note the type of material used, rope, sash, sheet, et cetera. What is the body suspended from (rafter, door, tree, et cetera)? Are the feet touching the floor and will the material stretch? What type of noose was used, slipknot versus fixed knot?

1. Suicide

Of the three, suicide is the most common and homicide the least. Frequently, it is difficult to distinguish between suicide and accident.

Ask yourself if the victim could have killed himself in this manner: If so, was it suicide or accidental?

2. Accident

Accidents can occur with children at play, falling, or during autoerotic sexual behavior; therefore, great care should be exercised in investigating a hanging death.

a. Autoeroticism

If autoeroticism is involved in the death, there is usually sexually-oriented material present, such as photos, female clothing at the scene or actually being worn by the deceased and possibly a large mirror in front of the body.

A quick-release method for releasing the pressure should also be present; therefore, it is very important to reconstruct and/or photograph the mechanism.

Photograph any "fail-safe" mechanisms on the ligature.

Describe any soft materials between the ligature and the neck and/or elaborate contraptions attached to the bonds.

Note obvious indications that the decedent had been masturbating, i.e., sexual paraphernalia present, pornography, sexual toys, et cetera, and their position in relation to the body.

Describe the decedent's clothing. Can any clothing be identified as belonging to the opposite sex?

3. Homicide

Homicide by hanging is the least likely mode for hanging deaths. It is extremely difficult to suspend a person without a struggle or disabling them first.

Search for indications of a struggle, trauma, fingernails broken, objects knocked over or anything not consistent with asphyxia.

C. Specific Notes

1. When cutting the victim down, do it in such a way as to preserve any and all knots. Leave the ligature around the victim's neck. All knots are to be labeled and sent to the morgue with the victim.
2. Lividity should be settled in hands and feet if the body is hanging off the floor.
3. Care should be taken in examining bodies as the family may try to cover up suicide by claiming heart attack or other natural events.
4. The ligature marks may be less pronounced if the victim is kneeling or if the body is moved soon after death.
5. Check for chafing or material on the area to which the material is fastened. This may indicate whether this has happened before or if another person suspended the body by pulling over the beam.
6. Do not cut through any of the knots.
7. If possible, photograph the ligature at the scene and on the body.
8. The rope or other item used (belt, electrical cord, etc.), shall be cut leaving the noose or knot intact and preferably still around the neck of the deceased. Always attempt to keep the rope as close as possible as to how it was initially found. If the rope or other item has been removed by emergency personnel or someone else, you shall take this piece of evidence along with the body. The pathologist requires this evidence at the time of autopsy.
9. The ligature must accompany the body to the morgue.
10. If there are any other bindings on the body, do not remove them.
11. Do not remove the clothing for the purpose of viewing the body in the nude on hangings, as the clothing may assist the pathologist in making a cause of death determination.