
**NEVADA COUNTY
SHERIFF'S OFFICE**



CORONER'S DIRECTIVE

20
Effective Date 05/30/99
2/6/18

SUBJECT **HOMICIDES**

POLICY To establish an investigative procedure for the routine patrol officer initially responding to a homicide case

PURPOSE To provide the deputy coroner with general guidelines in the handling and writing of homicide investigations

CODE REFERENCE

CASE LAW

DEFINITIONS

PROCEDURE

A. Homicide Investigation (General)

1. Homicide is probably the most serious criminal offense with which the deputy coroner comes into contact. Most homicides are violent and have a considerable impact on those connected with them.
2. Although homicides are difficult to prosecute and a considerable amount of time is consumed by law enforcement agencies in their investigations, it is one of the cases that requires a minimum of investigation on the part of the coroner's office. Most of the facts of the case at issue will be determined by the law enforcement agency involved.
3. Pursuant to Government Code §27491.55, it is the policy of the Nevada County Sheriff's Office, to investigate any death that may be attributable to an act of homicide in our jurisdiction or any other criminal act which has occurred in our jurisdiction. This would include deaths occurring at Sutter Roseville Trauma center in Placer County, U.C. Davis Medical Center in Sacramento County, and Enloe Hospital in Butte County. This would not pertain to deaths occurring at Washoe Medical Center in Reno, Nevada.
4. There are some important aspects of a homicide investigation with which the

coroner's deputy will be concerned. These are primarily the cause and manner of death.

5. As with any investigation, there is no set of rules that must be followed. Each case has its own facts and circumstances which makes it unique; and each should be handled as the situation warrants. Common sense should guide the investigation. Some of the information the coroner's deputy must ascertain are outlined below. These are not necessarily all of the points which should be addressed in the investigation:

- a. Day, date, and time call was received;
- b. Manner in which call was received;
- c. From whom the call was received;
- d. Location of the call;
- e. Is the investigating agency requesting the pathologist to respond to the scene?
- f. Reason?

6. Keep in mind that the investigating agency has a job more important than yours at the homicide scene. Assist them as much as possible. Do not do anything without coordinating with the officer in charge of the investigation first.

7. Keep in mind that your final coroner's report will be public information, and include only basic information so as not to jeopardize the integrity of the prosecution of the homicide case. **Always request a separate case number from dispatch; keep the coroner's report separate from the investigative report.**

- B. When the deputy coroner is the first law enforcement officer to arrive on scene of a possible homicide:

1. If death is obvious (decomposed, et cetera):

- a. Do NOT approach the body.
- b. Request a supervisor and/or homicide detective(s).

2. If death is questionable:

- a. Approach the victim via a route that was least likely the suspect's route so as not to disturb potentially vital evidence.
- b. If possible, do not move the body while checking for signs of life.

- c. If no signs of life are found, retreat from the body via the SAME ROUTE used to approach it.
 - d. Request a supervisor and/or homicide detectives
 3. Secure the scene and stand by to await responding officers.
 4. Notify the coroner supervisor and pathologist on duty as soon as practical. Be prepared to answer all possible questions. In unusual cases, multiple homicides, or when requested by the investigating agency, the pathologist on duty may be called to the scene.
- C. Once homicide investigators have completed their work at the scene, a deputy coroner will be notified and resume control of the body and scene?
 1. When investigators have completed their work at the scene, a deputy coroner will be notified and resume control of the body and scene.
 2. Be sure to obtain confirmation from the lead investigator before entering the scene.
- D. Removing the Decedent
 1. DO NOT disturb the body until it is ready to be moved. Obtain permission from the investigating agency or scene commander.
 2. Make sure all diagrams are complete and all evidence and photos are taken.
 3. Conduct your physical examination (do NOT remove clothing). Do not disrupt clothing any more than necessary. The pathologist will remove the clothing at the autopsy.
 - a. Skin condition (temperature and color);
 - b. Presence of rigor (fixed, easily broken, none);
 - c. Presence/location of postmortem lividity;
 - d. Type(s) of wounds and location, if present.
 4. Ascertain if investigating agency wants the hands bagged (use paper bags only).
 5. Check for additional evidence or wounds under the deceased.
 6. Photograph, if necessary.

7. Always remove a homicide victim in a NEW and unused body bag.
8. All property taken in conjunction with a homicide is to be taken by the investigating agency as either coroner property and/or evidence of the crime.
9. The patrol deputy taking the coroner report will stay with the body until it is removed by the mortuary.

NOTE: All coroner's receipts issued in homicide cases are to indicate what property was taken by the deputy coroner only, allow investigators to document items taken for the criminal investigation on a separate receipt, allow other jurisdictions to provide their own receipts.

E. Be sure to have x-rays taken of the affected area(s) in all homicide cases which have a possibility of being caused by anything penetrating the body/skin (bullet, knife, et cetera), or if there are any suspected fractured bones.

F. Notification

Ascertain whether the investigating officers want you to make notification, or if they want to handle it.

G. Writing the Report

1. Information to include in the text of the coroner's report for homicides:

- a. Basic information from the reporting party, if appropriate;
- b. Basic information regarding the circumstances of the case (method used, manner, et cetera) from the investigating officer;
- c. Description of the scene;
- d. Description of the decedent's position and body condition;
- e. Clothing description and condition;
- f. Description of any visible wounds;
- g. Description of blood (where located, size and shape of spots, spatters, direction of flow, color and consistency, et cetera);
- h. Description of jewelry, if any (if none, indicate so);
- i. Details of body removal (x-rays, et cetera).

2. Below are listed the basic questions which MUST be answered/addressed in the deputy coroner's report:

a. Who

Who was the victim?

Who was the reporting party?

Who discovered the crime?

Who saw or heard anything?

b. What

What other agencies were or need to be notified?

What weapon(s) were used?

c. When

When was the crime committed?

When was the crime discovered?

When were the authorities notified?

When did the authorities arrive at scene?

When was the victim last seen?

d. Where

Where was the crime discovered?

Where was the victim found?

e. How

How was the crime discovered?

How was the crime reported?