
**NEVADA COUNTY
SHERIFF'S OFFICE**



CORONER'S DIRECTIVE

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Effective Date 05/30/99

2/6/18

SUBJECT **TRAFFIC FATALITIES**

POLICY To set a standard procedure for the handling of all traffic-related deaths.

PURPOSE To provide the deputy coroner with sufficient basic information in the investigation of traffic fatalities.

CODE REFERENCE

CASE LAW

DEFINITIONS

PROCEDURE

A. Body at the Scene

1. Respond as soon as possible. Drive within the speed limit unless otherwise directed.
2. Bodies and vehicles may need to be removed to clear the highway, reduce hazard, and to keep traffic moving. This is one time that a body may be moved prior to the arrival of the deputy coroner; however, the body should only be moved a minimal distance.

B. Investigation

1. Observations

The deputy coroner should first note his/her general observations upon arrival at the scene, i.e., location of vehicles, location of decedent, et cetera. Remember, this investigation is from the coroner standpoint, not the accident investigator.

2. Photograph the decedent and the scene showing relationship to the vehicle if possible.

3. First Responder's Statement

The report should contain a statement from the paramedic/person who first found the decedent. This should include the position in which the decedent was found and any intervention used.

4. Accident Investigator's Statement

The deputy will contact the accident investigator and obtain a statement as to how the accident occurred, noting the position of the decedent in the accident (driver, passenger, pedestrian, motorcyclist, et cetera), and the location and time that the investigating officer is listing on his/her report. It is also very important to determine if seatbelts were in use.

5. Multiple Fatalities

- a. A separate event number is to be given to each body, preferably starting with the driver. If bodies are still in the vehicle, tag them as they are removed, starting with the driver.
- b. Note accurate clothing description for each victim. This may be essential in placing occupants later or making identification. If there is doubt as to whom was driving, be sure the shoes of the victims are secured and taken as evidence, either by the deputy coroner or the investigating officer. These may be helpful in determining who was the driver.
- c. The general narrative of the report may be written under the first event number, but each event needs a separate on-scene viewing, including a description of the individual's body position, condition, clothing, et cetera.

6. Injuries

List injuries to victims and, if possible, ascertain what portion of the vehicle caused the injury. Note the skid marks and other marks. Determine in your own mind what happened and what the direction of travel had been. Officers have been known to make mistakes.

7. Personal Property and Special Notations

- a. Secure personal property from the decedent(s), vehicle(s), or investigating officer(s). Note where the property was found in the vehicle as a possible aid to identification. Note if an odor of an alcoholic beverage is present. Note what type and color of clothing was worn. Note whether or not seatbelts were being worn.
- b. Ascertain time and location of the accident as it will appear on the investigating officer's report.

8. Presence of Alcohol/Drugs

Be sure to check the decedent and the vehicle for any signs of alcohol, drug use, or paraphernalia. Further, check with the accident investigator to determine if any other victims in the vehicle are under suspicion of alcohol/drug use; **note this in your report.**

C. Body at Hospital

1. Respond as soon as possible.
2. Follow the steps listed under “Hospital Deaths” in this manual with special attention to the following:
 - a. Obtain from the lab any blood and/or urine taken on admittance
 - b. Obtain the EMS transport sheet.
 - c. Make a clothing inventory and description for **each** decedent if there are multiple deaths.
3. Make a positive identification of the victim(s) prior to attempting notification of next-of-kin.
4. Contact the investigating officer/agency to advise them of the death. Also, obtain the following:
 - a. Details of accident, time of accident, exact location where it happened and where the vehicle is stored.
 - b. Ascertain position of victim(s) in the vehicle. If possible, view the scene and the vehicles involved.
 - c. Was the decedent wearing a seatbelt?

D. Follow-up

1. Some background information will be of value if available: Where the victims were coming from, where they were going, and/or how long they had been on the road.
2. Mental and emotional condition will be helpful in differentiating a possible suicide vs. homicide vs. accident.