

Trauma at Autopsy

1136.1 PURPOSE AND SCOPE

Pursuant to Government Code 27491.1, the Coroner shall immediately notify the appropriate law enforcement agency when it is suspected that a death was occasioned by criminal means. As such, this policy establishes rules and guidelines should unsuspected trauma or other reasonable suspicion of foul play be discovered during the postmortem examination (external examination or autopsy).

1136.2 POLICY

When trauma is discovered during the postmortem examination that may be related to the cause of death, and where trauma was not previously suspected by the assigned deputy coroner, the contract pathologist shall immediately halt his/her examination and a member of the Forensics unit shall promptly notify the on-duty Watch Commander of his/her findings.

Upon receiving this notification, the on-duty Watch Commander shall respond to the autopsy suite and consult with the pathologist regarding his/her discovery of unsuspected trauma or other reasonable suspicion of foul play. If the source of the trauma cannot be reasonably explained as non-criminal based on the decedent's known history and/or circumstances of death, the watch commander shall immediately notify the law enforcement agency having jurisdiction over the death investigation.

1136.3 AUTOPSY PROCEEDINGS

Any postmortem examination of deaths meeting the criteria of this policy shall not proceed without photographic coverage by the Orange County Crime Lab. The law enforcement agency having jurisdiction over the death investigation shall be afforded the opportunity to have a representative present at the postmortem examination, and shall be given reasonable time to respond to the Coroner Division Facility.