

Toxicology Request

1133.1 PURPOSE AND SCOPE

A forensic toxicology screen is often a critical component of the death investigation and in some cases is required by law. This policy establishes the categories of death investigations that shall require a toxicology screen, as well as the rules and guidelines for submitting a toxicology request.

1133.2 DEATHS REQUIRING A TOXICOLOGY SCREEN

The following categories of acute deaths shall require a toxicology screen in addition to the postmortem examination (complete autopsy or external examination):

- (a) Any death where a cause of death is not discovered at autopsy, i.e. pending deaths
- (b) Suspected overdoses or poisonings
- (c) Suspected neglect deaths, with alleged under-administration or withholding of medications
- (d) Suspected carbon monoxide deaths, including those resulting from scuba, aircraft, or fire related incidents
- (e) Drownings
- (f) Industrial accidents
- (g) All other traumatic deaths
- (h) State hospital patient deaths where a Coroner postmortem examination was performed
- (i) Sudden and Unexpected Infant Deaths, and Sudden and Unexpected Deaths of Children
- (j) Deaths that are known or suspected to be the result of a homicide
- (k) Officer Involved Deaths
- (l) When the death occurred while in the custody of a law enforcement agency
- (m) Any death where the handling Deputy Coroner and/or contract forensic pathologist believe that case history or circumstances warrant a toxicological assessment

1133.2.1 DELAYED DEATHS NOT REQUIRING A TOXICOLOGY SCREEN

A delayed death, defined as any death occurring more than 24 hours after the incident and where ante-mortem specimens are unavailable, does not always require a toxicology screen. Toxicology screens on a delayed death may be performed using the postmortem blood sample if the handling Deputy Coroner and/or contract forensic pathologist believe that case history or circumstances warrant a toxicological assessment.

- (a) The following deaths are excluded from this exception and shall always require a toxicology screen, regardless of delay or existence of ante-mortem specimens:

Orange County Sheriff-Coroner Department

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1. Suspected overdoses on hospital medications
2. Deaths that are known or suspected to be the result of a homicide
3. Officer Involved Deaths
4. When the death occurred while in the custody of a law enforcement agency

1133.3 PREPARING AND SUBMITTING THE TOXICOLOGY REQUEST

The handling Deputy Coroner shall be responsible for preparing and submitting toxicology requests on all cases outline in section 1133.2 of this policy within 4 working days of the postmortem examination. On the request, the Deputy Coroner shall provide a brief statement regarding the circumstances of death, including any suspected drugs or medications that may have been prescribed to or consumed by the decedent. The Deputy Coroner shall also list any paraphernalia that was discovered in the course of his/her scene investigation. The Deputy Coroner shall send the completed toxicology request to the Forensics Unit. Upon receipt of the request, a Forensic Assistant shall transport both the requests and the necessary specimens to the Orange County Crime Lab for toxicology screening.