

## Field Responses

### 1105.1 PURPOSE AND SCOPE

California Government Code 27491 specifies all deaths requiring an inquiry by the Coroner. California Government Code 27491.2 authorizes, but does not require, the Coroner to render a field response where the death falls within the Coroner's jurisdiction. The purpose of this policy is to establish those deaths where the inquiry shall include a field response by the assigned Deputy Coroner.

#### 1105.1.1 DEFINITION

A field response is defined as an in-person response by Deputy Coroners to the death location, and/or any related incident location, to conduct a death investigation.

- (a) All field responses to locations other than the death scene shall be made within the parameters of the 4th amendment.

### 1105.2 DEATHS REQUIRING A FIELD RESPONSE

The following deaths shall require a field response by the assigned Deputy Coroner:

- (a) All known or suspected homicide deaths.
  - 1. If the time from the initial injury to the time of death is significantly delayed, and the law enforcement agency declines to respond to the death location due to lack of forensic value, Deputy Coroners may also waive his/her field response.
- (b) All deaths occurring while in the custody of a law enforcement agency.
- (c) All deaths when it is known or suspected that a peace officer was involved.
- (d) All unnatural deaths occurring outside of medical facilities.
- (e) Deaths that occur while in the emergency room under any of the following circumstances:
  - 1. When death is a result of an accident or injury of an acute nature.
  - 2. When an acute drowning is known or suspected as being related to the death.
  - 3. When acute asphyxiation, of a non-natural nature, is known or suspected.
  - 4. When acute drug or ethanol overdose is known or suspected.
  - 5. When the death is known or suspected as resulting from suicide.
- (f) Natural deaths that occur outside of medical facilities when any of the following circumstances apply:
  - 1. When the death occurs outside of a private residence or temporary place of residence.
    - (a) A temporary residence may include motel rooms, board and care homes, and other similar facilities.

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2. When the circumstances surrounding the death do not support a reasonable expectation of sudden death.
  3. When the reporting party suspects neglect or reports poor living conditions.
- (g) All deaths suspected as being a result of SUIDS.
- (h) All deaths that occur at the Fairview State Developmental Care Facility.
- (i) All deaths of unidentified persons.
- (j) Residential deaths where the decedent was unattended at the time of death.
1. For purposes of this policy, unattended is defined as not having another party present in or about the residence at the time of death.
- (k) Any other case under Coroner jurisdiction where the circumstances are such that prudent investigative practice would require any of the following actions by Deputy Coroners:
1. On-scene examination of the body
  2. Identification confirmation
  3. Evaluation of the scene
  4. In-person interview with witnesses
  5. Collection of evidence
  6. Collection of decedent's personal effects or sealing of the residence

### **1105.3 EXCEPTIONS TO THE FIELD RESPONSE**

Field responses to emergency room deaths as described in section 1104.2.E (emergency room deaths) may be waived at the discretion of the assigned Deputy Coroner when there is no investigative or forensic value to be gained from responding (for example: no law enforcement or witnesses present, no property or evidence to collect) and a body exam will be performed upon the decedent's arrival to the Coroner Division Facility. Field responses to deaths in category 1104.2.J.2 (unattended deaths) may also be waived at the discretion of the assigned Deputy Coroner if the time the decedent was left unattended is minimal, there are no other investigative factors necessitating a response, and there is strong evidence to show that the death is not unexpected (for example: the decedent is under the care of a doctor for significant medical history or chronic illness, and there are no other circumstances to suggest an unnatural death). Any other exceptions to this policy shall be approved by the on-duty Watch Commander and documented in the Coroner Investigator's written report.

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#### **1105.4 RESPONSE TIME**

Deputy Coroners shall make every effort to respond to the death location as quickly as possible. Immediate response shall be made to any death on or near railroad tracks causing a delay in rail service, and other deaths in public view.

#### **1105.5 DEATHS REQUIRING THE DEPUTY CORONER TO REMAIN ON SCENE UNTIL REMOVAL OF THE BODY**

Deputy Coroners shall remain on scene until body removal when investigating the following deaths:

- (a) Deaths that occur while in custody of a law enforcement agency
- (b) Deaths that occur at the hands of a peace officer
- (c) Deaths resulting from homicide
- (d) Deaths in public view

This section does not apply when the decedent is in a hospital setting and being maintained on life support for the purposes of organ procurement.