

# **Homicide Death Scene Investigation Protocol Involving Officer and Public Safety**

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To: Forensic Investigation Unit

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## **Introduction and Background**

Following a high profile police officer involved shooting resulting in a homicide that occurred in our jurisdiction circa August 2014, similar deaths around the country have precipitated intense civil unrest. This has caused unsafe conditions for law enforcement agencies and the citizens of the community.

To defuse such a circumstance the medical examiner's office has met with representatives of the prosecuting attorney's office, command staff of the St. Louis County Police Department, and command staff of the Major Case Squad of Greater St. Louis. During this meeting all agencies involved concur the following protocol may be a possible solution to circumvent civil unrest.

At the direction of Dr. Mary Case, Chief Medical Examiner, the following protocol will be followed immediately as of this date. The following homicide death scene protocol is for ***"Extraordinary"*** situations only, and not the daily operational homicide scene investigations.

## **Definition of 'Extraordinary Situation'**

The extraordinary situation is wherein there is a homicide scene investigation, with the body of the deceased person remaining at the scene. As the first responding police officers, homicide detectives and evidence technicians are working this death scene a gathering of on-lookers starts to develop. If at any time during the death scene investigation that scene becomes volatile or unsafe for those investigators working the scene, and for public safety, the crime scene supervisor will notify the Medical Examiner's Office (MEO).

A crime scene supervisor is a person of police rank who is at the unsafe crime scene. The crime scene supervisor will tell the MEO forensic investigator that the scene is unsafe, and that our designated transportation service (Lonning Mortuary Service) is needed at the scene expeditiously. Prior to this notification being made to the MEO, a designated on scene "Staging Area" will have been identified by the police. The crime scene supervisor will instruct the MEO forensic investigator to make the notification to our transportation unit personnel, and to have them respond to the designated staging area, and to that location only.

When making the notification to the transport service call taker, instruct them this is a "priority response". Make the call taker commit to an estimated time of arrival (ETA). If the call taker provides you with an unsatisfactory ETA—specifically arrival to the scene is more than one hour—then the contract conveyance service (Lonning Mortuary Service) must have a contingent back-up transportation service that will be notified. Once the transportation vehicle and personnel are in staging, the police will coordinate the safe recovery of the deceased person from the scene.

## **Options for Safe Recovery of a Decedent**

The following are some of the recovery options discussed.

- Emergency Medical Service (EMS) will convey the decedent directly to the Medical Examiner's Office.
- Emergency Medical Service (EMS) will convey the decedent to the staging area or other designated location. Transport service personnel will then take custody of the decedent for transport to the medical examiner's office.
- Police will provide escort and protective cover for the transport service personnel during body recovery, and exit escort from the hostile scene.
- St. Louis County Police – Tactical Operations personnel will take possession of the transport service vehicle. Tactical Operations personnel will drive this vehicle to the recovery area, execute the recovery of the decedent, and return to the designated staging area.

In these situation the MEO forensic investigator ***“will not respond to the scene”***. Once the deceased person is safely recovered, the transportation unit will convey the decedent to the MEO morgue suite as usual.

If the homicide detectives need the MEO forensic investigator to inspect the deceased person for documentation of trauma and for seizure of items for the police investigation, this will be done at the MEO. Examples of such items could be photographic media for the identification process or cellular telephone for investigative purpose. Thorough documentation of your actions to include the opening of the secure morgue transportation bag at the MEO must be clearly articulated in your investigative report.

The supervisory personnel of the St. Louis County Police Bureau of Crimes Against Persons, Bureau of Identification, and Major Case Squad of Greater St. Louis now have my personal cellular telephone number. In the event an extraordinary incident occurs and there is a long delay by the MEO forensic investigator responding to a pager call, I am the contingency back-up. Notification will be made to me and this protocol will be activated. I will notify the on-duty MEO forensic investigator that this has occurred so that they can coordinate their investigation with the homicide detectives.

The purpose of this new protocol is “Safety”. The official protocol is being drafted by the prosecuting attorney's office. Once reviewed by the police and Dr. Case, then there will be an official document.

As of now this is the standard to be followed. If you have any questions do not hesitate contacting me.

Terrance Ledbetter, Chief Investigator