

**OFFICE OF EMERGENCY SERVICES  
LAKE COUNTY SHERIFF'S OFFICE  
2020  
LAKE COUNTY OPERATIONAL AREA  
Emergency Operations Plan  
Mass Fatalities Incident Annex**

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**For**

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## MASS FATALITY

A mass fatality incident is defined as any occurrence of multiple deaths that overwhelms the usual routine capability of the Coroner's Division. An event that causes the death of 20 or more individuals will be designated a "Mass Fatality Incident."

A Mass Fatality Incident may also have elements of a "Mass Casualty Incident," where the triage, treatment and transportation of the injured will be the priority, followed by the Mass Fatality response. Mass Casualty procedures are performed under protocols developed by the Fire Service and Public Health/Emergency Medical Services Agency and hospitals.

### I. STATUTORY AUTHORITY

The Coroner's legal authority is established pursuant to California Government Code §(s) 27471, 27491 et al, 27504.1, California Health and Safety Code §(s) 7102, 102850 and other statutes as specified by applicable code(s).

The Lake County Sheriff is the Coroner for Lake County, and all sworn deputies are also Deputy Coroners. Lake County Ord. No. 361, § 1, 1953; Ord. No. 2159, § 3, 6-1-93.

### II. OVERVIEW

The Sheriff/Coroner is responsible for the collection, identification and disposition of decedents during conditions of disaster or extreme peril. Responsibilities include, but are not limited, to the following:

1. Identify human remains and provide adequate, secure and decent storage.
2. Determine the cause and manner of death.
3. Inventory and protect personal effects found with the decedent.
4. Locate and notify next-of-kin.
5. Release decedent information-only the Coroner's is authorized to release decedent information including, but not limited to the identity of decedents, number of fatalities, nature of injuries, etc.
6. Release remains to an appropriate mortuary or cemetery as approved by next-of-kin or by statute.

It is likely that fatalities will occur during a major disaster. Communications and transportation may be disrupted. In the event of an area-wide disaster the coroner may not be able to immediately respond to all fatality sites as reported by local agencies. Although situations may vary, planning remains the same.

7. First responders (e.g., local fire, law enforcement or other emergency personnel) or health and medical personnel will in most cases initially detect and evaluate the potential or actual incident, assess casualties (if any), and determine whether assistance is required.
8. Of primary importance is the timely rescue of the living and the search for survivors. While it is necessary to preserve the integrity of the death scene for investigation, first responders may move a decedent if it is necessary to save another. In all other cases decedents shall not be moved or disturbed without authorization of the Coroner (California Government Code § 27491.2[b]).
9. In the event fatalities occur, the Sheriff's Office is to be notified immediately to evaluate the magnitude of the event and ensure an appropriate response.
10. The incidents that are most likely to produce fatalities that could activate this annex are:
  - a) Transportation (primarily tourist, school or transit bus)
  - b) Wildland Fire
  - c) Structure (hotel or multi-family building)
  - d) Criminal Act
  - e) Aircraft Mishap

### III. PROCEDURES

#### THE SHERIFF/CORONER'S RESPONSE WILL CONSIST OF FOUR MAJOR COMPONENTS:

1. Logistics - Identify and compile all necessary supplies and resource
2. Scene - Evaluation and Body Recovery
3. Morgue Facility - Body Identification and Processing – Determination of Cause and Manner of Death.
4. Family Assistance Center - Ante mortem Information – Assisting Families

The Operational Area Emergency Operations Center may be activated to support a Mass Fatality (or Casualty) response.

### IV. LOGISTICS

Personnel, Equipment and Supplies:

Designate Command staff member(s) to handle logistics, notify required personnel, monitor supplies (log in and out), order supplies as necessary and arrange transport of supplies where needed. Required duties and supplies may include:

1. Notification of off-duty personnel and personnel scheduling;
2. Transportation for personnel, i.e., cars, vans, etc. (transportation may have to be arranged for responding personnel);
3. Transportation for bodies/remains;
4. Refrigerated Trucks/Containers (if necessary) – for scene and/or morgue facility;

5. Protective Clothing – coveralls, gloves, boots, coats, hard hats, rain gear, etc.;
6. Body Bags – inventory and distribute/order as necessary;
7. Opaque sealable, markable bags for unassociated remains;
8. Clear heavy duty sealable bags for personal effects;
9. Paint – for marking the exterior of body bags and recovery sites as necessary;
10. Flags – stakes (similar to irrigation flags) for marking location of body, body parts, etc.;
11. Toe tags – sufficient tags with “Sharpie” permanent pens (or similar) to permanently mark the tags;
12. Bio-hazard bags and boxes – for safe storage and disposal of biohazard debris;
13. Photographic equipment/film/storage devices – to document the scene, body location, body parts, personal effects, etc. Crime scene investigative tools may be useful in these situations;
14. Field report forms;
15. Clip on identification badges for all personnel;
16. Food and beverages for morgue personnel and recovery teams – this may be handled by OES/Red Cross personnel, but ensure teams are taken care of in this regard since they often follow the primary responders and EMS personnel and may be “forgotten” and
17. A private space for staff members to rest, and meet with supporting staff as necessary (CISM).

## **V. SCENE**

### **1. Evaluation Team:**

An evaluation team consisting minimally of two senior members of the Sheriff’s Staff, i.e., the Investigative Lieutenant and Sergeant, or Coroner investigator will go to the site of the mass fatality incident, to evaluate the following:

- a) Number of fatalities involved.
- b) Condition of the bodies, i.e., burned, dismembered, crushed.
- c) Preliminary determination of cause/criminality.
- d) Difficulty anticipated in the recovery of the bodies and the types and numbers of personnel and equipment needed, i.e., structural stability of recovery area, the need for search and rescue teams, heavy equipment, etc.
- e) Location of the incident as far as accessibility and the difficulty that may be encountered in transporting bodies from the scene.
- f) Examination of the scene will be used to formulate a plan relative to documentation, body recovery and transportation.
- g) Number of personnel possibly needed to staff the morgue for identification, body examination/autopsy, evidence/property collection, notification, etc.
- h) Evaluate the scene for possible chemical, radiological, or biological hazards.
- i) Evaluate the need for remote fatality collection points. Possible sites are:
  - i. Lampson Airport,
  - ii. Lake County Fairgrounds,
  - iii. local school athletic fields, undeveloped fields, etc.

- j) Evaluate the need for a family assistance center, i.e., are most of the victims local whereby the families would also be local and housing would not be a critical issue; is the incident one where the bodies are mostly from out of the particular area (such as an airplane disaster) and responding families would be in need of housing/transportation.

***Note: In the event of multiple fatality sites several evaluation teams may be dispatched from the Sheriff's Office at the direction of Command Staff to meet with local emergency response agencies and evaluate the individual scenes.***

If the incident is of such magnitude that existing personnel and equipment will be insufficient to manage the fatality recovery and processing, the Sheriff's Office of Emergency Services will be notified immediately. It shall be the responsibility of the preliminary evaluation team(s) to estimate resources needed and notify the OpArea EOC. Additional resources available include but are not limited to the following:

- i. Coroner Utilization of allied agency law enforcement personnel for coroner duties under the ICS/SEMS model.
- ii. Mutual aid response by outside counties as directed by the Office of Emergency Services.
- iii. Federal Disaster Mortuary Operational Response Team (DMORT) aid provided through FEMA as requested by the Office of Emergency Services.

Sheriff/Coroner's response will be coordinated with other allied agencies using ICS and SEMS guidelines and procedures.

## **2. Preliminary Organization:**

Organize personnel and equipment prior to recording and moving bodies.

- a) If the body(s) or area is contaminated with radiological, biological or chemical agents, personnel equipped with and trained in the use of appropriate personal protective equipment must perform the recovery function.
- b) Arrange with logistics personnel for all necessary equipment for documentation and removal.
- c) Use departmental guidelines for necessary personal protective equipment (masks, gloves, etc.).

## **3. Body Recovery and Transport Team(s):**

Body recovery team(s) shall document each recovery on the proper report form. The team should be comprised of the following personnel\*:

- a) Coroner/Investigator

- b) Second investigator-law enforcement, fire or other emergency services personnel may be utilized in this role if necessary
- c) Scribe and photographer

***\*This is an ideal composition. If qualified coroner personnel are unavailable, a Coroner Liaison, trained in coroner functions, will ensure properly trained personnel are assigned to this function.***

Body transport team(s) should be comprised of a minimum of two personnel to transport decedents to the morgue or designated fatality collection point.

#### **4. Body Numbering:**

All numbers will be assigned at the scene. Use simple numbers, i.e., 1, 2, 3, . . . Body part numbers should be P1, P2, P3, . . . Personal effect numbers should be E1, E2, E3, . . .

In the event of multiple fatality scenes, a block of numbers may be assigned to each scene for tracking purposes, i.e., #1 - #100 for Lakeport area fatalities, #101 - #200 for Clearlake area fatalities, etc. All cases will be assigned permanent case numbers at a later time. The Coroner or designee will assign the appropriate numbering system. Body bags should be numbered with the appropriate number in a contrasting paint or marker color, on the exterior of the body bag for visibility.

#### **5. Body Tagging/Marking:**

Place an appropriately marked "toe tag" on the body and on the bag zipper. Personal effects recovered with the body should be packaged in marked clear baggies (marked with the corresponding body or body part number) and placed inside the body bag with the body. Tags should minimally have the following information:

- a) Name (if known)
- b) Race/Sex/Age (if known or approximate age)
- c) Hair/Eye Color
- d) Height/Weight/Build
- e) Location Recovered From
- f) Date/Time Recovered
- g) Recovery/Case No.

## **VI. MORGUE FACILITY**

### **1. Supervision:**

A Sheriff's Command Staff member (or designee) will supervise the morgue operation.

**2. Security:**

Morgue security will be strictly maintained. All assigned personnel will prominently display issued identification. Absolutely no unauthorized personnel will be allowed into the morgue facility.

If fatalities are the result of radiological, biological or chemical contamination and the bodies are contaminated, they will not be received into the central morgue without complete decontamination procedures being completed. In the event decontamination cannot be performed, contaminated bodies will be removed to and stored at a designated site with appropriate storage facilities and security. Appropriate storage facilities and methods will be determined by the Coroner and Public Health officials.

**3. Supplies:**

Ensure that all necessary supplies are assembled or requested. This function is to be coordinated by the logistics personnel. Morgue facility supplies may include, but are not limited to the following items:

- a. Security – identification badges for all assigned personnel
- b. Protective Clothing – coveralls, gloves, shoe covers, masks, face shields, hats, etc.
- c. Morgue Supplies – autopsy tools, recovery vials and implements, blades, etc.
- d. Morgue photographic equipment
- e. X-Ray Supplies (including dental systems)
- f. Office Supplies – pens, paper, etc.
- g. Office Equipment – copiers, computers, fax machine(s), etc.
- h. Refrigerated Trucks – steel walls/floors preferable

**4. Records:**

There must be dedicated staff to assemble and maintain both ante-mortem and post-mortem decedent records and ensure they are associated with the appropriate decedent's case.

**5. Receiving:**

A receiving team will be assembled to ensure accurate receipt of all bodies coming into the morgue facility or designated satellite fatality collection point. The number of the receiving team will be dictated by the nature of the event and number of anticipated decedents coming to the facility.

Each body received shall be documented in the designated log-in book by date, time received, decedent name if known, body recovery number (number assigned in the field) person receiving the body and person delivering the body. The staff member(s) assigned to body tracking must know the location and final disposition of bodies at all times.

The receiving team is also responsible for maintaining a “matrix” display showing bodies in, place of recovery, their identification (if known) and their disposition.

***Note: Three (3) login books should be used; one for bodies, one for body parts and one for disassociated personal effects (not attached to a body) recovered by field staff. Disassociated personal effects should be collected, documented and retained by the local law enforcement agency with jurisdiction over the scene and collected by Coroner’s staff only as a “last resort” measure.***

**6. Morgue Staff:**

Morgue staff requirements will be dictated by the nature and extent of the event. Morgue staff may be augmented by assigned law enforcement personnel, trained mortuary personnel, or other emergency responders as assigned. On-site morgue staff may include:

- a. Body Handlers – to move bodies
- b. Body Trackers – to escort the body and all associated paperwork from station to station in the order so intended – maintains integrity of body and documentation
- c. Forensic Pathologist – to perform autopsies and/or determine the cause of death
- d. Pathology Assistant – to assist the pathologist (trained Sheriff’s Office personnel or other qualified personnel as identified by competent authority)
- e. Personal Effects Officer – to document and secure all personal effects
- f. Photographer – to photographically record the decedent as received and as required by forensic staff
- g. Photography Assistant – to assist the photographer in accurate recordation of photographs
- h. X-Ray Technicians
- i. Odonatologists
- j. Forensic Anthropologists

## **VII. MORGUE FACILITY – Stations**

**1. Anatomical Charting/Personal Effects/Clothing:**

If evidence is to be collected, a law enforcement officer may also be present at the receiving station to take custody of the evidence. The personal effects and clothing should be collected, inventoried and bagged with the appropriate case number. All personal effects and clothing should be placed in a secure area with a designated person in charge of the area. The following procedures should be followed:

- a) Photographs – photographs should be taken before clothing is removed. The case number shall be displayed in each photograph.



- b) Clothing and Personal Effects– clothing and personal effects shall be described and recovered according to accepted procedure.

***Note: All paperwork generated at this station should be given to the “tracker” and placed in the case file to go with the body to the next station.***

**2. Fingerprints:**

Fingerprint specialists should attempt to print all bodies. Fingers should only be removed on non-viewable bodies at the discretion of the Coroner or designee. If fingers are removed they should be placed in a sealed bag with the case number and placed back with the body after processing.

**3. Photography:**

Full body photographs shall be taken of each body with the case number displayed in each photograph.

**4. X-Ray/Radiology:**

Type and number of x-rays will be determined depending on the type of incident. All x-rays should be given to the “tracker” to go with the body through the rest of the stations.

**5. Dental:**

Odontology exams are to be conducted as necessary or as required by statute. Jaws are only removed on non-viewable bodies or at the direction/discretion of the Coroner or designee. All records, charts, etc. become part of the case file.

**6. Autopsy:**

The forensic pathologist and assigned pathology assistant shall perform an autopsy to the extent deemed appropriate and necessary.

**7. Optional Stations:**

- a) Anthropology
- b) Digital X-Ray Examination

## **VIII. FAMILY ASSISTANCE CENTER**

A member of the Sheriff’s Command Staff must be in charge of the initial setting up of the Family Assistance Center due to the Coroner’s statutory responsibility to identify decedents and notify next-of-kin. Additional personnel may be recruited from the Law Enforcement & Fire Chaplains Association, Behavioral Health and local mortuary association due to their expertise in dealing with decedents and families of decedents and supplemented with other personnel as necessary.

Site selection is important to ensure it is away from the disaster scene while still accessible to responding family members and near motels/hotels that may be needed by responding family members. The Family Assistance Center should be large enough and have sufficient parking to comfortably accommodate the anticipated number of persons utilizing its services. The site should also lend itself to both parking lot and building security.

**1. Components of Family Assistance Center:**

Below are examples of the organizations/services necessary for the operation of and available to the Family Assistance Center:

- a) Coroner/General Administration – for interviewing responding family members and collection of ante mortem records, family information and death notification.
- b) American Red Cross/Salvation Army – for family support, transportation, housing, supplies, equipment, volunteer coordination.
- c) Lake County and local cities office(s) of social services, family assistance, etc.
- d) Security – parking lot, outside check points, inside check points, family escorts
- e) Food Service – for families and staff.
- f) Communications – telephones/cell phones/computers/WiFi for families and Family Assistance Center staff.
- g) Mental Health – family support, staff support, assisting with death notification.
- h) Medical – family care, staff care, assisting with death notification.
- i) Religious Support – family support, staff support, assisting with death notification.
- j) Site Support – custodial, site maintenance.
- k) Transportation.
- l) District Attorney’s Office, Victim Witness-For emergency aid/funds, Family Support, help with applications for victim services.

**IX. LOCAL JURISDICTION RESPONSIBILITIES/REQUIREMENTS**

Local jurisdictions (cities) will provide coroner liaison personnel to assist in body recovery, transport and/or handling as necessary pursuant to ICS/SEMS guidelines.

The “Mass Fatalities Annex” does not supersede local jurisdictions mission to investigate any criminal act associated with the mass casualty/fatality event. Pursuant to Government Code §(s) 27491, the Coroner and local law enforcement will cooperate in the investigation of death(s) suspected to be the result of a criminal act.

**X. MUTUAL AID**

Lake County is a part of Region II in the State of California Coroner's Mutual Aid System. Alameda County is the host Regional Coordinator. In the event of a Mass Fatality incident that exceeds Lake

County's capabilities, the Op Area EOC will request regional mutual aid through Alameda County REOC Coroner/Medical Examiner Mutual Aid Coordinator.