

# **FORT FAIRFIELD POLICE DEPARTMENT**

## **Standard Operating Procedure**

### **312 – DEATH INVESTIGATIONS**

|                              |                                                          |
|------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Effective Date</b>        | <b>July 28, 2026</b>                                     |
| <b>Legacy SOPs Replaced</b>  | <b>SOP 41G – Death and Probable Death Investigations</b> |
| <b>Review Date</b>           | <b>July 28, 2027</b>                                     |
| <b>Policy Classification</b> | <b>Operational</b>                                       |
| <b>Authority</b>             | <b>Chief of Police</b>                                   |
| <b>Version</b>               | <b>1.0</b>                                               |

## **I. PURPOSE**

To establish procedures for the investigation of deaths, probable deaths, suspicious deaths, and missing persons in accordance with Maine law, the Maine Attorney General's (AG's) published protocol, the Medical Examiner's Act, MCJA Board of Trustees standards, and accepted investigative practices.

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## **II. POLICY**

It is the policy of the agency to recognize the critical importance of death scene control, evidence preservation, timely notification, interagency coordination, and thorough investigative practices in all death investigations.

Agency personnel shall comply with the Maine Attorney General's Protocol for the Investigation of Deaths, Probable Deaths, and Missing Persons (See SOP 001 – Official Forms & References Library), the Medical Examiner's Act, applicable statutory reporting requirements, and agency policy. Officers shall assist the Office of the Chief Medical Examiner (OCME), the Office of the Attorney General, and other authorized investigative agencies as required by law and AG protocol.

The agency recognizes that death investigations frequently involve complex legal, forensic, evidentiary, medical, and public safety considerations. Officers shall preserve scenes, protect evidence, maintain investigative integrity, and avoid unnecessary disturbance of the deceased or surrounding scene unless immediate safety or lifesaving concerns require otherwise.

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## **III. DEFINITIONS**

**Attorney General's (AG's) Protocol** – The current Maine Attorney General's Protocol for the Investigation of Deaths, Probable Deaths, and Missing Persons, including related investigative directives and reporting requirements.

**Death Investigation** – Any investigation involving an actual death, probable death, suspicious death, unexplained death, or circumstances in which death is reasonably suspected.

**Major Crimes Unit (MCU)** – The Maine State Police Major Crimes Unit or other designated criminal investigative division authorized to investigate deaths under Maine Attorney General protocols.

**Medical Examiner's Act** – The provisions of Maine law governing the Office of the Chief Medical Examiner and medico-legal death investigations.

**Office of the Chief Medical Examiner (OCME)** – The State of Maine Office of the Chief Medical Examiner responsible for medico-legal death investigations and determinations regarding cause and manner of death.

**Probable Death** – Circumstances in which death appears imminent or reasonably anticipated, even if death has not yet occurred.

**Scene Control** – Measures taken to preserve, secure, protect, document, and restrict access to a death scene or probable death scene.

**Suspicious Death** – Any death involving known or suspected criminal conduct, violence, unexplained circumstances, unusual circumstances, or any death that reasonably suggests foul play may be involved.

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## IV. LEGAL AUTHORITY

### A. General Authority

Officers shall investigate deaths, probable deaths, and related incidents in accordance with:

- The United States Constitution;
- The Constitution of the State of Maine;
- 22 M.R.S. Chapter 711;
- 25 M.R.S. Chapter 257;
- Maine Attorney General investigative protocols;
- MCJA Board of Trustees minimum standards; and
- Agency policy.

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## **B. Medical Examiner Reporting Requirements**

Maine law requires that certain deaths, probable deaths, suspicious deaths, and deaths involving unusual circumstances be reported to the Office of the Chief Medical Examiner (OCME). Officers shall comply with all mandatory reporting requirements and notification procedures.

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## **C. Attorney General Investigative Authority**

The Attorney General maintains statutory authority over homicide investigations and investigations involving deadly force by law enforcement officers acting in the performance of official duties. Officers shall comply with all AG investigative directives and scene preservation requirements.

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# **V. OPERATIONS**

## **A. Initial Response** *(See Appendix B – Death Investigation Response Checklist)*

The first responding officer at a death scene, probable death scene, or suspected death investigation shall ensure scene safety, determine whether medical aid is required, request emergency medical services when appropriate, identify people who are involved and potential witnesses, secure the scene, and notify supervisory personnel.

If there is evidence of life, officers shall initiate or facilitate appropriate lifesaving measures consistent with officer training and scene safety considerations.

Officers shall avoid disturbing the body, evidence, or surrounding scene unless necessary to preserve life or prevent immediate destruction of evidence.

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## **B. Scene Security and Preservation**

Officers shall establish and maintain scene control measures appropriate to the circumstances. Scene security responsibilities include restricting unauthorized access, preserving evidence, protecting transient evidence, separating witnesses when appropriate, and preventing unnecessary contamination or disturbance of the scene.

Officers shall document the names and identifying information of people present at the scene and maintain a record of personnel entering or leaving secured areas when feasible.

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## **C. Notifications**

Officers or supervisors shall make notifications required by law, AG protocol, or policy. Notifications may include:

- Office of the Chief Medical Examiner;
- State Police Major Crimes Unit;
- Office of the Attorney General;
- Maine Drug Enforcement Agency;
- Office of the State Fire Marshal;
- Maine Warden Service;
- Department of Corrections;
- Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA);
- Maine Bureau of Labor Standards; or
- Other authorized agencies.

Notifications should occur as soon as practical and when consistent with maintaining scene safety and operational needs.

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## **D. Suspicious or Unexplained Deaths**

Any death involving violence, apparent criminal conduct, suspicious circumstances, unexplained injuries, unusual circumstances, or potential foul play shall be treated as suspicious until an investigation reasonably establishes otherwise.

Officers shall secure and preserve the scene, notify MCU and OCME, avoid unnecessary movement of the body, preserve physical evidence, and document statements, observations, and scene conditions.

All deaths involving gunshot wounds shall initially be treated as suspicious until investigative findings establish otherwise.

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## **E. Deaths While in Custody or Confinement**

Deaths or probable deaths occurring while a person is:

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- In police custody;
- Confined in a correctional facility;
- Held in a detention facility;
- Under a mental health commitment order; or
- In protective custody

shall immediately be reported to OCME and MCU, and other appropriate agencies consistent with AG protocol.

Officers shall preserve the scene, protect evidence, document involved personnel, and cooperate fully with authorized investigative agencies.

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## **F. Police-Involved Deaths and Deadly Force Incidents**

Any use of deadly force by a law enforcement officer acting within the performance of official duties, regardless of outcome, shall immediately be reported in accordance with AG protocol and agency policy.

Officers shall preserve the scene, protect involved officers and witnesses, secure evidence, avoid unauthorized public statements, comply with AG investigative directives, and coordinate with authorized investigators.

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## **G. Fire, Explosion, and Hunting Deaths**

Deaths involving fires, explosions, or hunting incidents require notification of OCME and coordination with the Office of the State Fire Marshal or the Maine Warden Service, respectively.

Officers shall secure the scene, preserve evidence, protect the body from unnecessary disturbance, make required notifications, and assist authorized investigators as requested.

## **H. Child Deaths**

Deaths involving children, particularly children under the age of three years, require immediate notification of MCU and OCME.

Officers shall recognize that child death investigations frequently involve specialized forensic, medical, and investigative considerations and shall preserve all potential evidence accordingly.

## **I. Suicides**

Deaths or probable deaths involving suspected suicide require notification to OCME and, when required by protocol, MCU.

Suicide notes, electronic communications, recordings, text messages, or other materials potentially expressing suicidal intent shall be preserved and handled consistent with law and AG protocol.

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## **J. Drug Overdose Deaths**

Suspected drug overdose deaths or probable overdose deaths require notification to OCME, MDEA and MCU, as well as scene photography, proper evidence collection, and documentation of medications and paraphernalia.

Officers shall properly inventory medications, suspected controlled substances, drug paraphernalia, and related evidence. Use Appendix C to document the following:

- Drug name;
  - Dosage;
  - Date prescribed;
  - Number prescribed;
  - Number remaining;
  - Prescribing physician; and
  - Dispensing pharmacy.
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## **K. In-Water Deaths**

Deaths involving people found in water require notification to OCME and MCU.

Officers shall recognize that aquatic deaths may involve accidental, suicidal, or homicidal circumstances and shall preserve the scene accordingly pending investigative direction.

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## **L. Missing Persons Associated with Death Investigations**

Missing person investigations involving suspicious or unusual circumstances shall comply with Maine law and AG protocol.

Officers shall complete required notifications, ensure NCIC and NLETS File 6 entries when required, notify MCU within required timeframes, notify OCME when legally required, and preserve evidence associated with suspected foul play.

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## **M. Public Information and Media Releases**

Public statements involving death investigations shall comply with AG protocol, OCME confidentiality requirements, applicable law, and agency policy.

Unauthorized personnel shall not release investigative details, opinions regarding culpability, confidential medical information, or protected evidence.

Information releases involving homicides, suspected homicides, police-involved deaths, or deadly force investigations shall be coordinated with the Office of the Attorney General.

# **APPENDIX A**

## **BOT & MLEAP STANDARDS CROSSWALK**

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### **Death Investigation Policy Requirements**

#### **Authority**

**25 M.R.S. § 2803-B – Law Enforcement Policies**

**BOT 11-1 – Death Investigation Policy**

**BOT 11-2 – Compliance with Attorney General Death Investigation Protocol**

**BOT 11-16 – Mandatory Policy Compliance**

**MLEAP 4.04 – Death Investigations**

Addressed in: Sections I, II

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## **General Death Investigations**

Authority

**BOT 11-3 – Death Investigations**

**MLEAP 4.04(A) – Initial Response and Scene Responsibilities**

Addressed in: Sections III, IV, V.A, V.B

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## **Death Scene Control and Evidence Preservation**

Authority

**BOT 11-3 – Death Investigations**

**MLEAP 4.04(A) – Death Scene Control**

Addressed in: Sections II, V.A, V.B

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## **Medical Examiner and Required Notifications**

Authority

**22 M.R.S. Chapter 711 – Medical Examiner Act**

**BOT 11-3 – Death Investigations**

**MLEAP 4.04(C) – Required Notifications**

Addressed in: Sections IV.B, V.C

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## **Fire and Explosion Death Investigations**

Authority

**BOT 11-4 – Fire and Explosion Deaths**

**BOT 11-14 – Public Safety Officer Benefit / Line-of-Duty Death Response**

**Attorney General Death Investigation Protocol – Section IV-A**

Addressed in: Section V.G

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## **Hunting Death Investigations**

Authority

**BOT 11-5 – Hunting Deaths**

**Attorney General Death Investigation Protocol – Section IV-B**

Addressed in: Section V.H

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## **Deaths While in Custody or Confinement**

### **Authority**

**BOT 11-6 – Deaths While in Custody or Confinement**

**Attorney General Death Investigation Protocol – Section IV-C**

**MLEAP 4.04(E) – Custodial Deaths**

**Addressed in:** Section V.E

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## **Police-Involved Death Investigations**

### **Authority**

**BOT 11-7 – Police-Involved Deaths**

**Attorney General Death Investigation Protocol – Section IV-D**

**MLEAP 4.04(E) – Police-Involved Death Investigations**

**Addressed in:** Section V.F

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## **Workplace Death Investigations**

### **Authority**

**BOT 11-8 – Workplace Deaths**

**Attorney General Death Investigation Protocol – Section IV-E**

**Addressed in:** Section V.I

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## **Child Death Investigations**

### **Authority**

**BOT 11-9 – Child Death Investigations**

**Attorney General Death Investigation Protocol – Section IV-F**

**Addressed in:** Section V.H

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## **Suicide Investigations**

### **Authority**

**BOT 11-10 – Suicide Investigations**

**Attorney General Death Investigation Protocol – Section IV-G**

**Addressed in:** Section V.I

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## **Drug Overdose Death Investigations**

### **Authority**

**BOT 11-11 – Drug Overdose Deaths or Serious Bodily Injury**

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**Attorney General Death Investigation Protocol – Section IV-H**  
**MLEAP 4.04(G) – Drug Overdose Death Investigations**  
**Addressed in:** Section V.J and Appendix C

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## **In-Water Death Investigations**

### **Authority**

**BOT 11-12 – In-Water Death Investigations**

**Attorney General Death Investigation Protocol – Section IV-I**

**Addressed in:** Section V.K

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## **Missing Persons Associated with Death Investigations**

### **Authority**

**25 M.R.S. Chapter 257**

**BOT 11-13 – Missing Person Investigations**

**Attorney General Death Investigation Protocol – Section IV-J**

**Addressed in:** Section V.L

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## **Line-of-Duty Firefighter Death Investigations**

### **Authority**

**BOT 11-14 – Line-of-Duty Firefighter Deaths**

**Attorney General Death Investigation Protocol – Section IV-K**

**Addressed in:** Section V.G, as applicable

## **Public Information**

### **Authority**

**BOT 11-15 – Release of Public Information**

**Attorney General Death Investigation Protocol – Section V**

**MLEAP 4.04(H) – Public Information**

**Addressed in:** Section V.M

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## **APPENDIX B**

### **DEATH INVESTIGATION RESPONSE CHECKLIST**

#### **Initial Response**

- Ensure scene safety
- Request EMS if needed
- Confirm death or probable death (EMS)
- Secure scene
- Protect evidence
- Separate witnesses when practical
- Notify supervisor

#### **Scene Preservation**

- Restrict unauthorized access
- Maintain entry/exit log
- Protect transient evidence
- Photograph scene when authorized

- Avoid unnecessary movement of body

## Required Notifications (Consult AG Protocol)

- Office of the Chief Medical Examiner
- State Police Major Crimes Unit
- Office of the Attorney General
- Maine Drug Enforcement Agency
- Office of the State Fire Marshal
- Maine Warden Service
- Department of Corrections
- OSHA / Maine Bureau of Labor Standards

## Evidence Collection

- Suicide notes
- Medications
- Drug paraphernalia
- Electronic devices
- Witness statements
- Surveillance footage
- Scene photographs

## APPENDIX C

### DRUG OVERDOSE INVENTORY WORKSHEET

- Agency & Case #: \_\_\_\_\_
- Decedent's Name: \_\_\_\_\_
- Date / Time: \_\_\_\_\_
- Location: \_\_\_\_\_
- Officer: \_\_\_\_\_

| Drug /<br>Medication | Dosage | Quantity<br>Prescribed | Quantity<br>Remaining | Prescribing<br>Physician | Pharmacy |
|----------------------|--------|------------------------|-----------------------|--------------------------|----------|
|                      |        |                        |                       |                          |          |
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**Notes for OCME:**

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## **APPENDIX D**

### **MAINE ATTORNEY GENERAL DEATH INVESTIGATION PROTOCOL**

The current version of the Maine Attorney General's Protocol for the Investigation of Deaths, Probable Deaths, and Missing Persons, is available through SOP 001 – Official Forms and References Library.



