

Unified San Diego  
County Emergency  
Services Organization  
And  
County Of San Diego

Operational Area  
Emergency Plan

ANNEX F

Department Of The  
Chief Medical Examiner Operations

October 2010

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## **Unified San Diego County Emergency Services Organization**

### **ANNEX F**

#### **Department Of The Chief Medical Examiner Operations**

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## **ANNEX F**

### **DEPARTMENT OF THE CHIEF MEDICAL EXAMINER OPERATIONS**

#### **I. General**

This Annex establishes organizational responsibilities, policies, and procedures for the operation of the Department of the Chief Medical Examiner, hereinafter referred to as “Medical Examiner” during an extraordinary emergency involving multiple deaths, particularly following major natural disasters, technological incidents, terrorist attacks or a nuclear accident.

#### **Objectives**

The overall objectives of the Medical Examiner operations will be to:

1. Recover, identify and provide adequate disposition of human remains.
2. Coordinate evidence identification and collection with the appropriate law enforcement agency.
3. Determine the cause and manner of death.
4. Inventory and protect the personal effects of the deceased.
5. Prepare and coordinate the list of deceased, both identified and unidentified.
6. Notify next of kin.
7. Process and maintain necessary records.
8. Coordinate information and notification with local law enforcement jurisdictions, public health, and other related agencies.

#### **Concept of Operations and Activation of Plan**

During peacetime and day-to-day operations the Medical Examiner will prepare and update these emergency plans, Standard Operating Procedures, pre-arranged agreements, resource listings and checklists. Partial or full activation of this annex shall be by the direction of the Chief Medical Examiner or his designated representative.

## **II. Organization And Responsibilities**

### **Local Conditions**

The Chief Medical Examiner shall direct and coordinate all Medical Examiner-related objectives and services within the San Diego County Operational Area. The Medical Examiner will operate under normal procedures unless one or more of the following conditions exists:

1. Five or more deaths from a single incident or when the number of fatalities overwhelms Medical Examiner local resources.
2. Conditions in the recovery of bodies present a hazard to personnel, i.e., Hazardous Materials, radiation, etc.
3. Access to Medical Examiner's facility is blocked or impeded.
4. Medical Examiner's facility is severely damaged.
5. A local pandemic exists limiting the availability of Medical Examiner staff.

### **Responsibilities**

In the event of an incident involving one or more of the above conditions the Medical Examiner's responsibilities are:

1. Designate a Disaster Control Staff Coordinator.
2. Establish a Medical Examiner Incident Commander and integrate the position into the Incident Command structure.
3. Provide a representative to the Emergency Operations Center.
4. Establish Field Medical Examiner Emergency Teams.
5. Establish Field or Site Body Collection Locations.
6. Establish a family assistance center.
7. Organize and establish Field Collection Staff.
8. Implement a record keeping system for numbers and identity of fatalities.
9. Establish body storage and examination facilities and transportation.
10. Coordinate with search and rescue teams for body recovery.
11. Coordinate with Law Enforcement and the Public Administrator's Office for recording, storing and protection of the personal effects of the deceased.
12. Notification of next of kin.



13. Coordinate the services of:

Funeral Directors	Dentists
American Red Cross	Salvation Army
X-Ray Technicians	Volunteer San Diego

14. Ambulance or other transportation agencies

15. Establish requests for mutual aid, if required, in accordance with the Medical Examiner's Mutual Aid System.

16. Determine disposition of human remains. In the event of mass fatalities beyond the local burial capacity, establish mass grave locations and a burial and preservation system, including marking graves for potential future recovery.

17. Respond to public inquiry.

### **III. Policies And Procedures**

The level and extent of the activation of this plan is contingent on the actual event and the severity of the conditions.

#### **Emergency Response**

##### **LEVEL I**

The Chief Medical Examiner will direct and coordinate operations from the Medical Examiner & Forensic Center. On-duty personnel will immediately be assigned to the emergency. Normal operations will continue as called-back employees arrive to work.

##### **LEVEL II**

The Chief Medical Examiner will direct and coordinate operations either from the Medical Examiner & Forensic Center, a secondary headquarters, or the County/Operational Area Emergency Operations Center (EOC). On-duty and called-back employees will be assigned to the emergency as needed. Normal operations will possibly be suspended for the duration of the emergency.

##### **LEVEL III**

The Chief Medical Examiner will direct and coordinate operations from the County/Operational Area EOC. All employees will be assigned to the emergency. There is a complete activation of this emergency plan.

#### **Notification and Call-Back**

Upon notification of an event of emergency or disaster, all Medical Examiner staff will contact their supervisor, or appropriate person in the chain of command, as soon as possible for assignment. If communications cannot be established with the supervisor, or appropriate person within the chain of command, personnel are to report to the closest Sheriff's substation or police station for reporting their location via police radio.

### **Medical Examiner Field Emergency Teams**

The Chief Medical Examiner will determine the need for utilizing Medical Examiner Field Emergency Teams, depending on the nature and the condition of the emergency. A Medical Examiner Field Emergency Team will consist of some or all of the following staff persons:

1. Deputy Medical Examiner
2. Medical Examiner Investigator
3. Law enforcement officer (field investigation, security)
4. Contract removal personnel
5. Forensic Autopsy Assistants
6. Clerical staff (record keeping, reports)

### **Communications**

Various agencies of County Government utilize voice radio communications in the furtherance of their duties. These agencies operate on the RCS and have been assigned their own talk groups. Countywide and mutual aid talk groups provide the ability for these agencies to talk to each other and with other RCS using agencies. When required, these agencies coordinate via the Sheriff's Communications Center (Station M). The Medical Examiner is included in this category.

### **Body Collection Site**

Under normal operations, the Medical Examiner team responds to the location of the body for recovery. In the event of multiple casualties or inaccessible recovery areas a Body Collection Site will be established in the field. In multiple casualty incidents, temporary morgue facilities, such as airport hangars, vacant warehouses, or other facilities may be utilized to house recovered bodies. Additionally, depending upon the circumstances of the event, the Medical Examiner will employ its mobile morgue vehicle and/or mobile morgue trailers to hold recovered bodies at the Body Collection Site. The Body Collection Site will be a designated point for the collection of all recovered bodies.

The Medical Examiner Field Emergency Team(s) will work at the Body Collection Site performing the following functions:

1. Tag and log recovered bodies as they are received.
2. Preliminary identification of remains.
3. Tag and log all property and personal effects.
4. Prepare remains for transportation to the Medical Examiner.

## **IV. Mass Fatality/Temporary Morgue Facility**

### **Functions**

When the fatality numbers exceed the capacity of the Medical Examiner or the Medical Examiner facility is unusable, the Medical Examiner will establish a Temporary Field Morgue. Assistance with this task is available from the National Disaster Medical System (NDMS) in the form of a Disaster Mortuary Operational Response Team (DMORT). During an emergency response, DMORTs work under the guidance of local authorities by providing technical assistance and personnel to recover, identify, and process deceased victims. The functions of a Temporary Field Morgue will be:

1. Receive, log, tag and place bodies in proper temporary storage.
2. Identify cause and manner of death.
3. Tag, log, and secure property and personal effects.
4. Identification process.
5. Disposition and transportation of remains, including determining when utilization of a mass grave is warranted.
6. Storage and disposition of property.
7. Counseling of staff.
8. Maintain necessary reports and records.

### **Facility**

The Temporary Morgue Facility should be:

1. A large storage facility with a warehouse-type receiving area away from the front entrance.
2. Equipped with showers, water, electricity, parking areas, and telephone communications.
3. Fenced or locked for security.
4. Equipped with a front office reception area.

### **Staff**

The Temporary Field Morgue staff needs are:

1. Medical Examiner Field Emergency Teams
2. Law enforcement for security
3. Outside x-ray technologist (non Medical Examiner staff) and portable field x-ray units, if available

4. Dentists
5. Anthropologists
6. Forensic Autopsy Assistants/Embalmers
7. Toxicology laboratory personnel
8. Clerical staff
9. Transportation coordinators

### **Equipment**

The Temporary Field Morgue Equipment needs are:

1. Cold storage capability (can be mobile refrigerator vans, trucks or trailers)
2. Dental x-ray equipment
3. Telephones/radio communication to field agents
4. Office and record keeping supplies
5. Portable x-ray, if available
6. Portable autopsy tables
7. Source of running water
8. Electricity, source for saws
9. Lighting, source
10. Laptop(s)
11. Body pouches
12. Bar-coding equipment, if available
13. Generator(s)

## **V. Family Assistance Center (FAC)**

### **Purpose**

1. Guide families through the administrative process of reclaiming their loved ones.
2. Facilitate the administrative process providing timely and accurate information.
3. Provide appropriate emotional support for grieving families by coordinating a mental health/spiritual professional to work with them

## **Victim Identification Data Collection**

The FAC is the primary location for collecting antemortem data for victims of a mass fatality incident for identification purposes. In the event of a natural disaster, such as flood or earthquake, the FAC will be a data collection point to gather information to reunify separated family members.

## **Family Interview Process**

The Medical Examiner's Office requires antemortem data for identification. This information will be gathered from family members via an interview with an investigator or mortuary officer. During the interview process, family members will be asked to provide very detailed information regarding their loved one's body, medical history, etc. Interviewers will collect this information in a caring and compassionate manner. Information collected will be compared to postmortem data for identification purposes.

## **FAC Location**

The facility should be in a location not associated with the disaster site or morgue. Access to the FAC should be easy and contain ample parking. The location must be large enough to accommodate the following rooms/spaces:

1. Family Room – Medical Examiner/National Transportation Safety Board (NTSB) briefings will take place in the Family Room and as a result there should be enough room to comfortably accommodate 150-300 people or more. However, the actual size of the room will be incident specific.
2. Reception Area – Required to evaluate needs of family members or any visitors to facility.
3. Family Interview /Death Notification Rooms – Private rooms that will accommodate a minimum of 10 people.
4. Family Refreshment Room
5. Childcare Room
6. Chapel
7. Information Resources Center – Houses database administration, network/technical support.
8. Administrative Office Space – Work area for Medical Examiner and other governmental agencies such as the NTSB, chaplaincy, security, mental health professionals, etc.

## **VI. Mass Burial**

### **Necessary Conditions**

Mass burial may become necessary when the number of victims becomes a public health hazard and the dead cannot be:

1. Adequately refrigerated or embalmed to prevent decomposition.
2. Processed and identified.
3. Released to the next of kin.
4. Transported to and/or cared for by cemeteries, mausoleums, crematoriums, etc.

### **Joint Decision**

The decision to begin mass burial must be made jointly by the Chief Medical Examiner and County Public Health Officer, the County's Director of Emergency Services, the County's Office of Emergency Services, the California Emergency Management Agency, and applicable city/special district officials and leaders within the community.

### **Location**

The site of mass burial must also be agreed upon by the above agencies, taking into consideration the number and location of dead to be buried. Ideally, an existing cemetery would be the most logical location for mass burial. However, should this type of site not be available, the following are suggested locations:

1. County landfill areas.
2. Parks and recreational areas.
3. Flood control basins (weather permitting).
4. Sides of freeways and river beds.
5. Areas beneath power lines.
6. Rail yards and areas along rail lines.

### **Record Keeping and Final Disposition**

The burial, preservation and record keeping system (grids and numbers) would be supervised by the Medical Examiner. Efforts will be made to mark graves for potential future recovery. Further disposition of buried bodies would be handled by the the Medical Examiner in conjunction with the next of kin, local authorities, and cooperating funeral homes.

## **ATTACHMENT A**

### **SUPPORTING AGENCIES AND GROUPS**

1. Public Administrator's Office, County of San Diego: Property of deceased
2. General Services, County of San Diego: Provide equipment and supplies
3. Purchasing and Contracting, County of San Diego: Purchasing emergency supplies
4. Environmental Health, County of San Diego: Public health hazard of un-disposed remains; environmental safety for Medical Examiner Field Teams
5. American Red Cross and Salvation Army: Assist with the Family Assistance Center; Public Inquiry Report record keeping assistance
6. County Communications Office, County of San Diego: Assist with media and public requests
7. HHSA Behavioral Health, County of San Diego: Critical incident stress management
8. Emergency Medical Services, County of San Diego: Temporary morgue
9. Fire departments/districts: Temporary morgue
10. Law enforcement agencies: Medical Examiner Field Teams; field security; property security; Family Assistance Center security
11. Dentists, x-ray technicians and anthropologists: Identification process
12. Funeral Directors: Transportation and final disposition of remains
13. Ambulance and Transportation Companies: Transportation and recovery of remains
14. Volunteer San Diego: Coordination of volunteers

## APPENDIX F-1

### MEDICAL EXAMINER EMERGENCY ACTION CHECKLIST RESPONSE TO A MAJOR EARTHQUAKE

<b><u>Action</u></b>	<b><u>Responsibility</u></b>
Staff OA EOC.	Medical Examiner
Coordinate Medical Examiner Field Teams.	Medical Examiner/Law Enforcement
Establish Body Collection Sites.	Medical Examiner
Determine and procure additional supplies.	Medical Examiner/OES/General Services/Purchasing and Contracting
Set up reporting/record keeping system.	Medical Examiner
Determine transportation needs and route status.	Medical Examiner
Establish field morgue, if needed.	Medical Examiner
Assign support personnel for identification and field processing.	Medical Examiner
Coordinate with law enforcement for security.	Medical Examiner/Law Enforcement
Notification of next of kin.	Medical Examiner
Response to public inquiry.	Medical Examiner/OES/County Communications Office/American Red Cross/ Salvation Army
Provide and release information to the public.	Medical Examiner/OES/County Communications Office
Request Mutual Aid, as needed.	Medical Examiner



## APPENDIX F-2

### MEDICAL EXAMINER EMERGENCY ACTION CHECKLIST RESPONSE TO HAZARDOUS MATERIAL INCIDENT

<b><u>Action</u></b>	<b><u>Responsibility</u></b>
Staff OA EOC.	Medical Examiner
Coordinate Medical Examiner Field Teams.	Medical Examiner/Law Enforcement
Coordinate with Field Command Post.	Medical Examiner Field Teams
Determine hazard to responding personnel.	Environmental Health (Hazardous Materials Division)
Determine requirement of special procedures in body recovery.	Medical Examiner/Environmental Health (Hazardous Materials Division)
Establish Body Collection Site,	Medical Examiner
Set up reporting/record keeping system,	Medical Examiner
Determine and procure additional supplies.	Medical Examiner/OES/General Services/ Purchasing and Contracting
Provide for transportation of bodies.	Medical Examiner
Identify and provide for the disposition of bodies.	Medical Examiner
Notification of next of kin.	Medical Examiner
Response to public inquiry.	Medical Examiner/OES/County Communications Office/American Red Cross/ Salvation Army
Secure personal property of deceased.	Public Administrator/Medical Examiner
Provide and release information to the public.	Medical Examiner/OES/County Communications Office
Request Mutual Aid, as needed.	Medical Examiner

## APPENDIX F-3

### MEDICAL EXAMINER EMERGENCY ACTION CHECKLIST RESPONSE TO IMMINENT/ACTUAL FLOODING

<b><u>Action</u></b>	<b><u>Responsibility</u></b>
Staff OA EOC.	Medical Examiner
Coordinate Medical Examiner Field Teams.	Medical Examiner/Law Enforcement
Coordinate with Field Command Post.	Medical Examiner Field Teams
Establish Body Collection Sites.	Medical Examiner
Determine and procure additional supplies	Medical Examiner/Environmental Health (Hazardous Materials Division)
Set up reporting/record keeping system,	Medical Examiner
Determine transportation needs and route status.	Medical Examiner
Identification and determination of disposition of bodies.	Medical Examiner
Secure personal property of deceased.	Public Administrator/Medical Examiner
Provide and release information to the public.	Medical Examiner/OES/County Communications Office
Request Mutual Aid, as needed.	Medical Examiner
Coordinate the reburial of any cemetery coffins that may be unearthed at inundated cemeteries.	Medical Examiner/Funeral directors
Coordinate with continued search efforts for body recovery.	Medical Examiner/Law Enforcement

## APPENDIX F-4

### MEDICAL EXAMINER EMERGENCY ACTION LIST RESPONSE TO IMMINENT/ACTUAL DAM FAILURE

<b><u>Action</u></b>	<b><u>Responsibility</u></b>
Staff OA EOC.	Medical Examiner
Coordinate Medical Examiner Field Teams.	Medical Examiner/Law Enforcement
Coordinate with Field Command Post.	Medical Examiner Field Teams
Establish Body Collection Sites.	Medical Examiner
Determine and procure additional supplies.	Medical Examiner/OES/General Services/Purchasing and Contracting
Determine transportation needs and route status.	Medical Examiner
Identification and determination of disposition of bodies.	Medical Examiner
Secure personal property of deceased.	Public Administrator/Medical Examiner
Coordinate the reburial of coffins that may be unearthed at inundated cemeteries.	Medical Examiner/Funeral directors
Continued coordination with downstream search and rescue operations for body recovery	Medical Examiner/Law Enforcement
Provide and release information to the public.	Medical Examiner/OES/County Communications Office
Request Mutual Aid, as needed.	Medical Examiner

## APPENDIX F-5

### MEDICAL EXAMINER EMERGENCY ACTION CHECKLIST RESPONSE TO MAJOR TRANSPORTATION ACCIDENT

<b><u>Action</u></b>	<b><u>Responsibility</u></b>
Staff OA EOC.	Medical Examiner
Coordinate Medical Examiner Field Teams.	Medical Examiner/Law Enforcement
Coordinate with Field Command Post.	Medical Examiner Field Teams
Establish Body Collection Site.	Medical Examiner
Set up reporting/record keeping system.	Medical Examiner
Determine and procure additional supplies.	Medical Examiner/OES/General Services/Purchasing and Contracting
Establish Field Morgue, if needed.	Medical Examiner
Assign personnel for identification and field processing of bodies	Medical Examiner
Disposition of property of deceased.	Public Administrator/Medical Examiner
Provide for transportation of bodies.	Medical Examiner
Notification of next of kin.	Medical Examiner
Response to public inquiry.	Medical Examiner/OES/County Communications Office/American Red Cross/ Salvation Army
Provide and release information to the public.	Medical Examiner/OES/County Communications Office
Request Mutual Aid, as needed.	Medical Examiner

## APPENDIX F-6

### MEDICAL EXAMINER EMERGENCY ACTION CHECKLIST RESPONSE TO PANDEMIC INFLUENZA INCIDENT

<b><u>Action</u></b>	<b><u>Responsibility</u></b>
Staff OA EOC.	Medical Examiner
Coordinate Medical Examiner Field Teams.	Medical Examiner/Law Enforcement
Coordinate with Field Command Post.	Medical Examiner Field Teams
Establish Body Collection Sites.	Medical Examiner
Set up reporting/record keeping system.	Medical Examiner
Determine and procure additional supplies.	Medical Examiner/OES/General Services/Purchasing and Contracting
Establish Field Morgue, if needed.	Medical Examiner
Assign personnel for identification and field processing of bodies	Medical Examiner
Disposition of property of deceased.	Public Administrator/Medical Examiner
Provide for transportation of bodies.	Medical Examiner
Notification of next of kin.	Medical Examiner
Response to public inquiry.	Medical Examiner/OES/County Communications Office/American Red Cross/ Salvation Army
Provide and release information to the public.	Medical Examiner/OES/County Communications Office
Request Mutual Aid, as needed.	Medical Examiner

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