

**EMERGENCY SUPPORT FUNCTION 8
APPENDIX 3
MASS FATALITY INCIDENT SUPPORT**

PRIMARY AGENCY: Washington State Department of Health

SUPPORT AGENCIES: Washington State Military Dept. Emergency
Management Division
Washington State Department of Social and Health
Services
Washington State Department of Labor and Industries
Washington State Forensic Investigations Counsel
American Red Cross
Washington State Department of Licensing
Washington State Patrol
Washington Association of Coroners and Medical
Examiners
Washington State Funeral Directors Association
U.S. Department of Health and Human Services
National Transportation Safety Board
Federal Bureau of Investigation
U.S. Department of Justice
U.S. Department of Defense

I. PURPOSE

The purpose of this appendix is to describe and define state-level responsibilities to support local jurisdictions that experience a mass fatality incident (MFI).

II. MISSION

The mission of the state in the wake of a mass fatality incident is to support local officials by obtaining and providing resources and logistical coordination to assist them in responding to the event.

III. AUTHORITIES

Cited Authorities:

RCW.36.24.190 Medical Examiner

RCW 38.10 Emergency Management Assistance Compact

RCW 43.06.200-.270 Governor's emergency proclamation and orders

RCW.68.50.010 Coroner's jurisdiction over remains

Supporting Authorities:

RCW.18.39.010 Definitions (Funeral Directors, Embalmers, Establishments)

RCW.18.39.020 License Required

RCW.18.39.215 Authorization to Embalm

RCW.36.16.030 Prosecuting Attorney Ex Officio Coroner

RCW.36.24.160 District Judge As Coroner

RCW.36.24.170 Coroner cannot Practice Law

RCW.36.39.030 County commissioners to dispose of remains of indigents

RCW.46.52.065 Blood samples to state toxicologist

RCW.68.50.015 Immunity for Determining the Cause and Manner of Death

RCW.68.50.020 Notice to Coroner – Penalty

RCW.68.50.032 Cost of Transportation

RCW.68.50.040 Deceased Effects to be Listed

RCW.68.50.050 Removal or concealment of body – Penalty

RCW.68.50.101 Autopsy, post mortem – Who may authorize.

RCW.68.50.102 Court petition for autopsy – Cost.

RCW.68.50.103 Autopsies in industrial deaths.

RCW.68.50.104 Cost of autopsy

RCW.68.50.105 Autopsies, post mortems- Reports and records confidential – Exceptions.

RCW.68.50.106 Autopsies, post mortems – Analyses – Opinions- Evidence – Costs.

RCW.68.50.130 Unlawful Disposition

RCW.68.50.160 Right to Control Disposition

RCW.68.50.170 Cremation Authorization

RCW.68.50.185 Individual Cremation

RCW.68.50.230 Undisposed Human Remains

RCW.68.50.240 Records Concerning Human Remains

RCW.68.50.300 Release of information concerning a death.

RCW.68.50.310 Dental ID System

RCW.68.50.320 Procedure for Investigating Missing Persons

RCW.68.50.330 Identification of body or human remains by dental examination

RCW.68.52.010 Morgues Authorized in Counties

RCW.68.52.020 Coroners to Control Morgues

RCW.70.02.045 Disclosure without patient's authorization

RCW.70.58.170 Death Certificate – By Whom Filed

RCW.70.58.190 Disposition When Cause of Death is undetermined

RCW.70.58.230 Burial and removal permits

RCW.70.58.240 Funeral Director must file death certificate

RCW.70.58.260 Disposal of remains prohibited unless accompanied by proper permit

RCW.70.58.390 Certificates of presumed death

WAC 246-500-010 Definitions

WAC 246-500-020 Contact with Human Remains

WAC 246-500-030 Refrigeration or Embalming

WAC 246-500-040 Transportation of Human Remains

WAC 246-500-060 Authority of Health Officer

WAC 308-48-030 Care of Human Remains

WAC 308-48-031 Embalming Facilities

IV. SITUATION

A. General

1. The state of Washington faces several hazards which could result in a large number of deaths and exceed the capacity of local jurisdictions. Among these are natural disasters such as earthquakes, tsunamis, and volcanoes, transportation accidents, chemical, radiological or nuclear accidents, terrorist attacks, violent crimes and communicable disease outbreaks.
2. According to Washington state law (RCW 68.50.010), county coroners (or medical examiners appointed under RCW 36.24.190) have jurisdiction over certain deaths in their jurisdictions, such as

sudden, unexpected, violent, suspicious or unnatural deaths, and deaths due to a suspected contagious disease which may be a public health hazard. This responsibility includes removing and placing human remains in morgues pursuant to local rules providing how human remains shall be brought to and cared for at the morgue and held for proper identification where necessary, and determining cause(s) and manner of death. Deaths occurring from natural causes where the decedent has been seen by a qualified medical practitioner within 36 hours of death are not normally investigated by the county coroner/medical examiner.

3. Washington State does not have a State Medical Examiner system. Instead, each county has its own coroner or medical examiner.
4. This plan assumes that in all cases, county coroners/medical examiners will request and exhaust mutual aid assistance from other local jurisdictions before requesting state aid.
5. A mass fatality incident involves an increase in the number of human remains that must be processed. It may also include the processing of a crime scene, where human remains and personal effects may be evidence. In order to manage response to a MFI, human remains may need to be processed and stored in temporary facilities (under the supervision of the county coroner /medical examiner) before being released for final disposition. If the human remains are located in a crime scene, there will be additional considerations for evidence management, including but not limited to managing chain of custody and proper documentation.

B. Resources

1. Local jurisdictions are expected to initially seek local assistance through formal or informal agreements to obtain needed resources for the response. Once these have been exhausted, the state will assist local jurisdictions with resource and logistical support.
2. The state will coordinate the acquisition of additional necessary mortuary resources contingent upon a request from the local EOC through the state EOC after local resources are exhausted.
3. Additional resources may be available from other states through interstate mutual aid agreements. These may include a variety of mortuary response resources. Requests for necessary out-of-state assistance through interstate mutual aid must be processed through the state EOC.
4. The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services can provide

state officials with resources to aid in a response under various authorities. This includes the Disaster Mortuary Operational Response Teams (DMORT), under which federal officials will dispatch appropriate personnel and equipment assets in response to a State EOC request for victim identification and mortuary service assistance as conditions warrant. If DMORT teams are dispatched they will operate under the authority of the coroner(s) or medical examiner(s) that have jurisdiction over the event. DMORT members are required to maintain appropriate certifications and licensure within their discipline. When members are activated, licensure and certification is recognized by all States, and the team members are compensated for their duty time by the Federal government as a temporary Federal employee. 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 Department of Homeland Security (DHS), Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA), Response Division, in support of the DMORT program, also maintains two Disaster Portable Morgue Units (DPMUs). A DPMU is a depository of equipment and supplies (including a complete morgue with designated workstations for each processing element and prepackaged equipment and supplies) for deployment to a disaster site. Also, refer to Appendix 9 (Mass Fatality Response) of the National Response Framework.

5. Mortuary Affairs (MA) resources may be available to support civilian authorities through the Department of Defense (DOD). The mortuary affairs support provided by DOD MA will be tailored to the needs of the requesting authority, but may include support such as victim identification and mortuary services; establishing temporary morgue facilities; performing victim identification by fingerprint, forensic dental, and/or forensic pathology/anthropology methods; and processing, preparation, and disposition of remains. DOD mortuary affairs support to civil authorities will be provided only when needs are beyond the capabilities of local, state and federal civil authorities.

V. PLANNING ASSUMPTIONS

- A. The normal systems for death investigations and human remains processing will be used to the maximum extent possible. The state will support local jurisdictions as necessary to respond to the volume of human remains. Management of the incident remains at the local level.
- B. Local jurisdictions will have exhausted their local capacity as well as any mutual aide agreements and therefore requires assistance from state or federal agencies.

- C. A mass fatality event exceeds the capacity of existing resources at the local level and state or federal assistance is necessary when:
 - 1. The necessary acts of recovery, collection of evidence (if necessary), storage, identification of human remains, determination of cause and manner of death, preservation or embalming (as authorized), notification of next of kin, facilitating the release of identified human remains and personal effects to the next of kin or their representative can not take place in a timely manner.
 - 2. Providing appropriate psychological or human service assistance (e.g. housing, food, insurance, etc.) to family members of the deceased as well as to responders can not take place in a timely manner within existing resources.
- D. A mass fatality incident will cause the local and state EOCs to activate. Through local and state EOCs, the emergency management system will be used to transmit and process requests for state and federal assistance, compliant with the National Incident Management System.
- E. As dictated by the situation, local officials and/or the Governor of the state declare or proclaim a state of local and/or state emergency in accordance with state laws (such as RCW 38.52 and RCW 43.06.210-.270) and local ordinances.
- F. During mass fatality incidents requiring state response, counties face shortages in qualified personnel, appropriate facilities, and/or necessary resources to process and store a large number of human remains. Resource and logistical assistance may be required from both private and public agencies. Using public agency and quasi municipal organizations facilities, staff, equipment and supplies will be the first step. If there is an emergency proclamation by the Governor, the private citizens and their supplies may also be part of the response. RCW 38.52.110
- G. Federal support in the form of qualified personnel and equipment may be available from the National Disaster Medical System or through the Department of Defense. Refer to Appendix 9 – Mass Fatality Response Overview to the National Response Plan – Catastrophic Incident Supplement for more details.
- H. The investigating law enforcement agency will coordinate information and results from its investigation with the county coroner/medical examiner to ensure that both the cause and manner of death of all related fatalities are properly determined and that victims are properly identified.
- I. Security assistance will be required to protect mortuary service response

personnel and facilities and to protect the integrity of the scene. This better assures that the mass fatality process is maintained.

- J. Local infrastructure may be damaged or destroyed during mass fatality incidents, requiring enhanced resource and logistical support from state and federal agencies or through interstate mutual aid.
- K. In the initial stages of a mass fatality incident, first responder agencies, as designated by the Incident Commander, may have to provide care and safeguarding of the deceased and secure and protect the human remains until adequate mortuary response resources can respond and assume control.
- L. First responder HAZMAT agencies may be needed to assist with decontamination of remains in coordination with the county coroner/medical examiner.

VI. CONCEPT OF OPERATIONS

A. General:

1. The key functions in a mass fatality incident response are the recovery, processing, identification, storage, and disposition of human remains; the certification of cause and manner of death; the collection of evidence, as appropriate; and providing information and assistance to affected families.
2. Local first response agencies will normally first become aware of the event which produces a large number of fatalities and will call for county coroner/medical examiner response. At this time the local authorities may decide to activate the local EOC and proclaim or declare a local state of emergency.
3. In a mass fatality incident, life safety measures for potential survivors are critical. For this reason the mortuary affairs response will come after the scene of a mass fatality incident has been secured by emergency and law-enforcement personnel. However, the local coroner/medical examiner office should be notified immediately so that they can provide assistance and advice as needed to better assure the scene is minimally disturbed during the removal of potential survivors and so that the integrity of the subsequent investigation can be preserved.
4. In mass fatality incidents involving transportation systems such as air, rail, bus or ferry, it is important that local, state, and federal authorities develop a close working relationship with the specific carrier(s) involved, as well as the representative of the affected

mode of transportation such as airlines, railways or bus carriers.

5. The county coroner /medical examiner will assess the scope of an event and the availability of local resources, and advise the local EOC if the mass fatality incident exceeds the capacity of existing resources. If additional resources are necessary, the local EOC will make requests to local mutual aid partners, both public and private, consistent with written agreements, as needed.
6. If the mass fatality incident exceeds the capacity of local resources and local mutual aid public and private resources, the county coroner/medical examiner will consult with local public health officials, as lead for ESF 8, and so advise the local EOC. All requests for state or federal assistance will originate from the local EOC and be relayed to the state EOC.
7. The level and type of assistance needed by local agencies during a mass fatality incident may vary significantly based on the day-to-day capabilities of the county medical examiner/coroner and local support agencies, together with the nature and extent of the mass fatality incident. Requests for assistance from the local EOC to the state EOC may include (but are not limited to) requests for:
 - a. Incident Management Teams;
 - b. Medico-legal death investigation personnel (i.e., forensic pathologists, death investigators, etc.);
 - c. Cold storage resources such as refrigerator trucks;
 - d. Logistical support in identifying and establishing alternate morgue facilities;
 - e. Transportation resources;
 - f. Assistance identifying and establishing a Family Assistance Center; and/or
 - g. Mental health professionals;
 - h. Federal assistance, including Disaster Mortuary Operational Response Team (DMORT); see Appendix 9 – Mass Fatality Response Overview to the National Response Framework – Catastrophic Incident Supplement for more details.

B. Organization – State Response Structure

1. State emergency management officials will activate the state EOC, including ESF-8, to coordinate state and/or federal support to the local jurisdictions, upon activation of the local EOC. Requests for support will be processed in accordance with State EOC procedures. Requests for health specific mortuary assistance will be processed by the ESF 8 representative at the state EOC consistent with ESF-8 procedures. All requests for state and/or

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federal assistance must be coordinated through the state EOC. The state EOC may consider requesting qualified out-of-state resources through the interstate mutual aid agreements, including the Emergency Management Assistance Compact (EMAC, ch. 38.10 RCW) or the Pacific Northwest Emergency Management Arrangement (PNEMA). In such a case, the detailed request will be developed in coordination with ESF-8 and processed by the State EOC Logistics Section for sourcing.

2. Mass fatality incident resources provided under this plan will be managed by local incident commanders in accordance with the National Incident Management System.

VII. RESPONSIBILITIES

A. Department of Health

1. As lead state agency for ESF-8, DOH is responsible for this appendix. It develops any required supporting plans and procedures for carrying out its responsibilities as described in this appendix.
2. Provides technical support as necessary to help assure the protection of the public health as it relates to the proper handling and disposition of human remains.
3. After the local jurisdiction has exceeded its own capacity and its local public and private mutual aid resources, DOH responds to health specific requests for medico-legal death investigation personnel and DMORT assistance made from the local EOCs through the state EOC. Through the state EOC, DOH communicates with all non-impacted counties to relay health specific resource requests, receives information regarding resources available from across the state, and communicates the availability of resources from non-impacted local jurisdictions to the local EOC in the impacted county.
5. Responsible for staffing ESF-8 at the State EOC.

B. Military Department

Emergency Management Division and State EOC

1. EMD develops and maintains any required supporting plans and procedures for carrying out its responsibilities as described in this appendix.
2. Staff in the State EOC Operations or Logistic section process requests for assistance from local EOCs for logistical and resource support.

3. Supports DOH with coordinating requests for mortuary assistance and medico-legal death investigation personnel.
4. Processes requests for interstate and federal resource support.

C. Washington State Patrol

As necessary and as available, Washington State Patrol, in coordination with the local law enforcement agency will:

1. Provide assistance with crime scene investigation through the Crime Scene Response Team, as requested.
2. Assist in providing perimeter control and security and limiting access to the scene.
3. Provide DNA identification and/or assist in arranging for private DNA contracts if necessary.

D. Department of Social and Health Services

Through its representative at the state EOC, DSHS is responsible for coordinating sources of mental health resource requests from local jurisdictions, state resources or commercial providers.

E. Department of Labor and Industries

The Victims of Crime Compensation Program is responsible for coordinating and processing benefits for eligible victims.

F. Department of Licensing

DOL, as the agency which regulates the funeral industry, provides technical assistance as necessary to DOH and the state EOC. DOL may, in coordination with DSHS, assist in responding to requests from local governments for family grief assistance from the funeral industry.

G. Washington State Forensics Investigation Council (FIC)

The FIC is responsible for the oversight of the WSP Crime Lab and Toxicology Lab as well as training and autopsy reimbursement for Coroners and Medical Examiners.

H. Washington State Funeral Director's Association (WSFDA)

The WSFDA will provide assistance in identifying needed mortuary service

personnel and resources, and can assist in providing technical guidance regarding mortuary affairs.

I. Washington Association of Coroners and Medical Examiners (WACME)

WACME is a resource for training, legislation issues and latest updates of death investigation for all of its members throughout the state.

J. Local Jurisdiction

1. Consistent with RCW 68.50.010, the county coroner (or county medical examiner appointed pursuant to RCW 36.24.190) has primary responsibility for deaths within their jurisdiction that are sudden, unnatural, suspicious, violent, result from unknown or obscure causes, are due to suspected contagious disease which may be a public health hazard, or where a body is found or not claimed by relatives or friends. During a mass fatality event the county coroner/medical examiner will maintain overall responsibility and provide command supervision for the mortuary response. To do this the county coroner/medical examiner will:

- a. Coordinate and oversee the evaluation of the mass fatality incident site to determine resource needs in terms of mortuary response and recovery of human remains.
 - i. Determine potential or real number of fatalities involved.
 - ii. Determine condition of human remains (e.g., burned, dismembered).
 - iii. Assess location for hazards or obstacles to recovering and transporting human remains.
 - iv. Coordinate with other responding agencies to determine equipment needs for recovering remains.
 - v. Coordinate with other responding agencies to determine adequate staging, access and egress routes.
 - vi. Coordinate with other responding agencies and the American Red Cross to determine best location for the Family Assistance Center(s).
- b. Coordinate and oversee the recovery of all human remains.
- c. Coordinate and oversee all temporary morgue operations.
- d. Provide short and long-term storage (as needed) for all human remains resulting from the incident.
 - i. Ensure the preservation or embalming of human remains, as required.
 - ii. Ensure emergency disposition of remains to prevent

the spread of disease, as required.

- e. Determine, collect and retain all medico-legal evidence in collaboration with other investigating agencies.
- f. Recover, document, track and provide security for all personal effects associated with the human remains.
- g. Investigate and determine the cause and manner of death for all victims of the MFI.
- h. Certify all deaths related to the MFI.
- i. Coordinate and confirm the positive identification of all decedents.
- j. Coordinate the disposition of fatalities resulting from the incident.
- k. Coordinate with local emergency management departments, voluntary agencies such as the American Red Cross, federal agencies and private agencies (as the situation warrants) to operate a Family Assistance Center(s).
- l. Conduct or coordinate the notification of legal Next of Kin regarding death, for all decedents.
- m. Maintain the official log and documentation of reported and confirmed deaths resulting from the MFI.
- n. Release evidence to the appropriate investigating law enforcement authority, as situation warrants.
- o. Release personal effects to legal Next of Kin.

- i. Coordinate disposition of unclaimed personal effects.
- p. Communicate with local responding agencies, state and federal agencies and the Family Assistance Center(s) regarding mortuary response.
 - i. If established, coordinate with the Joint Information Center to provide public information activities through a single spokesperson for release of identity of the decedents and any information involving mortuary or county coroner/medical examiner death investigation procedures.

- q. In coordination with appropriate officials, assure availability of critical incident stress management or other mental health resources for mortuary response personnel.
- r. To the extent possible, assure that cultural beliefs and religious practices of the deceased and their loved ones are respected.
- s. Maintain accounting/inventory of all mortuary response personnel and resources.
- t. In coordination with appropriate response agencies, establish and carry out a demobilization plan that includes:

- i. Appropriate decontamination of equipment and facilities.
 - ii. Return of donated/loaned equipment and supplies.
 - iii. Conduct post incident debriefings.
 - iv. Coordination with responding agency partners on After Action Report, identification of lessons learned, need for improvements, etc.
 2. The local Emergency Management agency is responsible for coordinating the regional response for an all hazards event. This includes the following actions:
 - a. Opening a Joint Information Center (JIC) per local plans.
 - b. Evaluating, prioritizing and coordinating emergency resource requests.
 - c. Activate local jurisdiction EOC when required by local Comprehensive Emergency Management Plan.
 - d. Local government authority declare or proclaim an emergency if required and forward documentation to the state EOC.
 - e. Forward requests for assistance that can not be filled with local or mutual aid resources to the state EOC.
 - f. Maintain coordination and communication with the state EOC.
 3. Local Health Jurisdictions – local health jurisdictions work with other local officials in the management of incidents that involve public health. Mortuary Affairs falls under ESF 8 so local health will respond to mass fatality incidents by providing public health support and technical assistance as needed. The Local Health Officer has certain authorities granted under state law that could help in the management of a mass fatality incident.
- K. American Red Cross
The American Red Cross provides support for Friends and Family Center and Family Assistance Center activities in coordination with other agencies. This may include providing Center staff and supplies as well as Mental Health and Health Services personnel.
- L. Federal
1. Federal Bureau of Investigations (FBI)
 - a. Assist local jurisdictions through the FBI Disaster Squad with fingerprint identification for criminal and non-criminal events,

if requested.

- b. Provide FBI Evidence Response Team and HAZMAT assistance, if requested.
- c. Provide state, local, and tribal governments with advice concerning identification of human remains.

2. Department of Justice – Office of Victims of Crime

- a. Provide information through the Office of Victims of Crime to victims of criminal acts and their families about programs or benefits to which they may be entitled.
- b. Work in coordination with local law enforcement agencies to support a call center for the Family Assistance Center to provide information, and take missing persons reports related to the MFI event and collect antemortem (after death) information, if appropriate.

3. Department of Defense (DOD)

Through the DOD Mortuary Affairs unit, assist in the management of human remains, including victim identification, recovery, storage, transportation, and other mortuary affairs according to the National Response Framework (NRF) Emergency Support Function 8 Health and Medical Services (ESF #8).

4. Department of Health and Human Service's National Disaster Medical System Disaster Mortuary Operational Response Team (DMORT).

Support death investigations, mortuary services and Family Assistance Center activities in federal emergency response situations involving natural disasters and mass fatalities associated with transportation accidents and terrorism. DMORT may also supply a disaster area with resources ranging from these specialists to mortuary supplies only depending on the scope of the disaster.

5. National Transportation Safety Board (NTSB)

Following major aviation and significant accidents in other modes of transportation, the NTSB has by law responsibility to:

- a. Conduct a federal investigation to determine the cause of the accident.

- b. Coordinate federal assistance efforts with local and state authorities and the carrier. Federal partners supporting these efforts include the FBI, American Red Cross, Department of State, National Disaster Medical System/DMORT, and Department of Defense.
- c. Coordinate and conduct briefings for victim's families and friends to provide information about the progress of victim search and recovery, progress of the investigation, the identification of victims, and management of their personal effects.