BEYOND THE MEDICAL EXAMINER'S OFFICE

In addition to the tasks that further our mission and support those of other agencies and institutions in the County of San Diego, our activities may also extend beyond the borders of our jurisdiction. As noted elsewhere, the Medical Examiner's Toxicology Laboratory runs testing not only for San Diego County cases but also those from the Riverside County Coroner's Bureau. Our Chief Deputy Medical Examiner, as a board-certified neuropathologist, conducts forensic neuropathologic consultation for that office as well.

MASS DISASTER PREPARATION

Mass disasters or mass fatalities may take many different forms, including disease epidemics or pandemics, natural disasters such as earthquakes or wildfires, accidents such as aircraft crashes or industrial/nuclear incidents, or even terrorist attacks. Whether these fatalities involve natural or human causes, the Medical Examiner Office must be ready to respond as part of the greater community of essential emergency services. Our role in such preparations for 2010 included participation in multiagency "tabletop" drills for pandemics and aircraft crashes as well as in meetings, and discussions regarding such scenarios. Our office has given multiple presentations to various groups including the Red Cross, San Diego City Schools, and various hospital agencies on the Medical Examiner's role in mass disaster fatality response. We have a representative involved in the continual planning and training for the Metropolitan Medical Strike Team – a multiagency group involved with organizing and facilitating disaster training. We are also involved in the planning stages for a full-scale, multiagency mass disaster exercise in 2011.

MULTIDISCIPLINARY DIVE TEAM

One of our Deputy Medical Examiners has been a member of the San Diego Multidisciplinary Dive Team since 2009 and continues to participate in team trainings and operations. The Dive Team uses scuba gear and underwater search techniques in a rescue capacity for possible drownings, boating accidents, scuba diving accidents, or other situations, as well as for recovery situations in which a person is believed to be missing in the water. The team includes personnel from San Diego Lifeguards, San Diego Police, and San Diego Lake Rangers. Having a team member from the Medical Examiner's Office allows for underwater investigation and recovery of remains, as well as strengthens scene documentation and chain of evidence.

DMORT

Three CME Investigators and one Deputy Medical Examiner are members of the National Disaster Medical System (NDMS) Region IX Disaster Mortuary Operational Response Team (DMORT), a federally funded and operated team that may deploy within the United States or internationally to provide mortuary assistance (investigation, identification, pathology, and disposition of remains) for mass fatality incidents. In 2010, two of our investigators were deployed to Haiti to assist with recovery of American nationals who died in the earthquake that year. One of those investigators also worked at a family assistance center in Miami, Florida to provide support for the same efforts.