

**UNIFIED SAN DIEGO COUNTY
EMERGENCY SERVICES ORGANIZATION
OPERATIONAL AREA EMERGENCY PLAN**

ANNEX F

**OFFICE OF THE
MEDICAL EXAMINER OPERATIONS**

September 2006

UNIFIED SAN DIEGO COUNTY EMERGENCY SERVICES ORGANIZATION

ANNEX F

OFFICE OF THE MEDICAL EXAMINER OPERATIONS

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UNIFIED SAN DIEGO COUNTY EMERGENCY SERVICES ORGANIZATION

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OFFICE OF THE MEDICAL EXAMINER OPERATIONS

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ANNEX F

OFFICE OF THE MEDICAL EXAMINER OPERATIONS

I. GENERAL

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

A. Objectives

The overall objectives of the Office 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.

B. Concept of Operations and Activation of Plan

During peacetime and day-to-day operations the Office of 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 Medical Examiner or his designated representative.

II. ORGANIZATION AND RESPONSIBILITIES

A. Local Conditions

The Medical Examiner shall direct and coordinate all Medical Examiner-related objectives and services within the San Diego County Operational Area. The Office of

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 facilities is blocked or impeded.
4. Medical Examiner's facilities are severely damaged.

B. 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	Ambulance or other transportation agencies
14. Establish requests for mutual aid, if required, in accordance with the Medical Examiner's Mutual Aid System.
15. Determine disposition of human remains. In the event of mass fatalities beyond the local burial capacity, the establishment of mass grave locations and burial system.
16. 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.

A. Emergency Response

- LEVEL I** The Medical Examiner will direct and coordinate operations from the Office of the Medical Examiner. On-duty personnel will immediately be assigned to the emergency. Normal operations will continue as called-back employees arrive to work.
- LEVEL II** The Medical Examiner will direct and coordinate operations either from the Office of the Medical Examiner, 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 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.

B. Notification and Call-Back

Upon notification of an event of emergency or disaster, all personnel of the Office of the Medical Examiner will contact the Office of the Medical Examiner as soon as possible for assignment. If communications cannot be established with the Office of the Medical Examiner, personnel are to report to the closest Sheriff's Substation or Police Station for reporting their location via police radio.

C. Medical Examiner Field Emergency Teams

The 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 or Medical Examiner Investigator
2. Deputy Public Administrator
3. Law Enforcement Officer (field investigation, security)
4. Lab Technician (photographs, evidence collection)
5. Contract removal personnel
6. Forensic autopsy assistants
7. Clerical staff (record keeping, reports)

D. Communications

As soon as possible, Medical Examiner Field Emergency Teams will establish radio contact using San Diego County Station M. In the event county radio is not functioning, the field teams will attempt to use other law enforcement radio channels or the RACES or ARES amateur radio system.

E. 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. 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 Office of the Medical Examiner.

IV. MASS FATALITY/TEMPORARY MORGUE FACILITY

A. Functions

When the fatality numbers exceed the capacity of the Office of the Medical Examiner or the Medical Examiner facilities are 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.
6. Storage and disposition of property.
7. Counseling of staff.
8. Maintain necessary reports and records.

B. 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

C. 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 currently not available through the Office of the Medical Examiner
4. Dentists
5. Forensic Autopsy Assistants/Embalmers
6. Clerical Staff
7. Transportation Coordinators

D. Equipment

The Temporary Field Morgue Equipment needs are:

1. Cold storage capability (can be mobile refrigerator vans or trucks)
2. Dental X-Ray equipment
3. Telephones/radio communication to field agents
4. Office and record keeping supplies
5. Portable x-ray (not currently available)
6. Portable autopsy tables
7. Source of running water
8. Electricity, source for saws
9. Lighting, source
10. Typewriters (portable computer)
11. Body pouches

V. FAMILY ASSISTANCE CENTER

- A. Acquisition of antemortem information
- B. Care of families
- C. Positive ID notification

VI. MASS BURIAL

A. 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.

B. Joint Decision

The decision to begin mass burial must be made jointly by the Medical Examiner and County Health Officer, the Office of Emergency Services, State OES, and applicable city/special district officials and leaders within the community.

C. 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.

D. Record Keeping and Final Disposition

The burial and record keeping system (grids and numbers) would be supervised by the Medical Examiner's Office. Further disposition of thus buried bodies would be handled by the Office of the Medical Examiner in conjunction with the next of kin, the local authorities, and cooperating funeral homes.

ATTACHMENT A
SUPPORTING AGENCIES AND GROUPS

1. Public Administrator's Office -
Medical Examiner Field Teams
Property of deceased
2. Fire and EMS
Temporary Morgue
3. Law Enforcement Agencies -
Medical Examiner Field Teams
Field security
Property security
FAC Security
4. Laboratory Technicians -
Medical Examiner Field Teams
5. Autopsy Assistants -
Other Medical Examiner functions
6. Dentists and X-Ray Technicians -
Identification process
7. Funeral Directors -
Transportation and final disposition of remains
8. Ambulance and Transportation Companies -
Transportation and recovery of remains
9. General Services, County of San Diego -
Equipment and supplies
10. Purchasing and Contracting, County of San Diego -
Purchasing emergency supplies
11. Environmental Health, County of San Diego -
Public health hazard of undisposed remains
Environmental safety for Medical Examiner Field Teams
12. American Red Cross and Salvation Army -
Assist with the Family Assistance Center
Public Inquiry Report record keeping assistance
13. Media and Public Relations
14. County Behavioral Health - Critical Incident Stress Management

APPENDIX F-1

Medical Examiner

**EMERGENCY ACTION CHECKLIST
RESPONSE TO A MAJOR EARTHQUAKE**

<u>Action</u>	<u>Responsibility</u>
Staff County EOC.	Medical Examiner
Coordinate Medical Examiner Field Teams.	Medical Examiner/Public Administrator/ 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 and response to public inquiry.	Medical Examiner/American Red Cross/ Salvation Army
Provide and release information to the public.	Medical Examiner/OES/PIO
Request Mutual Aid, as needed.	Medical Examiner

APPENDIX F-2

Medical Examiner

**EMERGENCY ACTION CHECKLIST
RESPONSE TO HAZARDOUS MATERIAL INCIDENT**

<u>Action</u>	<u>Responsibility</u>
Staff County EOC.	Medical Examiner/Public Administrator
Coordinate Medical Examiner Field Teams.	Medical Examiner/Public Administrator/ 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 needed supplies.	Medical Examiner/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, response to public inquiry.	Medical Examiner American Red Cross/ Salvation Army
Secure personal property of deceased.	Public Administrator/Medical Examiner
Provide and release information to the Public.	Medical Examiner/OES/PIO
Request Mutual Aid, as needed.	Medical Examiner

APPENDIX F-3

Medical Examiner

**EMERGENCY ACTION CHECKLIST
RESPONSE TO IMMINENT/ACTUAL FLOODING**

<u>Action</u>	<u>Responsibility</u>
Staff County EOC.	Medical Examiner/Public Administrator
Coordinate Medical Examiner Field Teams.	Medical Examiner/Public Administrator/ Law Enforcement
Coordinate with Field Command Post.	Medical Examiner Field Teams
Establish Body Collection Sites.	Medical Examiner
Determine and procure additional supplies.	Medical Examiner/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
Provide and release information to the public.	Medical Examiner/OES/PIO
Request Mutual Aid, as needed.	Medical Examiner
Coordinate the reburial of any cemetery coffins that may be unearthed at inundated cemeteries.	Medical Examiner/Cemetery Owners
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**

<u>Action</u>	<u>Responsibility</u>
Staff County EOC.	Medical Examiner/Public Administrator
Coordinate Medical Examiner Field Teams.	Medical Examiner/Public Administrator/ Law Enforcement
Coordinate with Field Command Post.	Medical Examiner Field Teams
Establish Body Collection Sites.	Medical Examiner
Determine and procure additional supplies.	Medical Examiner/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/Cemetery Owners
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/PIO
Request Mutual Aid, as needed.	Medical Examiner

**APPENDIX F-5
Medical Examiner
EMERGENCY ACTION CHECKLIST
RESPONSE TO MAJOR TRANSPORTATION ACCIDENT**

<u>Action</u>	<u>Responsibility</u>
Staff County EOC.	Medical Examiner/Public Administrator
Coordinate Medical Examiner Field Teams.	Medical Examiner/Public Administrator/ 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 needed supplies.	Medical Examiner/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, response to public inquiries.	Medical Examiner/American Red Cross/ Salvation Army
Provide and release information to the public.	Medical Examiner/OES/PIO
Request Mutual Aid, as needed.	Medical Examiner