

Managing Remains in a Disaster

Instructions for Marin County Health Care Facilities

Assumptions: It is likely that fatalities will occur during a major disaster or pandemic. Communications and transportation may be disrupted. The Coroner's Division may not be able to provide assistance for many days following a major incident, or may lack resources to address a prolonged response such as a pandemic. In extreme circumstances, the public may need to take action to ensure the safe handling and storage of decedents until the Coroner or Coroner-designated personnel can respond. In this situation, the Healthcare Facility (Hospitals, Clinics, Skilled Nursing Facility, Long Term Care, etc) goal will be to protect the living and to identify and preserve the dead.

While waiting for assistance from external partners, the Healthcare Facility's methods for managing remains can be summarized in three short words:

Tag, Wrap & Hold

NOTE: When handling decedents, follow contact precautions for infection control. Wear rubber or heavy duty leather gloves, facemask, and protective clothing. Always wash hands with antiseptic solution after handling decedents. Water and soap should be used if you do not have any other solutions.

TAG

Before moving the body, write on the ankle tags, toe tags, or body identification form identifying data – in addition keep a written log with this information in a notebook or on a log sheet that should be created as part of fatality planning for your facility:

- a. Name (if known) – (Document briefly How or Who provided the ID including that persons contact information for any required follow-up)
- b. Sex
- c. Race
- d. Apparent age
- e. Location where the individual died
- f. Number: assign each body a number
- g. Initials/signature of person tagging/logging in the body

***Same protocol should be applied for Human body parts / tissue - DO NOT CO-MINGLE TISSUE OR BODY PARTS**

WRAP

- a. LEAVE ALL PERSONAL EFFECTS ON THE BODY. These are crucial identifying tools. Wrap them up as found with the body.
- b. Make sure each body is tagged before wrapping it per above instructions
- c. Secure the body in plastic sheeting or vinyl body bag. If a body bag is not available, wrap and secure body with vinyl sheeting. The plastic sheeting should be frosted at least .004 mil in thickness and approximately 6 feet wide. You can purchase rolls of plastic that are 624 feet in length and weigh approximately 100 lbs. per roll. Place the body in the center of a plastic sheet cut 6 feet x 10 feet or use two heavy-duty lawn debris trash bags. Secure in such a manner that fluids are contained using tie wraps or 3 ply cotton rope cut into 3 foot lengths. Do not damage the body when securing (for example, do not secure rope around the face. This may disfigure the body and hinder identification efforts and funeral viewing).
- d. Purchase vinyl sheeting or body bags as part of fatality planning for your facility
- e. Label the body bag or plastic wrap with identifying information/body number, which corresponds with the tag on the body and log sheet/notebook as described in above section

HOLD

Collect the tagged, wrapped bodies in a cool, enclosed, central location out of public view and away from the water supplies. Try to provide a measure of security against scavenging. ***Do not allow any viewing of the bodies.*** Do not release bodies, or property to relatives. **This is the job of the Coroner after positive identification has been established.** The Healthcare Facility will HOLD the body until the Coroner can take over.

- a. Define an area that can be used as a collection point for fatalities and that is isolated from the living patients. This can be termed the temporary morgue. Make the area/room as cold as possible. A concrete floor is ideal as it remains cooler than other flooring. Black out window to keep room as dark as possible to help with temperature control. Cover floor with plastic sheeting if possible.
- b. Special care should be taken not to place bodies where body fluid can be absorbed, such as wooden floors or linoleum covered floors. (Damp environments can negatively affect potential ID efforts, especially in regard to fingerprints. If storage is not optimal, hands can be wrapped with towels or sheets before securing body in plastic)
- c. The following supplies are recommended to be kept on hand for the number of possible fatalities: body bags, heavy duty gloves, rubber gloves, plastic aprons, face masks, household Clorox, and indelible markers, protective shoe coverings. Ankle / Toe Tags

Security personnel – if available / feasible – should be assigned to prevent access to bodies / body parts / decedent property if the temporary morgue location cannot be physically secured. A log should be kept to document anyone who enters or exits the facility, including name, title, reason for entry, date and times of entry and exit. Keep log for bodies released – where they went and who signed them out.