22-09 - Homicide Bureau Notification for Drug Overdose Death Investigations

Los Angeles County Sheriff's Department

NEWSLETTER

Field Operations Support Services

Homicide Bureau Notification for Drug Overdose Death Investigations

PURPOSE

The purpose of this newsletter is to advise and update Department personnel regarding overdose death investigations.

BACKGROUND

Over the past five years, overdose deaths in Los Angeles County have more than doubled, with methamphetamine and fentanyl being the two controlled substances attributed to most deaths. Due to the rise in overdose deaths, the Overdose Response Task Force (ORTF) was created on July 1, 2022.

ORTF Response

The ORTF will investigate all overdose-related deaths, whether intentional (suicide) or accidental (overdose). These investigations aim to identify the seller(s) of the controlled substance and determine if they are criminally culpable in the death. The ORTF will use law enforcement resources and investigative methods to determine the source of the supply and the person(s) who contributed to the delivery of the controlled substance to the decedent. The team will be on-call and available to respond to scenes based on evidence and/or witnesses at the scene.

Patrol Response - Overdose Scene

Patrol deputies are typically the first law enforcement officials to arrive on scene. When arriving at a suspected overdose scene, deputies should consider the following:

- Treat the scene as a **crime scene**, the potential may exist for an investigation/prosecution;
- **DO NOT MOVE OR SEARCH THE BODY.** The coroner has jurisdiction over the decedent per 27491.3 of the California Government Code. Wait until the arrival of the coroner investigator and **assist** them with any evidence **they** collect from the decedent's person;
- Be Safe – something at that scene has already potentially caused a death;

- Secure any digital device (phone, computer, etc.);
- Identify and interview any potential witnesses or family members; and
- Identify any cameras that may have captured narcotic transactions.

The following are the Standard Operating Procedures for notifications when responding to a possible overdose-related death, per MPP section, 5-09/090.00, Dead Bodies - Homicides, Suicides, Accidental and Natural:

- **Patrol personnel shall continue to call Homicide Bureau at the scene of a suspected overdose death. Deputies shall relay all known information to Homicide Bureau desk personnel.**
  - Homicide personnel will make an initial assessment to determine whether the possibility exists that a controlled substance may have been the cause of death or if the investigation mandates a Homicide Bureau roll-out; and
  - If a controlled substance is suspected to be involved and it is believed to be an overdose, the on-call ORTF supervisor will be notified.
- **Homicide Bureau notifies the on-call ORTF supervisor.**
  - The ORTF on-call supervisor will get the information from the Homicide Bureau desk and will **call the patrol deputy at the scene;**
  - After obtaining case details from the on-scene patrol deputy, the ORTF supervisor will decide if an immediate roll-out by ORTF investigator(s) is required;
  - If an immediate roll-out is necessary, the on-scene deputy shall hold the scene pending the arrival of investigators;
  - If an immediate roll-out is not necessary, the ORTF supervisor will brief the patrol deputy on necessary documentation and evidence collection; and
  - The case will be assigned to an ORTF investigator the following day.

[REDACTED TEXT]

ATTACHMENTS

Overdose Death Investigation – On-scene Assessment Guidance for Patrol.

This form can be used as a quick reference for deputies when handling a suspected overdose death investigation. [REDACTED TEXT]