

Additional arrangements for contaminated fatalities

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Written by College of Policing

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Following any incident resulting in mass fatalities, there will be a range of physical, evidential, safety and psychological challenges to those organising and executing the response. The recovery of fatalities is taxing for those directly involved and is a generally emotive issue.

The process must be carefully handled, balancing the need to preserve the integrity of any crime scene and resulting evidence with the safety of staff undertaking the process whilst maintaining, so far as possible, the dignity and respect of the deceased and having regard to the social and ethnic sensibilities of their relatives.

In incidents involving chemical, biological, radiological or nuclear materials, these challenges are further complicated by the possible presence of contaminating agents on and around the fatalities which present potential health risks.

CBRN incident

'CBRN' is the abbreviation commonly used to describe the malicious use of chemical, biological, radiological and nuclear materials or weapons with the intention to cause significant harm and disruption.

In non-deliberate or non-criminal acts it becomes the responsibility of UK Health Security Agency (UKHSA) to provide advice. The provision of facilities, medical and mortuary staff to meet the need is a responsibility of the health or local authority depending on who owns the facility or employs the staff. For example, there will be differences between a hospital mortuary and public mortuaries run by the local authority. It is a coronial responsibility through the relevant local authority for transport and storage of deceased in these circumstances.

These will be hugely complex and dangerous scenes, which will require collaboration between a large range of partner agencies and most likely the military.

The guidance, although not specifically drafted for fatalities caused by hazardous materials (HAZMAT) incidents, can be transferred and adapted for such where necessary. For example, road traffic collisions involving tankers carrying hazardous chemicals or an industrial incident at a chemical plant. There will be some fundamental differences in approach and, primacy of the scene, but the principles will be broadly similar to that of CBRN.

Recovering contaminated fatalities

Police commanders should ensure that:

- body recovery in a contaminated environment is only carried out by personnel who are trained and equipped to respond to such an incident
- trained CBRN DVI personnel undertake the scene assessment and recovery of personal property
- trained CBRN DVI personnel undertake the police roles in the mortuary
- precautions are taken to ensure that health and safety risks to those involved in responding to the incident are adequately controlled
- contaminated fatalities are identified and sensitively managed through burial, cremation or other arrangement in a way that avoids harm to others or the environment
- the needs of the bereaved families are taken into account in the DVI process, without jeopardising the safety of the family or other responders involved in the process

The diagram below shows the process of a contaminated fatalities briefing.

Flowchart showing the process of a contaminated fatalities briefing

- For more information see the [contaminated fatalities briefing guide](#).

Tags

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