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AZ Center for Public Health Preparedness
1435 N. Fremont Ave.
Tucson, AZ 85719
Phone: 520.622.8971
Fax: 520.622.8974

Mass Fatality Planning
Quick Guide for
Emergency Planners

2007

The Arizona Center for Public Health Preparedness (AzCPHP) is part of a national network of training centers designed to strengthen the public health workforce readiness to respond to terrorism and other public health threats. AzCPHP has developed this Quick Guide to provide emergency planners with a brief description of pertinent issues that need to be considered in planning for a mass fatality event. The AzCPHP Mass Fatality module, which can be accessed from our website: www.azcphp.publichealth.arizona.edu, provides additional information.

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### Special Thanks

- **Ms. Cynthia S. Gavin, MS, CCEMT-P**  
  Principal Research Scientist/ CBRCNE Medical Specialist  
  Battelle

- **Dr. Donald W. Kautz, MPH**  
  Safety Officer/Industrial Hygienist  
  Arizona Department of Health Services

- **Ms. Lisa R. LaDue, MSW, LISW**  
  Executive Director  
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### Notes

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www.dmort.org

National Mass Fatalities Institute.
http://www.nmfi.org/


Pan American Health Organization. Management of Dead Bodies in Disaster Situation.


http://www.ojp.usdoj.gov/nij/pubs-sum/199758.htm

Pandemic Influenza-Mortuary Affairs Work Group Symposium White Papers. 

Arizona Fiduciaries Association
http://www.azfid.org/

Arizona Attorney General
http://www.azag.gov/

Arizona Funeral Directors Association
http://www.azfd.org/index.html

Arizona Board of Funeral Directors & Embalmers
www.fundirco.dot.state.az.us/index

Arizona State Office of Vital Records
http://www.azdhs.gov/vitalrcd/index.htm

Arizona Department of Transportation
http://www.azdot.gov/

Arizona Bureau of Public Health Emergency Preparedness & Response
http://www.azdhs.gov/phs/edcs/edpe/index.htm

Arizona Hospital & Healthcare Association

Arizona Division of Emergency Management
http://www.dem.state.az.us/

DMORT Region IX (AZ, CA, NV, HI)
http://www.dmort9.org/
Key Mass Fatality Terms

Autopsy: Medical examination of a corpse, by which a specialist determines the cause and manner of death.

Body Search & Recovery: Search involves the systematic and organized search of the mass fatalities incident site to locate human remains. Recovery involves numbering each located remains and recording all necessary information that may aid forensic specialists in making a positive identification.

Coroner: generally an elected local official who may hold public inquest to determine the cause and manner of death but may NOT perform an autopsy.

Final Disposition: refers to the final rites of the remains.

Human Remains: will mean a dead human body.

Medical Examiner: an appointed local or state official who may investigate the death of a person under certain circumstances. Unlike a coroner, a ME may perform an autopsy.

The MA System may include the following operational components needed to adequately process the body:

Family Assistance Center (FAC)
The FAC serves as a central location for support services and agencies to provide assistance to the family. Services provided may include mental health, spiritual care, legal services, and information exchange.

Search & Recovery (S&R)
This is a systematic process through which trained personnel form S&R teams search the recovery site for human remains and personal effects to aid in the identification of a deceased person and/or be used as evidence for criminal investigation.

Mortuary Affairs Collection Point (MACP)
The MACP is a centralized location to which remains can flow and be stored under cold storage before being sent to a morgue. It can also be used to provide extended support to the ME/C (e.g. allowing further capability to receive, process, refrigerate, and evacuate all remains).

Personal Effects (PE) Depot
PE depot is required to assist in the management and cataloging of personal effects when there are a high number of fatalities. The PE depot mainly receives, processes, stores, and safeguards PE of the deceased.

Morgue
The morgue is where the medical examiner collaborates with other professionals to evaluate the remains to determine the cause and manner of death and confirm identification.

Final Disposition
Allows for the proper final rites of the remains. Final Disposition options often include burial, entombment, and cremation.

Mortuary Affairs System
Mortuary Affairs System (MAS): based on the military mortuary affairs program and covers the search for, recovery, identification, preparation, and disposition of remains of persons.

Mass Fatalities Incident (MFI): is any incident that results in a number of fatalities that overwhelms the local Mortuary Affairs System.

Mass Fatalities Management (MFM): is the incident response component that is concerned with the recovery, transport, identification, and protection of all human remains resulting from a Mass Fatalities Incident.

Morgue: Place where bodies are temporarily deposited until final disposal is decided on.

Personal Effects: all items that may be the personal property of an individual.

Portions: portion of remains.

Key Mass Fatality Terms
### Local Planning Considerations

#### Key Stakeholders

- Public Works
- County Attorney’s Office
- Public Health Department
- Office of the Medical Examiner/Coroner
- Funeral Directors
- Office of Vital Records
- Behavioral Health Specialists
- Law Enforcement
- US Border Patrol
- Indian Health Services Office(s)
- Tribal Representatives
- Department of Transportation
- Fire Department
- Environmental Services
- Private transportation companies
- Casket companies

- Identify possible emergency scenarios and unique circumstances that will impact the management of mass fatalities.

- Assess the current workload of the OME and estimate the workload which will overwhelm the mortuary affairs system.

- Establish guidelines and protocols for signing death certificates and conducting death investigations (i.e. identify cases which will require modification of current protocols and procedures).

- Anticipate public health concerns and prepare appropriate risk communication messages (e.g. prepared public messages and information brochures to address the public’s fear of disease transmission from dead bodies).

- Collect demographic data to identify socio-cultural groups in your community.

- Utilize demographic data and collaborate with local religious groups to compile guidelines for providing behavioral health services to different cultural groups.

- Understand and incorporate local cultural beliefs and expectations relating to bereavement issues and appropriate final disposition of the deceased.
Planning will allow you to establish sound local infrastructure and aid in the incorporation and management of the varied response agencies that will be involved during a MFI. Therefore, Mass Fatality Planning Committees should:

- Assess the current situation/capability of managing mass fatalities.
- Identify professionals and resources who are trained to assist during a MFI.
- Identify local resources who will be able to respond during a MFI.
- Determine the budget required to adequately managing mass fatalities.
- Identify and develop MOA with companies that will supply the needed chemicals, instruments, and equipments.
- Determine alternate morgue facilities and the resources required to setup and manage mortuary affairs at this site(s).
- Establish details regarding the transportation of dead bodies: transportation routes, alternate modes of transportation, and vehicles needed to transport bodies from incident site to morgue (when necessary).

### Key Stakeholders

- Chemical Suppliers
- Public Fiduciary
- American Red Cross
- Clergy
- Emergency Planners
- Cemetery Directors
- Citizen Corps
- Hospital Administrators
The goals of mass fatalities management are to:

- Recover, transport, appropriately process, and protect all human remains.
- Establish victim identities and causes of death.
- Preserve all property found on or adjacent to the bodies.
- Maintain legal evidence for criminal or civil court action.
- Release remains promptly to the next of kin, if possible.
- Prevent further risk to the health of the living for the sake of the dead (this also includes staff and volunteers).
- Provide respect for those who have died and show compassion for their survivors.
- Provide social and psychological assistance for family members and mortuary affairs personnel.
- Quickly secure long-term refrigerated storage to provide medical examiners time to identify, process, and “hold” remains until final disposition.
During both the planning and response stages of a Mass Fatalities Incident, it is advised that local plans should proceed with several objectives in mind:

• First and foremost protect the lives and health of the MAS personnel.
• Handle the dead with dignity and respect.
• Place a high priority on burying the dead.
• Place a priority on abiding by religious and cultural requirements to the maximum extent that the situation allows.
• What are some other key points that your agency should keep in mind?

The Incident Command Structure may be expanded or collapsed depending on the incident. The Operations Section, in which the Mass Fatalities response activities belongs, may have various branches with specific functions. Branches within the Operations Section may include:

Mass Care: is the branch which provides mass care services to persons affected by an accident. These services include the provision of immediate shelter, food, basic first aid, bulk distribution of needed items and other related services.

Mass Fatality: is the branch which may be activated in the event of any incident which results in a great number of fatalities. The Mass fatalities section is responsible for managing the incident and activities beginning from search & recovery to final disposition.

Environmental Health: is the branch which provides environmental health services to protect the public’s health in the event of an emergency. These services may include vector control, sanitation, safe water supply, and food security.

Public Information: is the branch which coordinates the the development and release of accurate and timely alerts, warnings, and other emergency information to the public prior to an impending emergency and throughout the incident.
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Arizona State Office of Vital Records
http://www.azdhs.gov/vitalrec/index.htm
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