



STATE OF CALIFORNIA

The California Mass Fatality Resource Guide:

A Supplement to the State of California Master Mutual Aid Agreement

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Foreword

The care and management of the dead due to a catastrophe is one of the most difficult aspects of disaster response and recovery operations. California has experienced several disasters over the last half-century. The continued threat of a pandemic, California's natural disaster vulnerability, and the increasing possibility of terrorism within its borders, could produce mass fatalities which would overwhelm local jurisdictions.

This revision reflects changes to streamline the document by removing large blocks of text that are available from other on-line sources. Hyperlinks will be provided to this information, where possible. The document has been reorganized to make it more useful as an immediate resource when needed.

The guide provides for an organized and unified state level capability to assist in meeting the extraordinary demands of a mass fatality event. Where appropriate, federal, and private organizations are identified and integrated into this document which will be implemented within the State Standardized Emergency Management System (SEMS) and National Incident Management System (NIMS) structure. Any California state agency role and responsibility described in this document is consistent with their respective "Administrative Order" as referenced in the State Emergency Plan.

Finally, it is recognized that the Coroner/Medical Examiner's responsibility of the operational area may reside with a Sheriff or an appointed/elected Coroner/Medical Examiner. In this plan, the term Coroner/M.E. will represent all three types of coroners in California.

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Mass Fatality Defined

As used in this document, "Mass Fatality" will refer to a short or long-term event resulting in deaths which exceeds the local jurisdiction's ability to respond to with their existing personnel and / or equipment. Cal OES has not established a specific number of deceased that would qualify an event as a "mass fatality." That determination would be based on the local jurisdiction's available resources and the specific circumstances of the event. Additional workload created by deaths resulting from a Mass Fatality event must be considered in addition to the jurisdiction's normal death rate, increasing the demand.

California Mass Fatality Potential

In California, a mass fatality event can occur at any moment. Whether natural or human-caused, this state is extremely susceptible to disasters, most commonly wildfires, which could produce fatalities that would overwhelm a local government response system. In the past 25 years, California has had several incidents that have resulted in a need for a mass fatality response.

It is inevitable that California will experience more mass fatality events resulting in a significant number of deceased. Pre-event planning, a thorough knowledge of the organizational requirements, and a disciplined response to a mass fatality event will prove effective and beneficial. The proper care and management of human remains in the aftermath of a disaster is essential.



California's Coroner/M.E. System

In California, the responsibility for the coroner function falls on the individual counties. The 58 counties in California have a mixture of Sheriff-Coroner, Coroner, and Medical Examiner systems. These counties must rely on outside assistance to meet resource needs when mass fatality events overwhelm their local response capacity. The California Master Mutual Aid System was established in 1950 by Government Code Section 8550, et seq to meet the extraordinary demands of these significant events. The Master Mutual Aid Plan establishes a mechanism to share resources between counties within California. Resources may also be requested from the State of California, other states, the Federal Government or internationally when needed. Movement of resources to respond to a mass fatality event will be covered in this document.

Role of Cal OES

The role of Cal OES is to support local government. Cal OES recognizes that all disasters start and end with the local jurisdiction. The County Coroners / Medical Examiners have statutory jurisdiction over deaths occurring in their jurisdiction, with some exceptions. The local jurisdiction retains this authority and responsibility regardless of outside resources deployed by Cal OES or other state / federal agencies.

Purpose of the guide

The purpose of the guide is to describe ways Cal OES can assist a local jurisdiction. This guide will provide a framework to facilitate an organized and effective state response to an event involving overwhelming catastrophic loss of life. This guide will not address the operational details of an initial local government mass fatality response. Each Coroner / Medical Examiner must have mass fatality response plans in place that consider each jurisdiction's unique mass fatality threats and response resources.

More specifically the guide:

- Recognizes the potential for catastrophic mass fatality incidents.
- Establishes an organized structure within SEMS for coordinated and effective response to mass fatality incidents.
- Defines state agency and other organizational roles and resources to support state and local government.
- Identifies state, federal, private, and volunteer resources that may be available to a mass fatality incident.
- Provides planning guidance to state and local agencies in preparation and response to a mass fatality incident.



Authority of the guide

The *California Mass Fatality Resource Guide: A Supplement to the Master Mutual Aid Agreement* is developed under the authority of California state law, specifically, the California Emergency Services Act ([Gov. Code Section 8550](#), et seq).

Nothing in this document should interfere with, or usurp, the authority of the local Coroner/M.E. in carrying out their duties and responsibilities.

This guide is intended to be utilized within the California Standardized Emergency Management System (SEMS) and the National Incident Management System (NIMS).



Definitions

Note that some definitions are not verbatim from related codes and regulations but are paraphrased for clear understanding of the concepts involved.

Mass Fatality Event: For the purpose of this document, a mass fatality event is one in which the loss of life overwhelms the resources of a local jurisdiction and requires extraordinary support from the state, federal, and / or private resources. The deaths from a mass fatality event must be considered in addition to the normal death rate for the jurisdiction.

Coordinator of Coroner Functions in an Operational Area: The Sheriff/Coroner, Coroner, or Medical Examiner of the county.

Regional Coroner Mutual Aid Coordinator: A Sheriff/Coroner, Coroner or Medical Examiner nominated and elected by those vested with coroner responsibility in each county within that specific Region, to carry out regional Coroner/M.E. mutual aid activities.

Death Care Industry: Includes funeral homes, cemeteries, and crematories. At the state level, the industry is licensed and monitored by the California Department of Consumer Affairs, Cemetery, and Funeral Bureau.

Disaster Mortuary Operational Response Team (DMORT): Disaster Mortuary Operational Response Teams are teams managed by the US Department of Health and Human Services that can be deployed to assist a local jurisdiction in response to a mass fatality event.

Emergency Management Assistance Compact (EMAC): The Emergency Management Assistance Compact (EMAC) is a state-to-state mutual aid system that can be utilized to request resources from other states when the Governor has proclaimed a state of emergency. EMAC is administered by the National Emergency Management Association (NEMA). U.S. Territories also fall under the EMAC System. Under EMAC, other states can request assistance from California. California resources have responded to mass fatality events in other states on several occasions, most recently the 2023 Maui wildfire.

Family Assistance Center: The traditional family assistance center is a secure facility established as a centralized location to provide information about missing persons who may be victims of a disaster; a gathering point where information is exchanged in order to facilitate the decedent identification



process and the reunification of next of kin; a location for the collection of reference DNA; and where spiritual and/or emotional support is available for family and / or friends of those confirmed or suspected deceased. Additional support services such as housing information/referral, insurance, mental health counseling, and legal assistance may be provided.

Fatality: Death of a human being. This guide also uses the terms dead, decedent, human remains all of which refer to a human fatality. Fatality *should not* be interchanged with the term “casualty” which includes those injured but not deceased.

Incident Command System (ICS): The Incident Command System is under the umbrella of the Standardized Emergency Management System (SEMS). When applicable jurisdiction is determined, the first Deputy Coroner/Coroner on the scene is the Coroner Incident Commander.

Law Enforcement Branch: The Law Enforcement Branch of the Governor's Office of Emergency Services is the state facilitator of inter-regional Coroner/M.E. mutual aid response system. The Law Enforcement Branch coordinates resources provided by, or requested from, California State agencies, other states / territories per an EMAC request, or the federal government. The Law Enforcement Branch also provides ongoing liaison with operational areas, municipalities, and state and federal agencies during non-emergency periods to facilitate emergency preparedness planning and mutual aid awareness training. The Branch coordinates the state's search and rescue and law enforcement mutual aid programs, and other activities in support of local law enforcement mutual aid response.

Local Emergency: “Local Emergency” means the duly proclaimed existence of a disaster or of extreme peril to the safety of persons and property within the territorial limits of a county or city, caused by such conditions of air pollution, fire, flood, storm, epidemic, riot, drought, sudden and severe energy shortage, plant or animal infestation or disease, warning of an earthquake or volcanic prediction, or an earthquake, or other conditions, other than conditions resulting from labor controversy, which are or are likely to be beyond the control of the services, personnel, equipment, and facilities of that political subdivision and require the combined forces of other political subdivisions to combat, or with respect to regulated energy utilities, a sudden and severe energy shortage requires extraordinary measures beyond the authority vested in the California Public Utilities Commission (Section 8558(c),GC).



Mass Fatality Management: In the aftermath of an incident that results in an overwhelming number of deaths, this term refers to the process and accompanying functions performed by the local Sheriff/Coroner, Coroner, or Medical Examiner, among other supporting personnel and resources, in conducting search and recovery operations; decedent storage and morgue/identification operations; decedent personal effects management, assistance for family members; and final arrangements or disposition of the human remains. Mass fatality management may be complicated by type of incident, numbers of dead, location, weather, and contamination of incident scene and victims. Mass fatality management includes the private death care industry.

Medicolegal Death Investigation: An investigation to determine the cause and manner of death, including recovery of deceased, victim identification, and release of remains.

Mutual Aid Region: A Mutual Aid Region is a geographic area comprised of multiple operational areas (see Figure 3). A Mutual Aid Region Coordinator manages and coordinates information and resources among Operational Areas within the mutual aid region, between the Operational Areas, and the state.

National Incident Management System (NIMS): The NIMS is a comprehensive, national approach to incident management that is applicable at all jurisdictional levels and across functional disciplines. This system is used to conduct incident management as specified in Homeland Security Presidential Directive (HSPD)-5. NIMS establishes a national standard methodology for managing emergencies and ensures seamless integration of all local, state, and federal forces into the system.

National Response Coordination Center (NRCC): The facility in Washington, D.C. used by DHS/FEMA to coordinate federal response and recovery operations. Federal Emergency Support Functions (ESFs) are co-located at the NRCC to provide resource support to state counterparts through the Regional Response Coordination Centers.

Operational Area: A county, along with political subdivisions within that county constitutes an Operational Area.



Personal Effects (PE): Refers to those items carried by, or being transported with, an individual. In mass fatality disasters, the incident scene can be littered with thousands of personal effects.

Personal Protective Equipment (PPE): Specialized clothing or equipment worn by response personnel for protection against health and safety hazards.

Repatriation: The term used for returning the deceased to their country of birth, nationality, or permanent residence.

Standardized Emergency Management Systems (SEMS): The Standardized Emergency Management System is a system used for coordinating state and local emergency response in California. SEMS provides a multiple level emergency response organization that facilitates the flow of emergency information and resources.

State Emergency Plan: The State Emergency Plan (SEP) addresses the State's response to extraordinary emergency situations associated with natural disasters, technological incidents, and war emergency operations. The operational concepts reflected in this Plan focus on large-scale disasters which often generate situations requiring other than normal responses. Such disasters pose major threats to life and property and can affect the well-being of large numbers of people. The Cal OES maintains the SEP.

State Law Enforcement/Coroner Mutual Aid Coordinator: The Chief of the Law Enforcement Branch, Office of Emergency Services, through his designated Coroner Mutual Aid Coordinator, is responsible for administrative action and coordination between state, regions, and operational areas for Coroner Mutual Aid. The State Coordinator also acts as the state point of contact for law enforcement and coroner EMAC requests.

State of Emergency: "State of Emergency" means the duly proclaimed existence of disaster or extreme peril to the safety of persons and property within the state caused by such conditions as air pollution, fire, flood, storm, epidemic, riot, drought, sudden and severe energy shortage, plant or animal infestation or disease, the Governor's warning of an earthquake or volcanic prediction, or an earthquake, or other conditions, other than conditions resulting from a labor controversy or conditions causing a "state of war emergency," which, by reason of their magnitude, are or are likely to be beyond the control of the services, personnel, equipment, and facilities of any single county, city



and county, or city and therefore require the combined forces of a mutual aid region or regions to combat, or with respect to regulated emergency utilities, a sudden and severe energy shortage requires extraordinary measures beyond the authority vested in the California Public Utilities Commission. (Section 8558 (b)(GC)). During a state of emergency, the Governor has complete authority over all agencies of state government and the right to exercise within the area or regions designated, all police power vested in the state by the Constitution and laws of the State of California (GC, Article 12, Section 8620, and Article 8627, "California Emergency Services Act"). During a state of emergency mutual aid is mandatory.

State of War Emergency: "State of War Emergency" means the condition which exists immediately, with or without a proclamation thereof by the Governor, whenever this state or nation is attacked by an enemy of the United States, or upon receipt by the state of a warning from the federal government indicating that such an enemy attack is probable or imminent. (Section 8558 (a) GC) During a state of war emergency the Governor has complete authority over all agencies of state government and the right to exercise within the area or regions designated, all police power vested in the state by the Constitution and laws of the State of California (GC, Article 12, Section 8620 and Article 13, Section 8627, "California Emergency Services Act"). During a state of war emergency mutual aid is mandatory.

Unified Command: Unified Command is comprised of jurisdictions and agencies that have an implicit/direct responsibility for the incident. The objective and strategy of Unified Command should be to reach consensus in the consolidated action plan for the incident. In this manner, it increases the effectiveness of the response to a multi-jurisdictional or multi-agency incident.

**Introduction:**

By definition, a mass fatality event exceeds the local jurisdiction's capacity to effectively respond in a timely manner. This Guide will identify outside resources available to assist a local jurisdiction and how to request these resources when needed.

Planning Assumptions:

The ultimate purpose in a mass fatality response should be to locate, recover, identify, and release human remains for final disposition in a manner that meets or exceeds the legal requirements. This must be done in a timely, safe, and respectful manner which accommodates religious, cultural, and societal expectations, where possible. This can be challenging and require support and leadership from all levels of government.

Local jurisdictions must develop mass fatality response plans that consider the resources available to the jurisdiction and the mass fatality threats applicable to the jurisdiction. Any mass fatality plan must include a discussion of the critical functions provided by the private death care industry. Coordination with the private death care industry will be vital. Local government must rely on the private death care industry to provide funeral management services, cremations, casketing, embalming, and final disposition of remains.

Coroner staffing has been a primary concern for local jurisdictions. Staffing in some specialties, especially forensic pathology, is extremely limited. This increases the potential need for a jurisdiction to rely on outside assistance and reduces the ability for a jurisdiction to assist others.

A natural or man-made incident that results in the catastrophic loss of life will, in most cases, generate state and/or federal disaster declarations and their inherent provisions, immunities, and responsibilities.

The county Sheriff-Coroner, Coroner, or Medical Examiner is the responsible local authority for managing mass fatalities in an incident. These local officials retain responsibility for decedent management even if state / federal assistance is requested.

It is recognized that mass fatality management on exclusive federal military installations will be under the authority of the Office of the Armed Forces Medical Examiner. Those military installations with concurrent jurisdiction may have agreements in place with the local Coroner/M.E.



A mass fatality incident because of a terrorist act will involve the Federal Bureau of Investigation (lead investigative agency) and other federal agencies. Cooperation and coordination with the local Coroner/M.E. in the recovery, identification, and final disposition of the deceased.

The National Transportation Safety Board (NTSB) may be involved when the accident involves commercial transportation, including aircraft, buses, trains, and marine vessels. In these incidents, the airlines or railways have set obligations to the victims and families. NTSB has special guidelines for fatalities resulting from the crash of a commercial airliner. For additional information see: [Federal Family Assistance Framework for Aviation Disasters](#).

The California Standardized Emergency Management System (SEMS) and components will serve as the mechanism to request, provide, and coordinate state resources. Out-of-State resources will be coordinated by Cal OES through the Emergency Management Assistance Compact (EMAC) process. Federal agencies and resources responding under the auspices of the National Response Framework (NRF), Catastrophic Incident Annex, will integrate into the state and local SEMS organizational structure. The California Military Department will coordinate the deployment of all out-of-state Department of Defense resources.

Duties of the Sheriff/Coroner, Coroner, and Medical Examiner

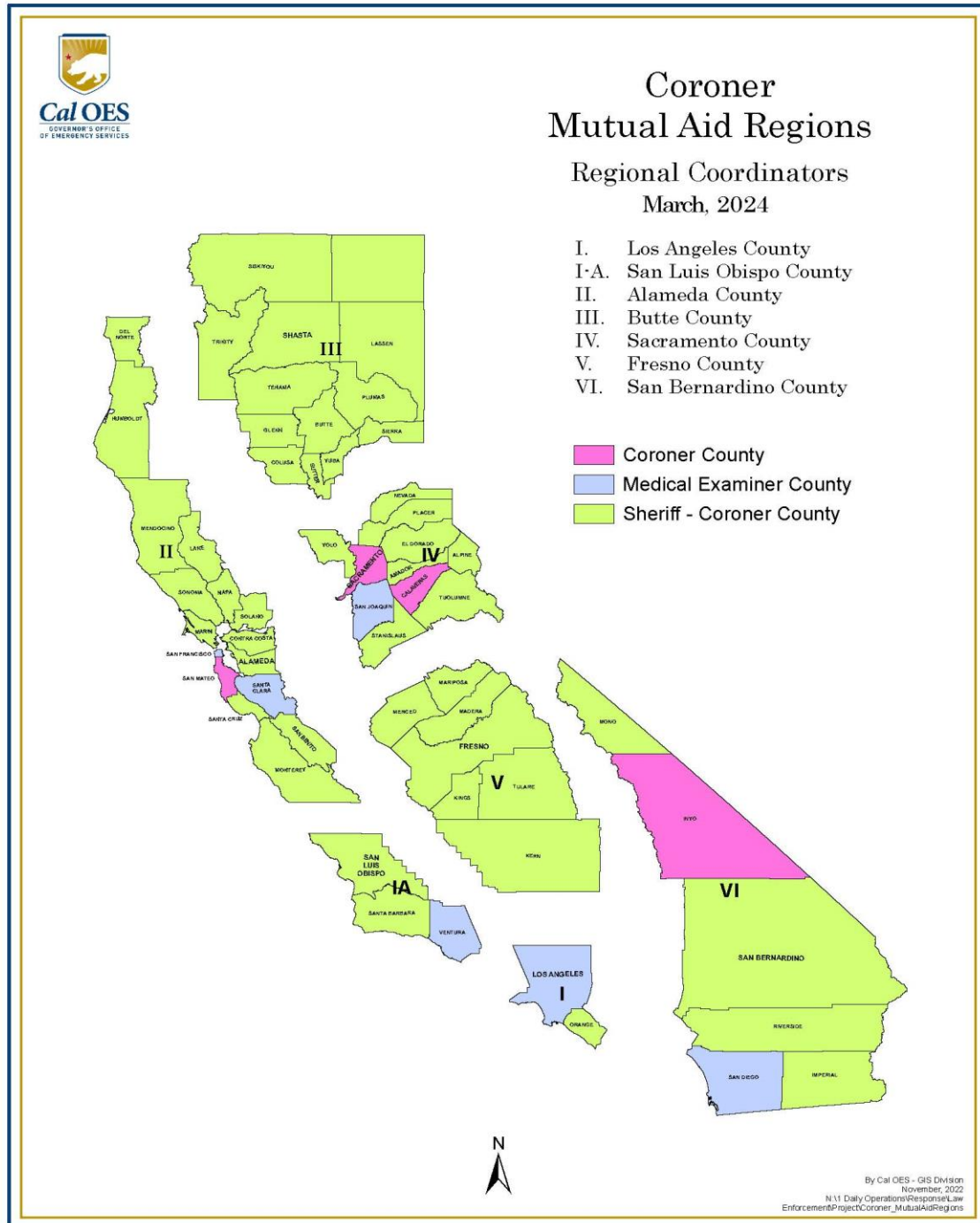
The organizational framework for a coordinated response to a mass fatality event in California begins with the County Sheriff-Coroner, Coroner, or Medical Examiner. The laws which govern the duties, responsibility and authority of the coroner are generally found in the California State Government Code and Health and Safety Code. The procedures performed by the Coroner/M.E. will vary from county to county. Fundamentally, it is the duty of the Coroner/M.E. to determine the circumstances, cause, and manner of certain deaths as listed in California Government Code, [Section 27491](#), and Health and Safety Code [Section 102850](#).

Specific Coroner / M.E. responsibilities include the following:

- Identify human remains.
- Provide adequate and decent storage.
- Determine the cause and manner of death.
- Inventory and protect personal effects found on the decedent.
- Locate and notify next-of-kin.
- Establish Family Assistance/Victim Identification Center.
- Release remains.
- Secure any evidence pertaining to the death.



Coroner Mutual Aid Map





Determining the Need for Mutual Aid

As part of their initial scene assessment of any large or unusual incident, local jurisdiction personnel should evaluate the potential need for mutual aid. This evaluation must consider the jurisdiction's continuing responsibility to provide services for deaths unrelated to the mass fatality incident. This normal workload will continue during a mass fatality event, adding to the demand on resources.

This need for mutual aid should consider:

- Maximum number of anticipated deceased.
- Condition of remains (fragmented, burned, buried, etc.)
- Anticipated issues in locating / retrieving deceased.
- Open / closed population and anticipated problems with identification.
 - Open / Closed population refers to a known list of deceased. In a closed incident, a list of the deceased is available. This would include a passenger manifest from an airline crash. In an open incident, the victims are unknown, making identification more difficult.
- Potential issues with deceased that are foreign nationals.
- Specialized equipment needed.
- Hazardous material issues with the scene or deceased.
- Jurisdiction's staffing levels and other resource availability.
- Jurisdiction's ability to sustain multiple operational periods or 24-hour operations.
- Availability of the needed goods/services within the Operational Area, or available by contract.
- The jurisdiction's ability to support the logistical needs of the responding personnel.

A local jurisdiction is required to exhaust any locally available resources, including contracting, before requesting mutual aid.

If the initial assessment indicates a potential need for Mutual Aid, the agency's internal process for management notification and concurrence must be followed. Since a mutual aid response may create a significant financial burden for the local jurisdiction, any request for mutual aid must be approved by the local jurisdiction management.

Cal OES, via the California State Warning Center, continually monitors for significant events that might impact California. If the Warning Center becomes



aware of the event, Cal OES personnel may reach out to determine if assistance may be needed, or for an operational update for state officials.

Requesting Mutual Aid

Once a Mutual Aid request is approved or anticipated, the request should be forwarded as soon as possible to the appropriate Regional Mutual Aid Coordinator. For the purpose of administering the Mutual Aid System the state is divided into multiple Mutual Aid regions, per the [Regional Mutual Aid map](#). Each region has elected a Region Mutual Aid Coordinator with the responsibility to coordinate mutual aid within their region. More information about the Regional Mutual Aid Coordinator, and their function, is located [later in this document](#). Information of the nomination and election process for the Regional Coordinator is located [later in this document](#). Contact information for the Regional Mutual Aid Coordinator, and local jurisdiction Coroner liaison, is included in the [Resource Database](#). If you are unfamiliar with the database, or don't have access, the mutual aid coordinator can be reached via Sheriff dispatch for the county. If the Regional Mutual Aid Coordinator is unavailable, the request can be made to the Statewide Coordinator at Cal OES, who will coordinate with the Regional Mutual Aid Coordinator. The Statewide Coordination can be contacted by requesting the Law Enforcement Duty Officer via the Cal OES Warning Center at 916-845-8911. The Warning Center will ask for basic information and then refer the request to the on-call Law Enforcement Duty Officer. This initial notification may be by phone, but any follow-up information would preferably be documented in an e-mail. The e-mail address for the Warning Center is warning.center@oes.ca.gov. Once initial notification has been made, you will be provided with contact information for the specific person coordinating the request.

Requests for assistance must be made through the appropriate process i.e., Local Jurisdiction to Region; Region to California-OES (State); State to other mutual aid regions and/or other state resources and the federal government. Requests for federal resources can be made by the state on behalf of the local jurisdiction after consultation with the impacted operational area Coroner/M.E. and the Regional Coroner Mutual Aid Coordinator.

It is important that these procedures be followed to maintain accountability of personnel and properly document the incident. Making mutual aid resource requests as soon as a need is reasonably anticipated is critical. It is much more difficult to fill last-minute or immediate need mutual aid requests.

Generally, the mutual aid request will contain the following information:



- Briefly describe incident and status.
Include current number of fatalities, anticipated number of additional fatalities, general condition of fatalities including extent of fragmentation of remains. Open or closed population? Haz Mat issues?
- Name and contact information of the Mass Fatality Branch Lead.
Include contact numbers and hours available if there are multiple people in this role.
- Location of Incident Command Post, Staging Area, and logistical support services.
- Agency Liaison contact for responding personnel.
Probably not the Mass Fatality Lead but a person with knowledge of the incident and local logistical resources. Must be someone that will be accessible. In large incidents, multiple people will be needed.
- Describe terrain of the site, approximate elevation, and anticipated weather conditions.
- Personnel requested:
Describe the anticipated tasks of the personnel requested. Try not to use job titles since there is not currently a statewide recognized definition of the knowledge and skills need to be a "deputy coroner" or "autopsy assistant." Itemize the list of requested personnel by their anticipated job function and the number of personnel needed for that function. Include any specialized training or capabilities needed, i.e., burned bone recognition. Staffing for ICS Command and Control positions. Staffing may be a significant issue.
- Equipment requested:
Consider the need for decedent storage, Rapid DNA, Family Assistance Center support, communications, decontamination, base camp operation, Fire USAR teams, Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) etc.
- Staffing plans:
What is the anticipated staffing plan? Number of staff needed for each shift? Consider travel time of mutual aid personnel when determining 8/10/12 hour shifts.
- Any specialized equipment responders will need that won't be provided by the host agency. For example, 4X4 vehicles, special PPE, or special tools.
- Logistical support available:
Mutual aid personnel will require logistical support, especially those with multi day deployments or long travel times. There is no minimum support level required but the better support you can offer the better. Describe plans for lodging / feeding / fuel.



- Communication Plan.
Consider loaner radios, cell phones, or mutual aid channels. If using cell phones, which cell service(s) are operational in the area? Cal OES Tactical Communications Unit may be able to assist with loaner radios or other communications support.
- Can you provide local maps or personnel familiar with the area? In the aftermath of a wildfire, navigation is often difficult for mutual aid personnel not familiar with the area.
- Do you have a deployment and demobilization plan to ensure that the requested personnel can be appropriately used?
- What efforts have been made to acquire the requested goods / services from within the Operational Area, or by contract?

Requesting Jurisdiction Responsibilities

- Developing Incident Action Plans.
- Logistical support for responding personnel.
- Food, fuel for responders.
- Lodging, if multi day deployments or long travel times.
 - Discuss funding options with responding agencies and Cal OES personnel.
- Local maps and / or guides
- Maintaining communication and coordination with liaisons from responding jurisdictions and Cal OES.
- Staffing / deployment plans
 - Every effort must be made to ensure mutual aid staff are effectively used and released as soon as practical.
- Provide briefings including safety protocols and job assignments.
- Provide any needed Just in Time training specific to the incident.
- Provide any end of workday procedures to include collection of deployment records and decontamination of personnel and/or equipment.
- Perform checks to account for deployed personnel, including canine.
 - Mental wellness / physical injury checks.
- Collect and maintain records.



Responding Jurisdiction Responsibilities

- Appoint on site lead / supervisory personnel to coordinate with the requesting jurisdiction. Confirm that any personnel and equipment assigned are suitable for the tasks described in the request.
- Keep requesting jurisdiction advised of deployment status and any issues encountered.
- Maintain records of deployment.
- Work within any procedures or guidelines established by the requesting agency.
- Ensure that the logistical support needs of personnel are being met.

Mutual Aid Reimbursement

Local jurisdictions may incur significant financial obligations in mass fatality incidents. There is often State or Federal assistance available, but this assistance is seldom guaranteed and often delayed. Cal OES will assist in identifying and applying for any financial assistance available. When requesting mutual aid resources, consideration must be given to the potential cost of supporting those resources. The procedures for Mutual Aid reimbursement can be complex and often change. Cal OES Law Branch personnel can often assist local jurisdictions in maximizing their reimbursement.

During a mass fatality event, proper documentation must be maintained to support any future claims. It is advised that local jurisdictions maintain this documentation on all significant events since it is not always clear at the time an expense is incurred that an event may later develop into a reimbursable event.

An in-depth review of the financial aid process is beyond the scope of this document but in brief, records should be maintained for the following:

- Paid personnel time.
 - Employee name, title and duties performed. Overtime or straight time?
- Volunteer time
 - The value of this volunteer effort can be used to offset other expenses the jurisdiction will incur. Need to record hours worked and duties performed.
- Equipment Costs
 - Equipment leased for the event or existing equipment assigned to support the event. Record type of equipment along with dates and hours used.
- Vehicle costs



- Vehicle mileage, including to/from incident. Record driver name, type of vehicle, duties performed.
- Donated goods or supplies.
 - Record receipts indicating the value of the donation, which can help offset other costs.
- Logistical costs, including food / fuel / lodging.
- Supplies used.

The [Public Assistance Division at Cal OES](#) oversees this process. Cal OES can assist local agencies with identifying and applying for funding to offset the cost of the mass fatality response.

Potential sources of funding include:

Law Enforcement Mutual Aid Response Fund

An anticipated allocation of state funding to reimburse responding agencies for eligible costs incurred while assisting another jurisdiction. Funds are available for Law Enforcement Mutual Aid activities, including Mass Fatality incidents. This fund is administered by the Cal OES Law Enforcement Branch. For further information visit:

<https://www.caloes.ca.gov/office-of-the-director/operations/response-operations/law-enforcement/law-enforcement-mutual-aid-fund/>

Fire Management Assistance Grant (FMAG)

[FMAG](#) are funds allocated by the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) to assist in the suppression of, and recovery from, eligible wildland fires.

California Disaster Assistance Act: (CDAA)

[CDAA](#) is a state program, administered by Cal OES to assist local jurisdictions in responding to and recovering from significant disasters.

Personnel Support / Welfare

When assigning personnel to an incident, the physical safety and psychological welfare of the assigned personnel must be a primary consideration. Staff must be required to take appropriate time to rest and drink/eat as needed. Staff

temporarily deployed to a mass fatality incident may not be accustomed to the physical and psychological demands of dealing with a death scene and must be monitored. Post event follow up is critical.



Areas of Potential Support - Personnel

Problems with Self Deployed / Unaffiliated Volunteer Personnel

It is important to eliminate, to the extent possible, the use of self-deployed and/or unaffiliated volunteer personnel. Large events will generate significant public interest and it is expected that volunteers will arrive asking to assist. Using these untrained and unvetted volunteers, especially in a field assignment, creates a significant risk for the local jurisdictions. The local jurisdiction may be liable for the actions of these volunteers, or injuries they receive.

Personnel from other agencies, either private or government, should not be used unless requested, approved, and monitored by both the incident and the other agency. These restrictions are imperative to maintain proper personnel records, chain of custody records, and financial records.

Incident Management Assistance

Local jurisdictions should maintain as much local command of an incident as feasible. In the event outside assistance is needed, The Coroner Mutual Aid system can be used to fill these critical positions. A local jurisdiction can request subject matter experts to address specific personnel needs. It is vitally important that someone with detailed knowledge of the unique needs and responsibilities of the coroner function be imbedded in the Incident Command System when mass fatalities are expected.

Additional subject matter experts can be requested to manage recovery operations, Family Assistance Center, morgue operations or other aspects of a mass fatality response.

Assistance is also available by contacting another jurisdiction for guidance or collaboration. Cal OES maintains a [Resource Database](#) to facilitate this coordination. This is an online listing of Coroner mutual aid contacts for each county. The database contains local government contacts for the Law Enforcement, Search and Rescue, and Coroner disciplines. Any deployment of personnel must be coordinated by the Logistics Section of the Incident Command System to ensure personnel accountability and proper fiscal records.

Each county has a sign on to the database that will allow the county to update the contact information for their county and view the contact information for all the counties. If you need the sign on for your county, contact your regional Law Enforcement Coordinator or the Law Enforcement Duty Officer via the warning Center at 916-845-8911.



The Coroner / Medical Examiner community in California is represented by the [California State Coroners Association](#). Their website includes hyperlinks to all the counties. Members of this group have a long history of helping each other address critical issues.



“Deputy Coroner” Staffing Support

Field investigative/recovery personnel can be requested, but the request must describe the duties these personnel will be expected to perform. The term “Deputy Coroner” may describe personnel from a large agency with full time death investigators or a deputy sheriff from a small agency that only occasionally handles death investigations. The experience, training and capabilities of these personnel will vary significantly. Coroner staffing will most likely be a significant issue. Consider using other support personnel, as opposed to death investigators, when the specific task does not require death scene investigations.

Sheriff Search and Rescue Teams – Ground Searchers

Sheriff based Search and Rescue teams can be very useful, especially when searching open areas for decedents that are easily identifiable as human remains. Just in Time training may be needed when searching for decedents that are burned or dismembered. These personnel are available through the [Search and Rescue Mutual Aid System](#). For Coroner / Medical Examiner systems that operate separately from the Sheriff’s Office, these local Search and rescue teams must be used, if possible, before requesting mutual aid from another county.

Sheriff Search and Rescue Teams – Overhead Teams

Sheriff based Search and Rescue teams have expertise in complex searches for lost / missing people. The mapping and search management capabilities of these teams are applicable to mass fatality operations. These personnel are available through the Search and Rescue Mutual Aid System, if not available in your local jurisdiction.

Human Remains Detection Dogs (HRD)

Human remains detection dogs, and their handlers, can assist in locating human remains in a variety of situations. These dog teams are available through the Cal OES Enforcement Duty Officer and the Search and Rescue Mutual Aid System, if not available in your local jurisdiction.

Fire based Urban Search and Rescue Teams:

These teams are generally full-time paid firefighters with specialized training to allow them to search areas not suitable for Sheriff based SAR volunteers. They have tools, training, and protective equipment to search unstable buildings and damaged structures. These teams are available through the [Cal OES Fire Rescue Branch](#).



California National Guard – Fatality Search Recovery Teams

The California National Guard has a limited number of personnel assigned to Fatality Search and Recovery Teams. These soldiers are mortuary affairs personnel with training and equipment to locate and recover deceased. These personnel are National Guard reserves and part of the California Military Department. They can be requested by Cal OES for short term deployments if other resources are not available.

Federal Bureau of Investigation – Evidence Response Teams

The FBI has Evidence Response Teams based out of field offices in Los Angeles, San Diego, San Francisco, and Sacramento. These teams can be used to search on especially complex incidents, or those related to a federal investigation. These teams can be requested by Cal OES via the local FBI Field Office.

San Luis Obispo Fire Investigative Strike Team (SLOFIST)

[SLOFIST](#) is a non-profit foundation that provides advanced training in the investigation of fire related deaths. They are not a government agency and can't be tasked via the Mutual Aid System, but they do maintain a list of alumni that are subject matter experts. These personnel have expertise in scene processing, documentation, and evidence collection at fire scenes. A significant number of these alumni are employed by government agencies in California and these alumni can be mission tasked under the Mutual Aid Plan through their employing agency.

Morgue Operations Support

Coroner Mutual Aid

Morgue staffing support can be requested through the Coroner Mutual Aid System. Most jurisdictions have systemic staffing shortages, especially regarding forensic pathologists. Pathologists may be available from other states or federal resources upon request by Cal OES.

Even in a mass fatality event, pathologists must be diligent in determining the cause and manner of death for each individual decedent. In mass fatality events where, multiple pathologists will be determining cause and manner of death, it is recommended that the death certificates be reviewed to make sure they are consistent with each other.



Most morgues use support personnel to assist in the actual examination and other morgue operations. The duties of these personnel vary greatly from county to county. These positions can be requested via mutual aid, but the request must be detailed enough to describe the expertise needed to perform the requested function.

Disaster Mortuary Operational Response Team (DMORT)

[DMORT](#) is part of the National Disaster Medical System (NDMS), a section of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (USHHS), Office of Preparedness and Emergency Operations (OPEO).

DMORT may be able to provide the following services:

- Subject Matter Experts to evaluate mass fatality response efforts and make suggestions for best practices. California used this service during the COVID response and the 2018 Camp Fire.
- Forensic Pathology services (based on availability of medical staff).
- Autopsy support personnel.
- Dental identifications.
- Decedent fingerprinting.
- Victim identification (recommendations to the local jurisdiction)
- X-ray technicians.
- Short term decedent storage and management.
- Family Assistance Center operations including collection of anti-mortem information.
 - DMORT Family Assistance Support can deploy independently of a full DMORT response.

DMORT is generally not currently able to perform these services:

- Field level fatality search and recovery
- Cremation / embalming/ burial services
- Funeral home functions
- Decedent transportation

DMORT operates in support of the local jurisdiction, which retains the responsibility for assigning the cause and manner of death, signing of death certificates, and death notifications. All records created by DMORT will be left with the local jurisdiction.

California has a very robust Coroner Mutual Aid System which can duplicate many of the functions of DMORT. Consideration should be given to using State / Local resources before requesting DMORT.

In a federally declared disaster, Cal OES can request DMORT assistance when



the incident exceeds the resources available through the Coroner Mutual Aid System. This request will be sent to the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) Region IX for potential funding support. In the absence of a federally declared disaster, a local jurisdiction can request DMORT assistance, but the cost of any DMORT activation would need to be paid for by the requesting agency. These costs can be significant.

Once a request for DMORT is received, FEMA would work with the US Department of Health and Human Services will evaluate the request to determine available funding sources, availability of DMORT resources, and appropriateness of the request. If the request is initially approved, it will be referred to a DMORT Advance Team member(s) to gather additional information. A DMORT Assessment Team may be deployed to provide an assessment and determine what personnel and equipment will be needed for possible additional DMORT support. This would include a much more in-depth review of the incident including setting realistic expectations and confirming that the requesting agency can support the logistical needs of a DMORT activation, which can be significant.

Once this initial assessment has been completed, DMORT will develop a plan for the response. It may take 2-4 days before DMORT personnel are able to deploy and be operational. There are a significant number of DMORT personnel that live and work in California, but it is understood that DMORT personnel may respond from other FEMA regions because California based personnel may already be assigned under the State's Coroner Mutual Aid System.

Once activated, DMORT works in support of the local jurisdiction. See below for the EMAC process.

Emergency Management Assistance Compact (EMAC)

The EMAC was established in 1996 to provide interstate emergency management. EMAC also applies to US Territories. EMAC is administered by the National Emergency Management Association (NEMA). EMAC is a congressionally ratified organization that provides form and structure to interstate mutual aid. Through EMAC, a disaster impacted state or territory can request and or receive assistance from other member states quickly and efficiently. The EMAC system resolves upfront the issues of liability and reimbursement. (www.emacweb.org). The EMAC request for assistance is made by Cal OES, as a representative of the Governor. Cal OES also receives requests for assistance from other states via EMAC.

**Other Support Personnel:**

Trained Coroner / M.E. personnel will likely be needed in fatality search, recovery, and processing assignments. It will be important to assign other staff to duties that do not require specialized Coroner / M.E. training. This would include using other investigators to staff call centers and follow up on unaccounted person reports. In prior incidents, personnel assigned to the jurisdiction's Crime Analysis Unit were well suited to managing the list of unaccounted persons as it constantly changing. Additional personnel can be requested through the Mutual Aid process.

Security / Staffing Traffic Control Points:

Local / state law enforcement officers can be requested for security staffing and traffic control points by contacting the local jurisdiction sheriff's office. The sheriff's office, if their role as the operational area law enforcement coordinator, is responsible obtaining the needed personnel. If the personnel are not available from the operational area, the sheriff's office can request additional personnel from other jurisdictions via the [Law Enforcement Mutual Aid Plan](#). The California Highway Patrol has primary jurisdiction for traffic control points on a state highway or other state property. CHP can be contacted via their [local offices](#).

California National Guard (CNG):

The CNG has played a vital supporting role in prior mass fatality incidents.

California National Guard military police personnel may be used for traffic control points on local roads, or state highways with concurrence of the California Highway Patrol, depending on local policies and availability of personnel. National Guard military police do not have power of arrest and their role must be clearly defined.

CNG provided significant morgue staffing assistance during the COVID response. CNG has a deployable capability to decontaminate personnel and tools returning from searches in a hazardous environment. CNG has "Friendly Force Trackers" that can be deployed to monitor search personnel in real time. CNG also can deploy helicopters for personnel movement or scene support. Requests for CNG personnel in this capacity are facilitated by the Cal OES Law Enforcement Branch. State / Local resources must be exhausted before CNG assets can be deployed.



Victim Identification:

Fingerprinting:

Decedent fingerprinting has long been used for identification. In the case of mummified or burned hands, special techniques are often needed. The Federal Bureau of Investigation's [Disaster Victim Identification Squad](#) has published [several videos](#) describing the process and capabilities of postmortem fingerprinting. FBI fingerprint assistance can be requested by Cal OES.

Traditional DNA Identification.

Performed by the [California Department of Justice's DNA laboratory](#) and several local government agencies, this process may provide results when the samples are extremely degraded or complex. This process can compare samples against nationwide databases. Samples must be submitted to the DOJ Lab and typically take several weeks to several months to complete. DOJ can assist in the coordination, collection, documentation, and submission of biological samples from unidentified remains for DNA analysis. Knowledge of the best samples available from partial, decomposed or otherwise compromised human remains can make the difference in the ability to utilize DNA for identification.

Rapid DNA:

"Rapid DNA" allows for DNA testing to be performed by personnel at or near the fatality site. The testing process itself typically takes less than 2 hours, but properly preparing and interpreting the samples may take several additional hours, depending on the substance being tested. Rapid DNA is useful on bone, tissue, blood, saliva, and other biological samples. Rapid DNA requires a reference sample from a close blood relative, or an antemortem reference sample from the victim. Rapid DNA instruments from [ANDE](#) and [Thermo Fisher](#) are currently being used in California. Cal OES has purchased and deployed three Rapid DNA instruments that are available for mass fatality response. Fresno County Sheriff – Coroner and Los Angeles County Medical Examiner each have one Cal OES owned instruments that is used by those agencies for internal purposes, while being available for disaster response. The third instrument is assigned to the Cal OES Law Enforcement Branch and is available for response or training as needed. In addition to the three Cal OES purchased instruments, about 25 devices have been acquired by local jurisdictions and are in use throughout the state (as of January 2024). These instruments can be deployed under the Coroner Mutual Aid System either to a scene, morgue, or family assistance center as needed. When requesting these devices, consideration must be given



to the cost of the consumables needed to operate these instruments and the personnel to operate them.

California Dental Identification Team (Cal DIT)

Cal OES maintains an agreement with the [California Dental Identification Team](#), a group of dentists with expertise in forensic odontology. If dental records are available, these dentists can often assist with identification. These dentists are volunteer private practice dentists and not part of the Coroner Mutual Aid System. Cal OES does not have an agreement in place to cover any costs associated with their use. Cal OES can request this resource and facilitate discussions between the jurisdiction and the dentist regarding costs, if any.

California Department of Justice (DOJ) - Missing/Unidentified Persons

The DOJ's Missing/Unidentified Persons Section (MUPS) also maintains statewide files containing the physical characteristics, photographs, and dental records of missing and unidentified persons reported to DOJ by law enforcement agencies and county coroners in accordance with mandates contained in Penal Code Sections 14200-14251 and Health & Safety Code section 102870.

MUPS compares missing person reports against unidentified person reports, and vice versa, to determine if there are possible matches. Possible matches can be made from comparison of physical characteristics such as hair color, eye color, height, and weight, or from comparison of other physical identifiers such as clothing, jewelry, scars, or tattoos. MUPS also makes inquiries into a variety of governmental and private databases to find information that may result in the location of missing persons. If any possible matches are made or any information is found, the appropriate law enforcement and emergency services agencies are notified.

Anthropology:

Anthropologists have been used very effectively in mass fatality incidents, especially in fire related incidents. They often can quickly identify bone fragments as human or animal, identify comingled skeletal remains, and may be able to provide gender and approximate age of the source of the bones. The Human Identification Lab at [California State University at Chico](#) has done extensive work in this area and deployed to both the Butte County Camp Fire in 2018 and the Maui Wildfire in 2023. The [California State University at Fresno](#) also has an Anthropology program. Both have expressed a willingness to assist in mass fatality incidents. These university programs are not part of the mutual aid



system but will work with local jurisdictions if needed and logistical issues can be addressed. Cal OES can facilitate that process.

In addition, some SAR teams, and several Coroner / M.E Offices have on staff or contract anthropologists available. These examinations may be available remotely using a good quality camera to photograph the bones, with a ruler for scale.

Anthropologists have been very helpful in providing Just in Time training in bone recognition. This training, provided to search personnel just before field deployment, would make them more effective in recognizing burned remains. This training may include examples of burned bone fragments.

Department of Motor Vehicles: (DMV)

The DMV can perform specialized database searches to assist in decedent identification. They can provide a list of names or vehicles associated with an address. They can search for vehicle registration information based on partial license plate or VINs. Available through the [DMV Investigations Division](#) or Cal OES.

Victim Information Center

A Victim Information Center (VIC), as a component of the Family Assistance Centers is a critical component of a mass fatality response. A VIC should have the capability of serving 8 – 10 people per anticipated decedent. A VIC provides several benefits for families of victims:

- Families can receive vetted information regarding the incident. This includes notifying families of the status of the victim (e.g., whether the victim is a decedent, has been transported to a hospital, or is still missing). This will also include the provision of updates regarding incident recovery efforts.
- Services: This may include emotional support, spiritual care, health, and social services.
- Allows for collection of reference DNA samples and other antemortem information to assist in victim identification.

The [National Transportation Safety Board](#) publishes several documents on managing a Family Assistance Center. Although tailored for transportation incidents, this document has information on establishing a FAC. The recommendations can be scaled up or down as needed.

Assistance is staffing or managing a VIC may be available from:



- The Local Jurisdiction's personnel.
 - Mental Health, Public Health, District Attorney Victim/Witness programs
- Local private death care industry
- Coroner Mutual Aid Plan
- California Department of Justice
- FBI Victim Assistance
- DMORT Victim Assistance



Decedent Storage

Decedent storage after a mass fatality event can be a significant problem. The International Red Cross publishes a guide for [*Management of Dead Bodies after Disasters: A Field Manual for First Responders*](#).

General Guidelines:

If possible, avoid placing decedents directly on the floor, especially stacked on top of each other. Appropriate shelving will dramatically increase the storage capacity while making handling of the deceased easier and more dignified. If purpose-built morgue shelving is not available, other heavy duty all metal shelving can be used. Shelves should be at least 7 feet long and 24 inches wide to allow for the length of bodyboards. Taller shelving can be used if personnel or equipment is available to assist in placing decedents onto the upper shelves. All metal shelving will be much easier to decontaminate after use.

The preferred temperature for refrigerated short term decedent storage is 36° – 39°F.

The following can be considered:

- Requesting another jurisdiction to temporarily house decedents.
- Private funeral homes / mortuaries and crematories.
- Refrigerated morgue vehicles.
 - Limited number available through Mutual Aid. Capacity of 4 to 20 decedents.
- Portable temporary decedent storage.
 - Capacity 4-24 decedents. Deployable at a scene.
 - Limited number available through mutual aid.





- Leased / purchased refrigerated Conex boxes.
- Commonly in 20- or 40-foot sizes, with a capacity of 16 – 40 using 4 tier shelving.
- Leased / purchased refrigerated simi truck trailers. Capacity of up to 54, with appropriate shelving. Design build trailers available in various sizes from [Acela](#) and [Mopec](#).
 - Food grade trailers are generally not recommended unless the trailers are purchased after their use.



- Temporary refrigerated morgue tents.
- [Mobile Integrated Remains Collection System](#) (MIRCS). These are a California National Guard resource with a capacity of 16 decedents each.





- Temporary burial.
 - Option of last resort. Capacity of about 720 decedents in a football field size space. The Department of Defense protocol for temporary mass burial is described in Appendix B of the [Mortuary Affairs Handbook](#).

It is important to include the private death care industry and medical facilities in any discussion about decedent storage. Generally, medical facilities do not have significant on-site decedent storage. Anything that can be done to decrease delays in obtaining death certificates and increase the capacity of funeral homes and crematories will reduce the need for temporary decedent storage.



Death Reporting

In a mass fatality event, local jurisdictions will be under intense pressure to report on incident related deaths as quickly as possible. During the early stages of the COVID response in early 2020, the Cal OES Law Enforcement Branch was updating death counts four times a day. It was difficult to report these numbers both quickly and accurately, especially since the deaths were reported by 58 local jurisdictions. This reporting continued once a day for a year until California Department of Public Health (CDPH) was able to develop procedures to report the deaths. The transfer of the reporting from Cal OES to CDPH was problematic because of different reporting methods. The Coroner / M.E.s report deaths based on location of death. CDPH reports deaths based on the decedent's home address at the time of their death. This was especially difficult for foreign nationals or residents of other states that died in California. If the mass fatality incident is a pandemic or other Public Health issue, jurisdictions are encouraged to refer death count reporting to CDPH.

There is a high likelihood that a mass fatality event will receive state or federal funding. This funding may include provisions for individual assistance, including burial assistance. In that event, FEMA will request additional information about each death to facilitate this benefit. Additional information will include decedent name, date of death, next of kin and their contact information.

During a disaster, an accurate accounting of deaths which may be related to the disaster will be critical. This information will be used to assist in determining the support needed and where to allocate that support. Declared disasters will often result in funding allocated to assist victim families in the cost of funerals for deaths which are related to the disaster. This creates a financial

The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, National Center for Health Statistics, National Vital Statistics System, <https://stacks.cdc.gov/view/cdc/49294> deaths can be directly or indirectly related to the disaster:

- A directly related death is defined as a death directly attributable to the forces of the disaster or by the direct consequences of these forces, such as structural collapse, flying debris, or radiation exposure.
- An indirectly related disaster death occurs when the unsafe or unhealthy conditions present during any phase of the disaster (i.e., pre-event or



preparations, during the actual occurrence, or post-event during cleanup after a disaster) contribute to a death.

Common Causes of Direct Disaster-related Death

- Burns
- Crushing
- Drowning
- Electrocution
- Falls
- Fire or smoke inhalation
- Hyperthermia (heat)
- Hypothermia (cold)
- Radiation or chemical poisoning
- Suffocation
- Traumatic injury
- Blunt-force trauma
- Penetrating injury

Common Circumstances Leading to Indirect Disaster-related Death

- Acute exacerbation of chronic condition(s) (e.g., asthma, cardiovascular)
- Cleanup after disaster (e.g., chain-saw injury, electrocution)
- Escaping or fleeing the disaster (e.g., saw the tornado and fell while rushing down storm shelter stairs [Note: This could be directly related if the tornado's winds led to the fall])
- Evacuation (e.g., motor vehicle crash while evacuating before the storm)
- Exposure to industrial or chemical hazards (e.g., chemical release from hurricane- damaged refiners [Note: This could be directly related if the exposure was due to a human-induced disaster])
- Loss/disruption of public utilities (e.g., fall in home without power)
- Loss/disruption of transportation-related services (e.g., lack of medical transport to dialysis)
- Loss/disruption of usual access to medical or mental health care (e.g., oxygen)
- Preparation for disaster (e.g., falling while putting up storm windows)
- Psychosocial stress or anxiety
- Social disruption, including riots or anarchy
- Return to unsafe, unhealthy structures or environment (e.g., electrocution)
- Use of temporary sheltering or provisions; displacement



Additional guidance to assist local jurisdictions in completing death certificates for disaster related deaths is available from a publication from the National Vital Statistics System titled [*A Reference Guide for Certification of Deaths in the Event of a Natural, Human-induced, or Chemical/Radiological Disaster*](#) and a publication from the National Association of Medical Examiners titled [*Recommendations for the Documentation and Certification of Disaster-Related Deaths*](#).



Other Assisting Agencies

Local jurisdictions are expected to utilize local resources, if available, before requesting statewide assistance. Several large counties have local agencies that may duplicate the functions of state agencies, at the local level. If local resources are unavailable, local jurisdictions may reach out to state agencies directly or request Cal OES to make the request.

In a significant event, it is expected that the State Operations Center will be activated. This is a facility located in Sacramento and managed by Cal OES, that will coordinate state / federal resources assisting in the incident. If activated, the State Operation Center may have liaison officers available from assisting state / federal agencies.

In a mass fatality event, the Governor may declare a State of Emergency directing state agencies to aid local jurisdictions. This will allow Cal OES assist local jurisdictions in requesting and obtaining state resources.

State Agencies

California Department of Public Health:

The [Department of Public Health](#) (CDPH) will assist local government in assessing health hazards and ensuring compliance with health regulations. The CDPH is responsible for ensuring observance of health regulations and policies. To assist in Coroner operations, CDPH will provide or assist in providing emergency supplies of death certificates, disposition forms, and training in their use.

Cemetery and Funeral Bureau, Department of Consumer Affairs (CFB)

The [CFB](#) is the licensing authority for funeral homes, crematories, and their critical personnel. The agency investigates complaints against licensed facilities or personnel. The agency has enforcement authority. CFB has field staff that are familiar with the licensed facilities and the regulations covering their operations. CFB can provide a list of facilities within a jurisdiction.

Federal Agencies

Section 402 of the [Robert T. Stafford Disaster Relief and Emergency Assistance Act](#) (P.L. 93-288 as amended by P.L. 100-707) provides that in any major disaster, the President (through FEMA) may direct any federal agency under federal law, with or without reimbursement, to utilize its authorities and the resources granted to it (including personnel, equipment, supplies, facilities, and managerial,



technical and advisory services) in support of state and local assistance efforts. The Federal Bureau of Investigation may assist in the identification of the deceased on its own authority without any declaration or proclamation.

Federal Bureau of Investigation

Primary investigative agency for suspected acts of terrorism. Can also assist with victim identification, personnel, and investigative resources.

Collaborating Office for Medical Examiners and Coroners

This is a division of the Center for Disease Control and Prevention that The Collaborating Office for Medical Examiners and Coroners ([COMEC](#)) works to bring together resources from across the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) to support the work in the medical examiner and coroner community. Content is continuously updated as new materials are developed or identified.

This website has a great deal of information about Coroner and Medical Examiner issues nationwide.

Non-Government Agencies

Death Care Trade Industry Associations,

The California Funeral Directors Association [CFDA](#) and the Cemetery and Mortuary Association of California [CMAC](#) are statewide trade organization representing the majority of funeral homes and mortuaries in the state. Their members can assist in Victim Information Center Operations, with the understanding that their function is to inform victim families of services offered by the private death care industry, not solicit business for their specific company. They can also assist in coordination with funeral homes statewide. During the response to COVID, they were used to distribute information from the Center for Disease Control regarding changing recommendations on infection control. They also assisted with gathering information from the local funeral homes on the cause of delays in decedent burial or other final disposition.



National Association of Medical Examiners Position Paper: Recommendations for the Documentation and Certification of Disaster-Related Deaths

https://name.memberclicks.net/assets/docs/NAME%20Position%20Paper_Disaster-Related%20Deaths_FINAL%20FOR%20PUBLICATION.pdf

U.S. Department of Health and Human Services: Vital Statistics Reporting Guidance: A Reference Guide for Certification of Deaths in the Event of a Natural, Human-induced, or Chemical/Radiological Disaster

<https://stacks.cdc.gov/view/cdc/49294>



The Role of the Regional Law Enforcement Coroner Mutual Aid Coordinator

The Regional Coordinator, during an incident, must balance not only the needs and resources of his/her own department, but also other Operational Areas in their Region.

Duties and Responsibilities include:

Maintain coordination with the Operational Area Coroners/M.E. s, and others as needed, within the region. The Operational Area Coordinators should meet at least once a year to network and discuss response capabilities and challenges.

On receipt of information of a mass fatality incident within the region, coordinate the regional response and communicate with Cal OES Law Enforcement for situational awareness and any unmet needs.

Participate in conference calls initiated by the Cal OES Law Enforcement Branch or regional partners as needed.

The Regional Coordinator should designate one or more points of contact in his/her agency to assist in coordination of the mutual aid activities of the region.

The Regional Coordinator shall evaluate requests for assistance from the impacted operational area; determine the resources available from within the region and initiate appropriate response. When resources within the region are insufficient, additional mutual aid requests must be made to the state.

The Regional Coroners' Mutual Aid Coordinator is not responsible for any direct emergency operations except those which occur within the jurisdiction of its own agency. The Operational Area Coroner/M.E. in whose jurisdiction the emergency exists shall remain in full charge of all coroner resources furnished for mutual aid operations.

The Regional Coordinator should assess the region's Coroner/M.E. mutual aid capabilities and be able to communicate this information to the State Coroner Mutual Aid Coordinator.

If Federal resources (e.g., DMORT), are requested by the operational area Coroner/M.E., the Regional Coroner/M.E. Mutual Aid Coordinator will assist in the request and coordination protocols for federal deployment to the impacted jurisdiction(s).



Election of Regional Coroner/Medical Examiner Mutual Aid Coordinator

Introduction

The California Governor's Office of Emergency Services - Law Enforcement Branch is charged with the coordination and implementation of Coroners' Mutual Aid activities during multi-jurisdictional/multi-incident emergencies. Over the years, a system to accomplish the dispatch and utilization of mutual aid resources has been developed to meet the specific needs of the coroners/medical examiners services. This office is responsible for overall coordination and management of the "system."

Any organization, by virtue of large numbers of individual units or geographical expanse, must contain a recognized chain of command to operate effectively. For this reason, responsibility for monitoring Coroner/M.E. activities within each Region is vested in a Regional Coroners Mutual Aid Coordinator, who, in turn, works with the Operational Area Coroners.

Much of the success of any "system" depends upon the capability of the individuals serving at the various levels in the chain of command and acceptance by their peers.

Term/Election

The term of the Regional Mutual Aid Coordinator will coincide with the coordinator's term as a Sheriff-Coroner, Coroner or Medical Examiner. The California State Sheriff's Association, in coordination with the California State Coroner's Association will conduct an election every four years.

The term of the Regional Mutual Aid Coordinator may also be terminated upon the request of the incumbent, or upon the request of two thirds of the Sheriff/Coroner/Medical Examiners within the region.