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# EMERGENCY MORTUARY SERVICES

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*United States Office of Civilian Defense*  
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## EMERGENCY MORTUARY SERVICES

### GENERAL CONSIDERATIONS

In some air raids forty percent of the casualties may be fatal, but fortunately the total number of casualties is usually small in proportion to the amount of property damage. While the wounded require first attention, the dead should be cared for promptly and inconspicuously, and always with proper reverence and respect. The mortuary service is an essential part of the casualty organization and of the war effort, and must be conducted with tact and efficiency. Detailed instructions for all communities are impossible because of wide variations in local legal practices and responsibilities, but general principles and procedures may be indicated.

Normal funeral services, including embalming, caskets and individual burial or cremation, should be provided by private morticians insofar as circumstances permit, and every opportunity should be given for appropriate religious observances. There must be sufficient mortuary and burial accommodations as well as sufficient staff and transport to deal with the number of bodies which may reasonably be expected in view of the size and density of the population and the degree of exposure to enemy attack. It is essential to provide for prompt removal of bodies from the scene of the incident to a mortuary, followed by identification and rapid clearance of the mortuary. Speed and efficiency must be coupled with consideration for the feelings of bereaved relatives. A breakdown in this important service may have a serious effect upon public morale and the prosecution of the war.

To facilitate identification, each civilian in target areas of the country should be encouraged to carry an identification bracelet or necklace, or a metal identification pocket piece. These may be obtained at jewelry stores, five-and-ten-cent stores, novelty shops and from public vending machines. Lucky pocket pieces and key tags with names are examples of useful vending machine products. Metal "charga-plates" issued by some department stores for credit purposes make satisfactory identification tags.

### PRELIMINARY PROCEDURE

The local Chief of Emergency Medical Service should call into conference the following officers who, besides himself, may have normal or emergency responsibilities in the collection and disposal of the dead. Under his leadership, this group should create the necessary organization and clarify the lines of responsibility for handling the fatalities. A careful survey of existing morgue, mortuary and cemetery facilities should be the first step in planning for emergencies.

1. *Medical Examiner*, Coroner or similar official who has legal responsibilities in connection with the investigation of deaths from violence and disposition of remains.
2. *Chief of Police*, who usually has legal responsibilities for identification of the dead and disposal of their personal effects.
3. *Health Officer*, who has public health responsibilities in the disposal of bodies and recording of deaths.
4. *Representative of the private funeral directors and cemeteries*, to act as liaison officer with that profession in planning for the collection, transportation and temporary storage of the dead and for the preparation of bodies for burial. Several national and local organizations of funeral directors have made plans to cooperate with local civilian defense authorities.

These officials in conference should provide for:

- a. Location of the morgue and of supplementary morgue facilities.
- b. Administration of these facilities by the police, medical examiner or coroner under whom they are customarily operated.
- c. Training of supplementary mortuary personnel in adequate numbers for emergency duty at morgue and on mortuary vehicles.
- d. Responsibility for the collection and preparation of the dead and for burial.
- e. Rules governing the emergency issuance of death certificates and burial permits for both identified and unidentified casualties.
- f. Type of inquests, if any, to be required. Although inquests should not be required for

- deaths due to enemy action, autopsies are of great value in planning better means of future protection and should be encouraged whenever possible.
- g. Safeguarding of personal property of the identified and of the unidentified dead.
- h. Manufacture of board coffins in adequate numbers.
- i. Pooling of equipment and personnel of private mortuaries in emergencies.
- j. Identification procedures: Viewing by relatives and friends, photography, fingerprinting, and other means of identification.
- k. Location and preparation of burial places for unclaimed and unidentified bodies.
- l. Preparation of mortality lists and determination of policy concerning their publication or posting by the police, the health officer, or other casualty information officer.
- m. Arrangements with neighboring communities for mutual aid, which should include provision for the loan of mortuary personnel and equipment.

## ORGANIZATION

### A. Morgue

In large cities, the morgue facilities and equipment should not be concentrated in one place. The main morgue (designated "A") should be located centrally; it will usually be the regular public morgue of the community. Tentative arrangements should be made for the use of skating rinks, gymnasiums, auditoriums, or similar buildings for use as supplementary morgues (designated B, C, D, etc.) as necessary to provide space to lay out bodies in the ratio of two per thousand population, in target areas.

The normal morgue personnel should be supplemented with auxiliaries who have been trained by instructors furnished by the morticians of the community. Some of the morgue personnel may be employees of the police department or of the medical examiner's office, assisted by trained volunteers from private funeral establishments who are accustomed to handling the dead.

The staff of the Emergency Mortuary Service in large cities should consist of the following during emergency periods:

1. *Director*, in charge of morgue operations.
2. *Physician*, to confirm deaths.

3. *Recorder*, to supervise the reception and disposal of bodies and to keep the Morgue Record Book.

4. *Property Officer*, to keep personal property and the records pertaining thereto.

5. *Identification Officer*, who controls the viewing of bodies and completes the identification record, including fingerprinting, photographing and recording identifying marks or anatomical features. A police officer, experienced in identification procedures, serves well in this capacity. He may require assistance in the making of fingerprint records and identification photographs, and the services of a dentist to make dental charts.

6. *A Coroner's or Medical Examiner's Representative*, who has authority to sign death certificates and order disposal of unidentified bodies.

7. *Morgue Attendants*, for handling bodies: one per 10,000 population with a minimum of four part time attendants in each morgue.

8. *Clerical Assistants*, at least one per 50,000 population with a minimum of two per mortuary.

9. *Receptionists*, tactful and intelligent female attendants, who should be available for interviewing and consoling the relatives and friends.

In small cities, several of these functions may be assumed by one person. Fewer personnel are needed in less exposed areas.

### B. Insignia

All volunteer members of an emergency mortuary organization are to enroll with the Civilian Defense Volunteer Office and be registered officially by the Director of the Mortuary Service as members of the United States Citizens Defense Corps. They are then entitled to wear the armband and insignia of the Emergency Medical Service, of which the Mortuary Service is a part.

### C. Transport Facilities

To insure the most economical use of transport vehicles, the hearses, flower cars and other vehicles of private mortuaries should be in the transport pool of the Emergency Medical Service and be under the direction of the transport officer during and after a raid. If other vehicles are used, the floor and a short distance up the sides should be lined with some suitable non-absorbent material that may readily be washed down.

**OPERATION**

**A. Marking and Segregation**

The dead should be tagged in the field with identification tags in the same manner as the wounded, covered with clothing or sheets if possible, and segregated from the living while awaiting transport. A record of the site where the body was found is important, for it may provide a clue to identification.

The dead should not be brought by stretcher teams to a first aid post, casualty station or hospital. Those who die after reaching these places should be placed in a separate room or yard from which they are later removed, preferably by separate exit.

Whenever possible, a physician should examine the body before it is moved to the morgue so as to determine whether life is actually extinct. To the inexperienced, a condition of profound shock with extremely shallow respiration may give the appearance of death. When there is the slightest doubt, the body should be taken to a hospital or casualty station for observation.

**B. Transport**

After necessary transport has been furnished the living, the transport officer will promptly dispatch appropriate equipment and personnel to remove all bodies from the scene of the disaster, and from first aid posts, casualty stations, and hospitals, to the official morgue. The identified dead may later be taken to private mortuaries. The identified dead

in hospitals or homes, if released by the coroner or medical examiner or by the health officer, may be transferred directly to private mortuaries. Unidentified dead should always be sent to the morgue.

It may at times be necessary to employ the same vehicle for the dead as for the wounded, although some cities prohibit such use.

**C. Morgue Reception**

Immediately after arrival at the morgue, a physician should again examine each body to confirm state of death; if there is any possibility of life, the body should be removed at once to a hospital.

When a body is received, a metal tag showing a letter to identify the morgue and a serial accession number should be fastened around the neck with a wire. This tag should be removed only from identified bodies ready for private interment or cremation. The tags should not be removed from unidentified bodies, even at the time of burial, as they may be important for later identification. These tags may be prepared from scrap galvanized iron or other metal obtained from a tin shop and marked with a tool marking set and hammer, obtainable in tool and machine shops or in hardware stores.

In the morgue receiving room a record book (fig. 1), supplied by the Office of Civilian Defense, should be filled in as completely as possible. The morgue accession number in the book should correspond to that on the metal tag attached to the body.

Serial Number	Name	Address	Age	Sex	Race	Religion	Received			Disposition							
							Date	Hour	From	Date	Hour	To	Ordered by	Property Received by (Signature)	Body Received by (Signature)	Interment	
1																	
2																	
3																	
4																	
5																	
6																	
7																	
8																	
9																	
10																	
11																	
12																	
13																	
14																	
15																	
16																	

FIGURE 1.—MORGUE RECORD BOOK

#### **D. Personal Property**

In the receiving room of the morgue, clothing, contents of pockets and jewelry should be placed in a strong paper bag marked with the number assigned to the body. The objects should be listed on a form pasted or printed on the outside of the bag. This list must be checked when the body and property are removed from the morgue. Property bags of unidentified dead should be transferred to the custody of the police or other authorized officials and a receipt signature obtained by the morgue recorder. For the identified dead, the property bag may be delivered to responsible relatives or their agents upon a proper receipt.

Ration books and registration identity cards should be transferred to the police who will forward them to the Rationing Board or other appropriate agency.

#### **E. Morgue Storage**

As soon as possible after bodies have been placed in the morgue and before they are viewed for identification purposes, they should be cleansed thoroughly so as to be as presentable as possible. They should be laid out on the floor in orderly rows, covered with clean sheets or blankets. Proper cleansing and laying out is important for public morale. When mutilation of the features or of the body has occurred, an effort should be made to dissuade the relatives from viewing the body, provided other means of identification are available.

Unidentified bodies should be kept in a room separate from those already identified, so that a minimum number will be seen by persons viewing the bodies for purposes of identification. Inspection of unidentified bodies should be by permit only, such permits to be issued at police stations or the Casualty Information Service office to individuals who may be able to make an identification.

The period during which unclaimed or unidentified bodies are to be retained in the morgue will be determined by local laws, morgue capacity, weather, and the speed of disposal methods used. Forty-eight hours is suggested as the time limit without embalming or refrigeration.

Provision should be made at the morgue for

embalming bodies if private mortuaries become overtaxed. For this purpose suitable tables and equipment should be available. It may be wise to use volunteer embalmers from the private mortuaries for central embalming service at the morgue in case of any considerable number of deaths; this would permit more effective use of the available embalmers and would allow bodies to be held longer at the morgue for identification.

#### **F. Identification Procedures**

Before the disposal of unidentified bodies, certain information must be recorded on identification record cards (fig. 2), supplied by the Office of Civilian Defense. This should include photograph, fingerprints, a dental chart and a record of physical abnormalities and blemishes.

#### **G. Release and Disposal of Bodies**

Identified bodies should be released to private funeral directors as soon as they are claimed by responsible relatives. Unidentified bodies may also be consigned by proper officials to private funeral directors for disposal. Bodies should be removed from the mortuary only at specified periods when viewing is not permitted.

Pending appropriate permanent legislation, burial expenses for all persons deceased as a result of enemy action will be paid by the Federal Government, at rates not to exceed \$100 in any one case for complete burial including ground for interment. Such payment will be in lieu of, but not in addition to, payments made by the decedent's family or friends. Prior authorization is not required for the payment of such costs, provided that a certificate has been issued in each case by the Commander of the appropriate Citizens Defense Corps or his designated representative, stating that death occurred as a direct result of enemy action. Bills for burial costs must be accompanied by these certificates. Such bills and certificates should be forwarded through the local Chief of Emergency Medical Service to the State Chief of Emergency Medical Service for official vouchering, certification, and transmittal to the Office of Civilian Defense Regional Medical Officer, and thence to the Emergency Medical Section, United States Public Health Service, Washington, D. C.

Every effort should be made to facilitate the

OCED Form No. 187

### IDENTIFICATION RECORD CARD

Possible or partial name \_\_\_\_\_ (Surname) \_\_\_\_\_ (Given name)

Possible or partial address \_\_\_\_\_

Where found \_\_\_\_\_

By whom \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

Sex \_\_\_\_\_ Race \_\_\_\_\_ Hair \_\_\_\_\_ Eyes \_\_\_\_\_ Build \_\_\_\_\_

Approximate: Age \_\_\_\_\_ Height \_\_\_\_\_ Weight \_\_\_\_\_

Morgue No. \_\_\_\_\_

Dental Chart

Indicate position of fillings in teeth and state type of materials used.

Crown   
 Dummy Bridge   
 On Denture   
 Missing

REMARKS:

18-0148-1 U. S. GOVERNMENT PRINTING OFFICE

Scars, old deformities, and marks \_\_\_\_\_

Clothing, laundry marks, jewelry, etc. \_\_\_\_\_

Disposal: Body— \_\_\_\_\_ Property— \_\_\_\_\_  
Delivered to \_\_\_\_\_ Delivered to \_\_\_\_\_  
Place of interment \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_  
Date \_\_\_\_\_

#### RIGHT HAND

1. THUMB	2. INDEX FINGER	3. MIDDLE FINGER	4. RING FINGER	5. LITTLE FINGER

#### LEFT HAND

6. THUMB	7. INDEX FINGER	8. MIDDLE FINGER	9. RING FINGER	10. LITTLE FINGER

Classification: \_\_\_\_\_

18-0148-1

FIGURE 2.—IDENTIFICATION RECORD CARD

conduct of burial services in accordance with the rites of the deceased's religious denomination. The American Flag may be used as a pall at the funeral of any civilian, whether a civilian defense worker or not, whose death is due to enemy action.

#### **SPECIAL TREATMENT OF GAS-CONTAMINATED BODIES**

The Director of the Emergency Mortuary Service should call on the Senior (local) Gas Officer for technical advice and assistance in setting up procedures for handling bodies contaminated, or suspected of contamination, with persistent gases. It is important that the identification tag on such bodies be distinctively marked "Gas Case" in order that persons handling them will be warned to give them special treatment. Such bodies should be collected and moved only by workers wearing protective clothing and masks. All clothing and effects should be taken from the body, marked for identification, decontaminated, and taken to the morgue. The bodies should be cleansed by approved methods before being admitted to the morgue. This cleansing may be performed out of doors or at the regular gas-cleansing stations after living casualties have been cleansed. Persons undressing and cleansing the bodies out of doors need wear only protective shoes, gloves, aprons, and gas masks. After cleansing, bodies may be admitted to the morgue, placed in shrouds, and dealt with in the usual way. Persons who have performed these procedures must subsequently go through the cleansing prescribed for decontamination unit members.

Vehicles used for the collection of such bodies should be decontaminated in the same manner as vehicles used for the transportation of the wounded.

#### **EMERGENCY MASS DISPOSAL OF BODIES**

It is desirable to organize existing facilities as completely as possible in order to avoid the necessity for resorting to mass methods of disposal. Only in the event of extremely large numbers of casualties, which make usual disposal methods impossible, should one of the following methods be employed:

1. Mass burial in a common grave, without embalming, in board caskets if available. Provisional arrangements should be made in advance for the production of such caskets. Identification tags attached in the reception room of the morgue should in all cases remain attached at the time of burial so as to facilitate future identification on exhumation. A chart should be made of each common grave showing the relative locations of the bodies by tag number. The common grave should be located in an established cemetery.

2. Mass cremation would be necessary only after a great catastrophe, if bodies have remained at the scene of disaster for several days and require collection and cremation as a public health measure. Mass disposal of bodies disturbs public morale. It should be considered only when there is absolutely no other alternative.

#### **CASUALTY REPORTING**

The Casualty Information Service mentioned in Medical Division Bulletin No. 4 should have a representative in the morgue during periods of activity, so that he may prepare and transmit to that service the necessary information for compilation. This information may be transcribed from the Morgue Record Book and the Identification Record Cards. To insure accuracy, the information should be forwarded to the Casualty Information Service by messenger, not by telephone. To reduce confusion at the morgue, mortality lists should be released to the public at the Casualty Information Service or at police headquarters or precinct stations and not at the morgue.

#### **COMPLETION AND STORAGE OF RECORDS**

The Morgue Recorder shall be responsible for the careful completion of all entries in the Morgue Record Book and on other information forms. After disposal of bodies, the Record Book should be retained at the morgue for future reference. The field casualty identification tags and special identification cards of unidentified dead should be stapled together and transferred to the custody of the police or other authorized officials who will make them part of a public file and will continue identification efforts.