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OSAC 2025-N-0008
Standard for the External
Evaluation of Human Remains
by Medicolegal Death
Investigators at Scenes

Medicolegal Death Investigation Subcommittee
Medicine Scientific Area Committee (SAC)
Organization of Scientific Area Committees (OSAC) for Forensic Science



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OSAC Proposed Standard

OSAC 2025-N-0008 Standard for the External Evaluation of Human Remains by Medicolegal Death Investigators at Scenes

Prepared by
Medicolegal Death Investigation Subcommittee
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Disclaimer:

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56 **Foreword**

57 A medicolegal death investigator (MDI) is a field responder who supports the medicolegal death
58 investigation authority. The MDI is responsible for examining a decedent to identify pertinent
59 findings to assist in determining the cause and manner of death. The findings of the MDI may
60 determine the extent of the investigation. This assessment by the MDI may aid in the
61 identification of the decedent. The MDI must consider the scene's safety and utilize necessary
62 personal protective equipment to effectuate this assessment. The Scene investigation is another
63 important aspect of a medicolegal death investigation and is not included in this standard.

64
65 **Abstract**

66 This document presents standards for the medicolegal death investigation (MDI) authority to be
67 followed when medicolegal death investigators (MDIs) perform an external evaluation of
68 decedents. General topics highlighted include documentation, parts to be assessed, and findings
69 to be assessed.

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86 **Keywords:** *assessment, coroner, death scene, decedent, external evaluation, medical examiner,*
87 *medicolegal death investigation, medicolegal death investigation authority, medicolegal death*
88 *investigator*

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91	Table of Contents	
92	1 Scope	5
93	2 Terms and Definitions.....	5
94	3 Standards.....	6
95	Annex A.....	8

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127 **Standard for the External Evaluation of Human Remains by Medicolegal Death Investigators**
128 **at Scenes**

129
130 **1 Scope**

131 This document provides a standard for the physical assessment of a deceased person by a
132 medicolegal death investigator (MDI). The MDI will assess decedents to identify, describe, and
133 document findings. This standard is not a substitute for additional best practices, medicolegal
134 death investigation authority policy or regulation set forth. This standard does not address the
135 specifics of required documentation.

136
137 **2 Terms and Definitions**

138 **2.1**
139 **autopsy**

140 Postmortem diagnostic medical procedure conducted by a pathologist or other specially
141 trained medical personnel, consisting of external and internal examination of a decedent,
142 and may include other ancillary tests

143
144 **2.2**
145 **certified medicolegal death investigator**

146 Medicolegal death investigator who has completed the requirements for Certification (Registry
147 or Board) by an accredited credentialing body; currently, the American Board of Medicolegal
148 Death Investigators

149
150 **2.3**
151 **death scene**

152 Location or site at which a death is pronounced, and at which the decedent's body is located. This
153 may or may not be the same location as the incident scene

154
155 **2.4**
156 **incident scene**

157 Location at which a fatal injury or fatal sequence of events happened. This may or may not be
158 the same location as where the death was pronounced.

159
160 **2.5**
161 **external examination**

162 Diagnostic medical procedure conducted by a forensic pathologist or other specially trained
163 medical personnel that consists of physical inspection of the decedent without internal
164 examination; can include ancillary tests

165
166

167 **2.6**

168 **external evaluation**

169 Non-medical visual and physical assessment of the decedent by a medicolegal death investigator

170

171 **2.7**

172 **jurisdiction**

173 (1) Legal authority to make legal decisions and judgments regarding a death, including
174 performance of autopsy, as well as investigation and certification of cause and manner of death.

175 (2) Geographic area in which a medical examiner or coroner's authority applies.

176

177 **2.8**

178 **medicolegal death investigation**

179 Formal inquiry into the circumstances surrounding the death of a human being; investigative
180 information is considered with autopsy findings and adjunctive studies (if performed) to
181 determine the cause and manner of death.

182

183 **2.9**

184 **medicolegal death investigation authority**

185 Person or persons whose mandated duty it is to perform medicolegal death investigations for a
186 designated jurisdiction and ensure certification of cause and manner of death; duties vary based
187 on local enabling statutes.

188

189 **2.10**

190 **medicolegal death investigator**

191 Individual who performs medicolegal death investigations and includes those who have not
192 completed the requirements for certification and is not certified.

193

194 **2.11**

195 **postmortem examination**

196 Examination of a decedent and associated information by specially trained medical personnel;
197 this may include autopsy, external examination, ancillary tests, evaluation of circumstances,
198 review of medical records, and other contextual information.

199

200 **3 Standards**

201

202 **3.1 Requirements**

203

204 **3.1.1** The medicolegal death investigator shall evaluate the decedent, and the findings shall be
205 documented. This assessment shall be conducted in a careful and discreet manner. The
206 assessment shall include the following:

207

- 208 **3.2** Assess the overall appearance of the decedent (e.g., dirty, disheveled)
209
210 **3.3** Assess the position of the body
211
212 **3.3.1** At the scene, including any relevant surroundings
213
214 **3.3.2** Decedent position (e.g., prone, left lateral)
215
216 **3.4** Assess any clothing
217
218 **3.5** Assess external areas of the body, specifically documenting:
219
220 **3.5.1** Presence or absence of potentially identifying features (e.g., scars, marks, tattoos,
221 piercings)
222
223 **3.5.2** Postmortem changes (e.g., livor, rigor, decomposition, postmortem animal predation)
224
225 **3.5.3** Relevant items associated with the decedent (e.g., driver's license, passport, drug
226 paraphernalia, money, jewelry)
227
228 **3.5.4** Any medical interventions (e.g. intubation, IV lines, electrodes)
229
230 **3.5.5** Signs of non-traumatic illness (e.g., lesions, edema, skin discoloration)
231
232 **3.5.6** Possible trauma (recent and remote)
233
234 **3.5.6.1** Blunt force trauma
235
236 **3.5.6.2** Sharp force injuries
237
238 **3.5.6.3** Thermal injuries
239
240 **3.5.6.4** Firearm-related injuries
241
242 **3.5.6.5** Other injuries (e.g., chemical burns, electrocution, missing limbs or digits)
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Annex A
(informative)

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