

Unidentified Bodies

Minimum Standards for Managing the Dead

Operation Identification
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Overview

1. **Glossary**
2. **Legal Statutes and Principles**
3. **Identification Process**
4. **Methods of Identification**
5. **Minimum Components**
6. **Additional Considerations**

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Glossary

- **Antemortem:** occurring before death
- **Decedent:** deceased person
- ***In situ*:** in its place
- **NamUs:** National Missing and Unidentified Person System
- **CODIS:** Combined DNA Index System
- **Perimortem:** occurring at or around the time of death
- **Postmortem:** occurring after death
- **Traceability:** ability to trace bodies, personal effects, and documentation throughout the process of medicolegal death investigation, including locating bodies after final disposition

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Legal Statutes and Principles

- **Texas CCP §49 and 63**
 - Requires an inquest/investigation into the identity of the decedent, in addition to cause and manner of death
 - Requires a DNA sample submission to the federal DNA database (i.e. CODIS)
 - Requires Justice of the Peace to record & maintain all information on burial location for no less than 10 years
- **John and Joseph's Law (2021 TX HB1419)**
 - Makes entry of missing/unidentified persons into NamUs compulsory in Texas
- **Humanitarian Principles**
 - Dead managed with dignity and in perpetuity
 - Families of missing/dead have right to know fate and whereabouts of loved ones

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Identification Process

- Identification of the dead based largely on 4 components:
 1. Proper recovery of the dead
 2. Collection/ submission of postmortem information
 1. Comparison of postmortem information (from decedent) with antemortem information (from missing person)
 1. Ensuring **traceability** for the long-term unidentified dead

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Methods of Identification

Non-Scientific Methods

- Circumstantial
- Visual recognition
- Visual comparison

Scientific Methods

- Fingerprints
- DNA
- Medical records comparison
- Dental charting/radiography

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Non-Scientific Methods

- Problems with non-scientific methods of identification
 - Witnesses can be mistaken
 - Decedents may carry false documentation
 - Injuries, decomposition, dirt or fluids (e.g. blood) around the face can obscure visual recognition/identification
 - Mistaken identification can cause
 - Serious distress and legal difficulties for the bereaved
 - Embarrassment to the authorities
 - May incur additional expenses

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Minimum Components

Coding	Allocating a unique code to each body
Recovery	Placing each body in a bag with appropriate labels
Recording	Recording all relevant data, photographing each body
Collection	Collecting and managing information relevant for identification
Submission	Ensuring samples/information adequately submitted for identification
Storage	Ensuring orderly temporary or long-term storage of bodies
Traceability	Retaining information on location of each body

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Coding:

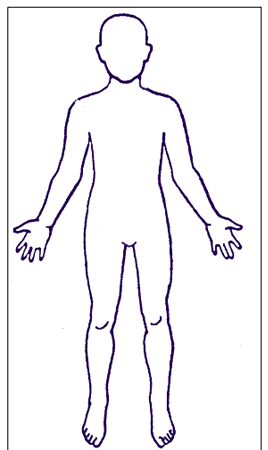
Allocating a Unique Code

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Overview

Allocating a Unique Code

- A unique code (number) must be allocated to each body or body part
- All information collected/recorded about individual body is also allocated this unique code
- **Purpose**
 - To avoid loss of bodies
 - To ensure correct documentation and traceability
 - To help identify dead bodies



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Assigning Codes

Allocating a Unique Code

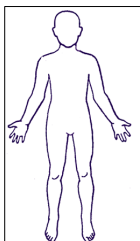
- More than a simple number
- Standardized and logical system (noted in a log) for tracking bodies, indicating location, year, and sequence
 - JP Precinct Location + Year of Recovery + Number
 - {Precinct} 2022 – 0001
- Should be managed and stored in a place that **ensures continuity with successors**
 - Not a personal log, but institutional
 - Consider backing up the log and storing in multiple places

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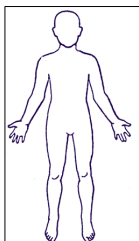
Assigning Codes

Allocating a Unique Code

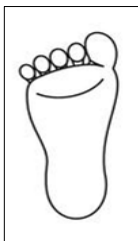
- Unique body codes must not be duplicated
 - **Two bodies should not have the same code**
 - Unassociated body parts should be given separate unique codes



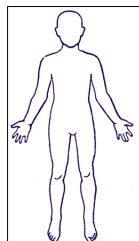
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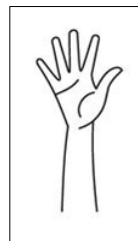
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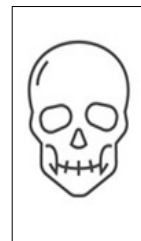
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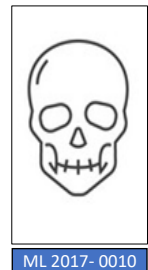
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Applying Codes

Allocating a Unique Code

- Unique codes should be
 - Attached to the body (body part) at all times
 - Included within and on all containers (inside body bags, on body bags) and burial markers
 - Included (and readable) in all photographs
 - Same body code assigned to all associated personal effects
 - Noted (legibly) on all related forms and associated samples

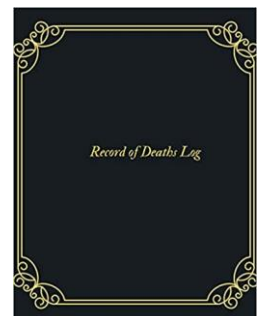
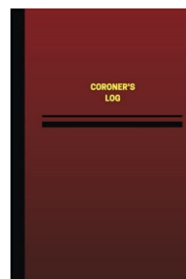


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Organizing Codes

Allocating a Unique Code

- Codes stored in centralized place
 - Accessible to all relevant people
 - Secure, protected and backed up
 - Ensures continuity over time and amongst personnel
- Examples
 - Log book/Ledger
 - Excel sheet
 - Case management system (CMS)



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Associated Case Numbers

Allocating a Unique Code

- All agencies should assign a unique code
 - Law enforcement (e.g. Sheriff's Office, Police Department)
 - Justice of the Peace
 - Medical Examiner/Forensic Pathologist
 - Forensic consultants (e.g. Forensic Anthropologist)
- **All agencies should record and track associated case numbers to ensure traceability**

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Considerations

Allocating a Unique Code

- Assign a unique code to each body (body part) as soon as possible
- Attach the unique code to the body (body part) and its container
- Is it consistently applied? Is it sequential and logical?
- Is it regularly updated, maintained, and stored in a place that is accessible?
- Are associated case numbers (e.g. law enforcement number, OpID case number) being tracked?

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Recovery:

Recovering bodies and personal effects

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Recovering Bodies



Recovery

- Effective recovery of dead bodies enables future identification
- Allocating unique code, taking photographs, and documenting body should occur around the same time as moving the body
- Any separate body part must be managed as though it were a whole body
- Assumptions must not be made that a separate body part belongs to an adjacent or nearby body

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Recovering Bodies

Recovery

- Before recovery, the body and personal effects should be photographed *in situ*
- Information about the scene should be recorded, including location body found (record GPS coordinates) and photographed
- Bodies/personal effects should be placed individually in body bags at the scene
 - Generally at least two people are needed to move an adult into a body bag
- Dignity of the dead should be maintained
 - Bodies should be kept secured and in the coolest location possible during investigation
 - Protected from direct sunlight, scavengers and public viewing

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Recording:

Record all Relevant Information

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Documentation

Recording Information

- Responsibility of JPs to record all case information, including initiating a death certificate
- All bodies and personal effects should be well documented, starting at the beginning of the investigation/recovery
 - Photographs
 - Handwritten notes (on standardized forms)
 - GPS/location data
- Valuable opportunities to document information relevant for identification may be lost as bodies decompose

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Photography

Recording Information

- Photograph body, personal effects, and scene upon discovery
 - Photographs taken as soon as unique body code is allocated
 - Additional detailed photography of the body and personal effects can be completed after recovery
- Always include
 - Scale
 - Unique case code(s) that are clearly visible and legible
 - North arrow (for on scene photos)
 - Color card for camera white balance (when possible)

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Photography

Recording Information

- Include individual images of:

- Full length of the body, front and back views
- Face, front view and side views (full frame)
- Dentition, upper and lower (full frame) and chewing surfaces
- Upper body
- Lower body
- Distinguishing features (e.g. tattoos, scars)
- All personal effects on the body (before and after removal for physical exam)
- All personal effects found near the body (before and after scene recovery)



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Photography

Recording Information

- Bodies should be sufficiently clean to allow facial features/clothing to be properly documented



Full length of body, front view



Entire face, front view

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Photography

Recording Information



Distinguishing features and personal effects

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Data Recorded

Recording Information

- Data should be recorded upon arrival at the scene using standardized forms
 - General condition and state of preservation
 - Location of body
 - Physical characteristics and external appearance
 - Personal effects or belongings on or near the body
- Dissociating personal effects from bodies makes identification difficult in the future
 - Placed in the same body bag or container
 - Recorded under the unique code
- Bodies, personal effects, and all other case data (e.g. forms, photographs) must be traceable

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Data Recorded

Recording Information

- **Physical Characteristics**

- **Sex** (based on anatomical sexual characteristics)
- **Approximate age range** (infant, child, adolescent, adult or elderly)
- Approximate **height** and **weight**
- Characteristics of **hair** (ex. length, color, texture)
- Obvious **dental features** (ex. restorations, antemortem loss)
- Specific **marks on the skin** (e.g. tattoos, scars, piercings, birthmarks)
- **Other medical conditions** (e.g. amputations, extra digits)

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Personal Effects

Recording Information

- Jewelry
- Clothing
- Documents (e.g. ID cards)
- Other items
 - Personal hygiene products
 - Medications
 - Phones
 - Religious items

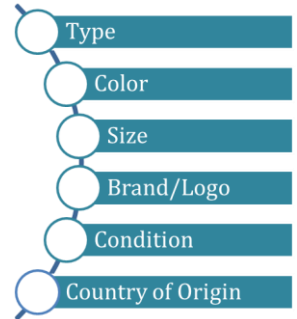


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Personal Effects

Recording Information

- Considerations for personal effects
 - Documented (photographs/notes) and recovered with body
 - Assigned same unique case code as associated body
 - Accompany body until repatriated
 - Check seams, shoes, and bra liners for hidden personal effects (e.g. ID cards)
- If buried, place personal effects in a sealed container within body bag to protect from decomposition fluids
 - Delicate items such as paper may need additional protection



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Storing Data

Recording Information

- All data/images should be stored in centralized, secure location
 - Accessible to relevant staff involved in identification
 - Ensure access to information/continuity with successors
 - Not stored on personal hard drives, flash drives, or phones
 - Labeled with the same case number
- Hard copies of standardized forms placed in file folders or 3 ring binder
 - Advantageous to digitize (or scan) forms and retain

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Standardized Forms

Recording Information

Unique code:
(Use this same code on associated files, photographs or stored objects.)

Possible identity of body (Explain reasons for attributing a possible identity):

Person completing this form

Name: _____

Official status: _____ Place & date: _____

Signature: _____

Recovery details (include place, date, time, by whom found, and circumstances of finding. Give GPS coordinates if available. Indicate if other bodies were recovered in the same area, including name and possible relationship, if identified)

Unique Code: _____

A. PHYSICAL DESCRIPTION

A.1 General condition (mark one):

a) Complete body	Incomplete body (describe):	Body part (describe):
b) Well preserved	Decomposed	Partially skeletonized
		Fully skeletonized
		Burnt

A.2 Apparent sex (mark one and describe evidence):

Male	Female	Undetermined
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Describe evidence (genitals, beard, etc):

A.3 Age group (mark one):

Infant	Child	Adolescent	Adult	Elderly
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A.4 Physical description (measure or mark one):

Height (given to head with units)	Short	Average	Tall
Weight (specify units)	Slim	Average	Fat

A.5 a) Head hair:

Colour:	Length:	Shape:	Baldness:	Other:
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b) Facial hair:

None	Moustache	Beard	Colour:	Length:
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A.6 Distinguishing features:

Physical (e.g. old amputations - limbs, fingers)

Surgical prostheses (e.g. artificial limbs)

Skin marks - scars, tattoos, piercings, birthmarks, moles, etc.), specify location

Apparent injuries: include location, side

Dental condition: crowns, gold teeth, adornments, false teeth). Describe any obvious features

(Use additional sheets if needed. If possible, include a sketch of the main findings. Note if photographs taken (include unique code in all photographs))

Unique Code: _____

B. ASSOCIATED EVIDENCE

B.1 Clothing:

Type of clothes, colours, fabrics, brand names, repairs. Describe in as much detail as possible

B.2 Footwear:

Type (boot, shoes, sandals), colour, brand, size. Describe in as much detail as possible

B.3 Eyewear:

Glasses (colour, shape), contact lenses. Describe in as much detail as possible

B.4 Personal items:

Watch, jewellery, wallet, keys, photographs, mobile phone (include number), medication, cigarettes, etc. Describe in as much detail as possible

B.5 Identity Documents

Identity card, passport, driving licence, credit card, etc. Take photograph if possible (including the unique code in the photograph). Describe the information contained in them

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Collection:

Collecting and Managing Information Relevant for Identification

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Relevant Information

Collection

- Data collected for identification purposes - **requires expert assistance**
 - Fingerprints - sheriff's office or MMP?
 - DNA samples - who will collect?
 - Dental charting/radiographs - forensic odontologist
 - Forensic anthropological analysis - forensic anthropologist
- Photographic documentation for identification assistance
 - Tattoos

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Fingerprints

Collection

- Ensure fingerprints of decedents are collected in all cases
 - Traditional method (i.e. fingerprint card/ink)
 - Digital fingerprinting
 - Macrophotography
- In difficult cases, it is still possible to obtain fingerprints (FBI/MMP)
 - Mummified/dessicated tissues
 - Decomposed
 - Waterlogged

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DNA Samples

Collection

- DNA samples (2 or 3) should be taken from unidentified bodies prior to release or burial
- Appropriate samples
 - Blood stain card
 - Hair with root/follicle attached
 - Teeth
 - Section of long bone (e.g. thigh or arm bones)
 - Hand/foot bones or loose bones (e.g. rib)
- Considerations
 - Burned remains and paraffin embedded tissues (on a case-by-case basis)
 - Embalmed bodies or samples of unknown origins not accepted

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Tattoos

Collection

- All tattoos should be documented (described and photographed)
 - If possible photograph using infrared/near-infrared light source
 - Photograph before and after removal of slipped skin
- Information on tattoos should be shared with appropriate coordinating agencies (e.g. NamUs, MMP, consular offices, local NGOs)

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Submission:

Ensuring samples/information adequately submitted for identification

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NamUs

Submission

- National Missing and Unidentified Persons System (NamUs)
 - Online, centralized repository and resource center for missing, unidentified, and unclaimed person cases
 - Searchable by the public (English and Spanish)
 - generates potential matches between Unidentified Persons and Missing Persons
 - Free training available for JPs
- NamUs Entries
 - Enter as much information as possible about body/personal effects into NamUs
 - Include descriptions, photographs, and radiographs (if available)
 - Record final disposition of remains (cemetery, lot/plot number, etc.)

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Fingerprints

Submission

- Fingerprints for unidentified bodies should be digitized, uploaded to NamUs, and shared with appropriate agencies
- Coordination with associated agencies key
 - US Border Patrol's Missing Migrant Program (MMP)
 - FBI's Latent Print Unit
 - Local law enforcement agencies

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DNA Samples

Submission

- DNA sample submission
 - At least one sample should be submitted to the University of North Texas Center for Human Identification (UNTCHI) according to Texas Code of Criminal Procedures (Ch.63)
 - DNA profiled by UNTCHI will be uploaded to the **Combined DNA Index System (CODIS)** at the state and national levels
 - DNA samples may also be submitted to other labs/agencies
 - Additional samples should be retained

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Storage:

Ensuring orderly temporary or long-term storage of bodies

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Storage of Bodies



Storage

- Aim of temporary storage
 - Preserve and protect the bodies as best as possible
 - Improve the chance of identification
 - Ensure traceability
- Following collection of the data, unidentified bodies can be temporarily buried unless better temporary storage is available
- Unidentified and unclaimed bodies should never be cremated or commingled

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Considerations

Storage

- Each body/body part should be kept in a body bag or similar storage item before storage
 - Use waterproof labels or paper in sealed plastic with the unique code
 - Do not write the unique code directly on bodies or sheets (may be easily erased or separated from the body during storage)
 - **Place waterproof labels outside and inside the body bag**
 - **Use sharpie to label body bag in addition to waterproof labels**

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Refrigeration

Storage

- Refrigeration is best
 - Refrigerated transport containers used by commercial shipping companies can be used (with suitable racking) to store up to 50 bodies
- If refrigerated containers not available, alternative storage options possible
 - Cool and protected rooms or environment
 - Temporary burials with documentation of GPS coordinates, even within cemetery

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Burials

Storage

- Burial of bodies can be used as temporary or long-term storage
 - Bodies can be buried only after a unique body code has been allocated, photographs/data recorded, and samples are collected and submitted
 - All efforts should be made to ensure the body can be located in the future
- Objectives of correctly burying/documenting bodies
 - All bodies are traceable and accounted for
 - Ability to identify a body at a later date is preserved
 - Relatives can visit the resting place of their loved ones

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Traceability:

Retaining information on the location of each body

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Traceability

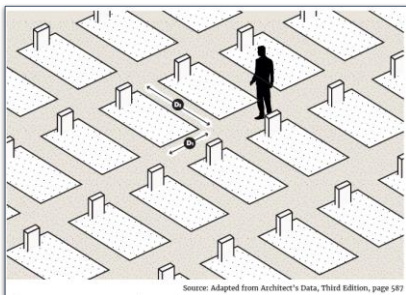
Traceability

- Traceability
 - Refers to ability to track bodies (recovery to final disposition)
 - Ensures exact location of bodies, personal effects, and documentation are known
- Importance of retaining traceability on unidentified/unclaimed bodies
 - Allows for investigation/identification in the future (e.g. future exhumations)
 - Provides families and communities a place to pay tribute to their loved ones
- Ensure traceability of bodies by marking, mapping, recording and centrally storing precise location of final disposition
- **Do not rely on funeral homes to provide you with the location of burials.**

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Burial Considerations

Traceability



- Graves of unidentified/unclaimed persons should be buried in a manner that ensures traceability
 - Buried in an orderly way
 - Graves should be visibly demarcated on the surface
 - Bodies should **NOT** be buried on top of each other
 - Bodies should be placed in burial containers (e.g. body bags, coffins)
 - Avoid use of biodegradable body bags and chemical products (e.g. lime)

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Labeling

Traceability

- **Labeling with Unique Code**

- Each body, body bag, coffin, and surface marker labeled with unique code
- Labeling should occur on a waterproof label or on paper secured in plastic (leak-proof) bag before burial
- Ensure the unique code is legible and can withstand the burial or surface environment



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Surface Markers

Traceability

- **All burials should have individual surface (grave) markers**

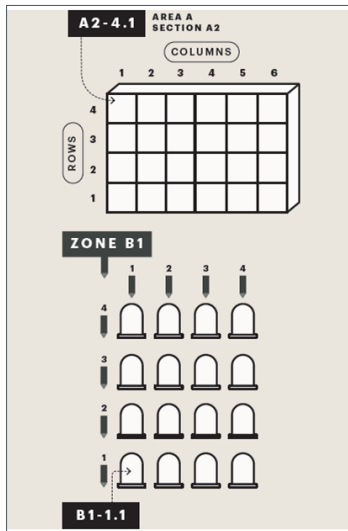
- Placed over the burial to indicate exact position of body
- Labeled with the specific unique body code
- Durable even with adverse weather conditions and time
 - Not easily removed
 - Waterproof
 - Flush with ground (not easily removed or destroyed)
 - Avoid perishable or easily removable materials to mark burial sites
- Procure enough markers to allow for any surges in deaths/burials



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Mapping

Traceability



- **Location of unidentified/unclaimed bodies should be recorded/mapped**
 - Record cemetery and body location (plot, lot, area, zone, etc.)
 - Collect GPS coordinates
 - Mark burial location on a cemetery map (or draw sketch map)
 - Make sure to use cardinal directions and relevant fixed reference points (e.g. trees, roads, etc.)

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Documentation

Traceability

- All information on burial site must be recorded and stored centrally
 - Include precise location of every body to allow future forensic investigations and the transfer of the body to the family or community once an identification is made
 - Make copies and store information in at least two different places or institutions to ensure its security
 - Burial information (e.g. cemetery name, city/town/county, burial plot, etc.) should be **entered into NamUs**

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Documentation

Traceability

Additional Case Info

Indicates information not viewable by the public

Autopsy Facility

Edit

Agency

--

State
Texas

Phone

--

Contact Email
pfarley@rgv.rr.com

Notes

Valley Forensics, PLLC.
Dr. Norma Farley

Disposition of Remains

Edit

Cooler Number

--

Cemetery Name
Val Verde Cemetery

Plot Number
16

Date Buried
December 17, 2015

Notes

Section: U
Space: 25

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Documentation

Traceability

- Good idea to record additional information
 - Handover details (e.g. who delivered body, who received body, date, etc.)
 - Legal burial permits (if applicable)
- Grave number should match in case documentation, cemetery register, and NamUs

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Additional Considerations

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Identification & Repatriation

Additional
Considerations

- Repatriation can occur when
 - An identification has been approved by appropriate jurisdictional authority
 - A death certificate is filed or decedent's name has been amended on original death certificate
 - Agency initiating original death certificate is responsible for changing name on the death certificate
- Repatriation of foreign nationals to their country of origin is facilitated through consular offices in conjunction with a funeral home/funeral transport service
- **An identification is not complete until the family/next of kin is respectfully notified and they accept the means of identification**

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Summary

- These minimum components should be incorporated into current operations
- NamUs serves as a tool to both
 - Record/manage information
 - Ensure traceability

