

- Policy:** To facilitate transportation of the decedent from the scene and facilities to The District of Columbia Office of the Chief Medical Examiner (DC OCME).
- Purpose:** OCME's mission is to investigate and certify all deaths in the District of Columbia that occur by any means of violence (injury), and those that occur unexpectedly, without medical attention, in custody, or which pose a threat to the public health. As a part of the death investigation, decedent transport to the DC OCME will be required for further examination by the medical examiner (ME) to determine the cause and manner of death.
- Scope:** The medical examiner transport team (METT) is responsible for providing and managing transportation of decedents, personal effects, medical reports, and biological samples to the DC OCME. Decedents and personal effects shall be handled with proper dignity in accordance with transport standard operating procedures, health & safety procedures, and universal precaution. The METT is required to remove decedents in a courteous, sensitive, and professional manner.

Definitions and Abbreviations:

BDU- Battle Dress Uniform worn by METT for decedent transport

CMS- Case management system

DPW- DC Department of Public Works

ENS- Everbridge Notification System used to notify agency staff of decedent transport status

ME- Medical Examiner

METT- Medical Examiner Transportation Team

OOS- Designated time frame that decedent transport by METT is temporarily suspended

OCME- DC Office of the Chief Medical Examiner

1. Transport System/Vehicle Maintenance

1.1. Medical Examiner Transport Team (METT) Vehicle(s)

1.1.1. Maintenance occurs according to schedule set by the DC Department of Public Works (DPW).

- 1.1.1.1. See DPW schedule for preventative maintenance and inspection.
- 1.1.1.2. The mortuary vehicle should have $\frac{1}{2}$ to $\frac{3}{4}$ of a tank of gas at all times.
- 1.1.1.3. Vehicle inspection form shall be completed by METT member daily before and after vehicle operation.
- 1.1.1.4. Any vehicle maintenance or mechanical deficiencies should be reported to supervisor or designee immediately.
- 1.1.2. Quarterly assessment of body transport stretchers shall be completed by METT member to ensure that they are in good repair, sturdy, can withstand heavy load, and are free of sharp edges. Any equipment mechanical deficiencies shall be reported to supervisor or lead staff immediately.
- 1.1.3. Daily assessment of vehicle maintenance. The METT member is responsible for cleaning, stocking, fueling, documentation, and security of the mortuary vehicles daily.
 - 1.1.3.1. All biohazardous waste must be disposed of in red biohazard bags and transferred into biohazard boxes in the mortuary unit areas for disposal on a daily basis.
 - 1.1.3.2. Vehicles must be cleaned and disinfected on a weekly basis by the evening shift or immediately if a biohazardous situation exists.
 - 1.1.3.3. Vehicles must be stocked with supplies and equipment on a weekly basis to include but not limited to:
 - 1.1.3.3.1. Work mobile phone, AND
 - 1.1.3.3.2. Hand held Motorola Radio.
 - 1.1.3.3.3. See Vehicle Operations and Accountability Policy for additional supplies and equipment.
 - 1.1.3.4. Vehicles should be locked at all times when unattended.
 - 1.1.3.5. Vehicles should be started daily prior to morning meeting and assessed for fuel levels and mileage.
- 1.1.4. Monthly assessment of vehicle cleanliness and disinfection.
 - 1.1.4.1. Exterior cleaning of the vehicles will be completed once a month at the Automated Car Wash or manually by METT member.
 - 1.1.4.2. Interior cleaning of the vehicles will be completed by METT member once a month to include thorough interior detailing and vacuuming.

NOTE: Mortuary vehicle use is limited to official OCME business ONLY.

1.1.5. Emergency Incidents and Vehicle Operations

- 1.1.5.1. See Vehicle Operations and Accountability Policy for driving requirements, training, safety, incidents/infractions, incident reporting, and emergencies.

2. Notification

- 2.1. Notification for transport of decedents to OCME is to be made as soon as it is determined that transport is required.
- 2.1.1. If the METT member is not operating or will be out-of-service (OOS), the Investigator will be advised by the METT supervisor, or their designee to coordinate alternate resources to assist with decedent transport.
- 2.2. Notification of the need for body transport is requested from the OCME Investigator via direct communication, telephone or handheld radio to the METT supervisor, member or designee.
- 2.2.1. The Investigator shall send confirmatory notification of decedent transport requests via the Everbridge Notification System (ENS).
- 2.3. Upon notification of body transport need, the METT members will:
- 2.3.1. Check vehicle for adequate supplies (e.g. body bags, sheets, body bag locks, batteries, flash light, PPE), equipment (e.g. stretchers), and gas
- 2.3.2. Dress for removal in proper DC OCME issued uniforms (e.g. BDU pants, jumper, shirt, jackets, hats, gloves, boots, etc.), and display well groomed disposition.
- 2.3.2.1 METT members should refrain from wearing tattered, torn, soiled, and spotted DC OCME issued uniforms and boots.
- 2.3.3. Prepare to take DC OCME handheld radio/mobile phones, and valid driver's license.
- 2.3.4. METT members are required to have work-issued mobile phone or radio equipment available and accessible at all times when operating vehicle.
- 2.3.4.1 METT members will make notification via work-issued mobile phone or handheld radio to on-duty METT supervisor or designee and OCME Investigator

when departing from OCME or previous location, arriving to scene/facility, departing from scene/facility, and upon return to OCME.

- 2.3.5. Verify scene/facility address and case number with OCME Investigator.
- 2.3.6. Print the transport notification form from CMS.
- 2.3.7. Print decedent name labels from CMS.
- 2.3.8. Place printed label on toe tag and identification band.
- 2.3.9. Prepare a vehicle utilization form to document transport itinerary.
 - 2.3.9.1. METT members are to record the following on the vehicle utilization form. See Appendix C:
 - Time and Date of Departure from DC OCME or previous scene
 - Time and Date of Arrival at scene
 - Time and Date of Departure from scene
 - Time and Date of Arrival to OCME or next scene
 - Mileage at Departure from OCME or previous scene
 - Mileage at Arrival at scene
 - Mileage at Arrival at OCME or next scene
- 2.3.10. Complete vehicle inspection checklist prior to transport at the beginning of the shift.
 - 2.3.10.1. Completed transport notification, transfer of custody, and vehicle utilization forms are to be retained in the mortuary unit for review and placement in the case file.

3. Transport Priority

- 3.1. Transport of decedents, medical records, and biological samples shall be prioritized by the METT members based on location and circumstances as follows:
 - 3.1.1. Transport of decedents from scenes in public view and environmental exposure.
 - 3.1.2. Transport of decedents from residences, buildings, or facilities without refrigerated storage.
 - 3.1.3. Transport of decedents from hospital facilities or buildings with refrigerated storage.
 - 3.1.4. Transport of medical records and biological samples.

4. Biohazard Precautions for Transport

- 4.1. METT members shall assess environment for safety and security issues that may inform how the body is to be removed and/or transported. Assessment shall include proper precautions against biohazards associated with body handling.

- 4.1.1. METT members performing field mortuary services shall adhere to health and safety policies which have been implemented to protect workers from biological and general safety hazards.
 - 4.1.1.1 METT members shall immediately address unsafe field conditions by relaying the information to the on-duty METT supervisor, OCME Investigator, or designee.
- 4.1.2. The following procedures outline health and safety procedures that shall be followed when performing field work.
 - 4.1.2.1. METT members shall be completely covered when performing field mortuary services; there should be no exposed skin.
 - 4.1.2.2. Face and eye protection are recommended for all removals, and are mandatory when the potential for facial exposure to blood or body fluids exists.
 - 4.1.2.3. Disposable gloves are required for all field work (decedent removals from any location and specimen transports).
 - 4.1.2.4. Tyvek suits and shoe coverings are required for known or potential crime scenes.
- 4.1.3. Below represents the complete list of Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) that METT members shall have available to perform field work:
 - 4.1.3.1. N95 respirator mask
 - 4.1.3.2. Nitrile, or latex gloves
 - 4.1.3.3. Disposable hair Bonnet or other similar head covering (such as a surgical hat)
 - 4.1.3.4. Tyvek suits
 - 4.1.3.5. Disposable plastic aprons
 - 4.1.3.6. Disposable shoe covers
 - 4.1.3.7. Safety helmet with light
 - 4.1.3.8. Safety vest
 - 4.1.3.9. Work gloves
 - 4.1.3.10. OCME- issued boots
 - 4.1.3.11. OCME issued field uniform (no scrubs).
 - 4.1.3.12. Goggles, face shield, or similar eye protection
- 4.1.4. PPE is not required for records or document transportation.

5. Scene Removal Protocol

- 5.1. METT members shall arrive at scene location within one (1) hour of notification by OCME Investigator.
 - 5.1.1. If major delays, are anticipated that eradicate the arrival at the scene location within one (1) hour of notification, the METT members shall immediately notify the METT supervisor or designee and OCME Investigator at the scene via the work-issued mobile phone and handheld radio.

- 5.1.1.1 Delays in scene arrival may include accident and street closures.
- 5.1.2. METT members shall document issues regarding decedent transport on the Transport Notification Form and in CMS.
- 5.2. Upon arrival on the scene, METT members are to “Check-in” with the OCME Investigator and introduce him/herself to scene officials.
 - 5.2.1. METT members may provide assistance for body handling to facilitate body examination and photography by OCME Investigator
- 5.3. METT members shall locate and prepare decedent for removal as follows:
 - 5.3.1. Place the OCME labeled identification band on the decedent’s ankle and tag on the decedents toe.
 - 5.3.2. Assist the OCME Investigator or law enforcement in removing any personal effects that should not accompany the decedent to DC OCME.
 - 5.3.3. Decedent will be wrapped in a clean white sheet prior to being moved.
 - 5.3.4. Place decedent in body bag.
 - 5.3.4.1. If a decedent is too heavy to remove or if the field circumstances are unsafe, the METT members shall contact the on-duty METT supervisor or designee and OCME Investigator on scene to arrange for assistance with removal and, if necessary, the transfer of the decedent to DC OCME.
- 5.4. All decedents shall be transported in locked body bags.
 - 5.4.1.1. The body bags will be secured by the OCME Investigator for the cases in which an investigator is present at the scene.
 - 5.4.1.2. The body bags will be secured by METT members for the cases in which an investigator is not present at the scene.
 - 5.4.1.3. All body bags should be zipped and the zipper should be sealed with a numbered wire lock. The lock will then be wrapped with evidence tape.
 - 5.4.1.4. The OCME Investigator or METT members will be the person(s) responsible for placing the lock on the body bag and dating and initialing the bag lock.
 - 5.4.1.5. If the body bag is unable to be secured with a lock, wrapped with tape, the on-duty METT supervisor or designee and OCME Investigator shall be immediately notified. This must also be documented on the transport notification form and electronic case file via CMS.
 - 5.4.1.6. The OCME Investigator on scene will photograph locked body bag.

- 5.5. Transfer and secure decedent to removal stretcher.
- 5.6. Place decedent into METT vehicle.
- 5.7. Sign the transport notification form.
- 5.8. Transport decedent to DC OCME.
- 5.9. On occasion the family will request that the removal of the body to the medical examiner's office be delayed pending the arrival of family members. If the family will arrive in a reasonable amount of time, the investigator may delay removal of the body. Consideration should be given to the condition of the body, preservation of the body, potential evidence, and workload constraint.

6. Hospital/Institutional Removal Protocol

- 6.1. Institutional pickups should be carried out in accordance with the protocols of the releasing agency (i.e. log signatures, clearance, notification of relevant personnel, etc.).
 - 6.1.1. METT members shall identify and comply with institutional procedures for body handling to facilitate safe transport.
 - 6.1.2. The METT members shall detail any deviation from the established protocol on the transport notification form and in the electronic case file via CMS.
- 6.2. METT members shall arrive at the facilities without refrigerated storage within one (1) hour of notification by OCME MLI/FI.
 - 6.2.1. If major delays are anticipated that eradicate the arrival at the facility location within one (1) hour of notification, the METT members shall immediately notify the on-duty METT supervisor or designee and OCME Investigator via the work-issued mobile phone or handheld radio.
 - 6.2.1.1 Delays in arrival at facility without refrigerated storage may include accident and street closures.
 - 6.2.2. METT members shall document issues regarding body transport on the Transport Notification Form and in CMS. .
- 6.3. Upon arrival at the institutional facility, METT members are to "Check-in" with the security officer or nursing staff and introduce him/herself to the facility staff.

- 6.4. Locate and verify decedent identity (Name, Race, Gender, and Age) and medical record number on the hospital toe tag and identification band.
 - 6.4.1. The decedent should be removed in the body bag provided by the hospital/institution.
 - 6.4.2. Place the OCME labeled identification band on the decedent's ankle and tag on the decedents toe.
 - 6.4.3. Decedents shall not be removed from hospital if body bag is soiled with fluids to minimize exposure to biological hazards. If body bags are filled with fluid, METT member shall notify the on-duty METT supervisor or designee and OCME Investigator prior to proceeding with the removal.

- 6.5. When possible, a white sheet may be placed around the hospital body bag and the body placed within a DC OCME body bag.

- 6.6. When possible, decedents may be transported in locked body bags.
 - 6.6.1.1. The body bags will be secured by METT members
 - 6.6.1.2. All body bags should be zipped and the zipper should be sealed with a lock. The lock will then be wrapped with evidence tape.
 - 6.6.1.3. METT members will be responsible for placing the lock on the body bag and dating and initialing the bag lock.
 - 6.6.1.4. If the body bag is unable to be secured with a lock, wrapped with tape, the on-duty METT supervisor or designee and OCME investigator shall be immediately notified. This must also be documented on the transport notification form and the electronic case file via CMS.

- 6.7. Transfer and secure decedent to removal stretcher.
 - 6.7.1. If a decedent is too heavy to remove or if the field circumstances are unsafe, the METT members should contact the on-duty METT supervisor or designee and OCME Investigator to arrange for assistance with removal and, if necessary, the transfer of the decedent to DC OCME.

- 6.8. Obtain appropriate signatures from facility staff on the transport notification form.

- 6.9. Place decedent into mortuary vehicle.

- 6.10. Transport decedent to DC OCME.

- 6.11. On occasion the family will request that the removal of the body to the medical examiner's office be delayed pending the arrival of family members. If the family will arrive in a reasonable amount of time, the investigator may delay removal of the body. Consideration should be given to the condition of the body, preservation of the body, potential evidence, and workload constraint.

7. Personal Effects, Medical Reports, Biological Samples

7.1. Personal effects

- 7.1.1. Personal effects and clothing with no medico-legal significance should not be taken from the hospital or institution.
- 7.1.1.1. ONLY if the decedent is a victim of a homicide or suicide, and has penetrating wounds of the body, should the clothes be received from the hospital or institution.
- 7.1.1.2. If personal effects and clothes are located in the body bag for all other case manners, the METT members shall contact the OCME Investigator or on-duty METT supervisor or designee for clarification regarding transport of personal property and clothing.
- 7.1.2. Clothing and personal property with medico-legal significance to be removed from the institutional facility shall be documented on the transport notification form, in the Chain of Custody Module in CMS as 'Personal Property' transported with and left on the Body, as well as on the Transfer of Custody form.
- 7.1.2.1. Personal Property form and Transfer of Custody form will be completed by METT member and retained in the mortuary unit for review and placement in the case file.
- 7.1.2.2. If clothing and personal property are removed from facility, the METT member will request a copy of the decedent's inventory log from security officer or facility staff for placement in the case file.
- 7.1.2.3. The METT members will sign the institutional release forms, and obtain signature on the OCME transfer of custody form from facility staff to be retained in the mortuary unit for review and placement in the case file.
- 7.1.3. Clothing and Personal Property are to be secured in a paper bag in the body bag until examination.

7.2. Medical Records and Biological Samples

- 7.2.1. Records or biological samples removed from the institutional facility will be documented on the transport notification form and transfer of custody form, and in the CMS technician comments field.

7.2.1.1. Records and biological samples shall be verified by METT members for correct OCME case number, decedents first and last name, and facility medical record number prior to removal from institutional facility.

7.2.2. The METT members will sign the institutional release forms, and obtain signature on the OCME transfer of custody form from facility staff to be retained in the mortuary unit for review and placement in the case file.

7.2.3. Records and biological samples are to be secured in a paper bag in the body bag or transferred into the specimen refrigerator in the autopsy room after arrival at OCME.

7.2.3.1. Biological samples transferred into the specimen refrigerator at OCME shall be documented by METT member in the Transfer of Custody log book in the autopsy room along with the Transfer of Custody form to be completed by medical examiner and mortuary staff prior to processing.

8. Peer Review

8.1. Documents related to transport of decedent, personal property, biological specimens, and medical records shall be peer reviewed by METT members prior to placement in the case file.

8.2. The following forms shall be peer reviewed:

8.2.1. Transport Notification;

8.2.2. Personal Property; and

8.2.3. Transfer of Custody Forms for Biological Specimen and Medical Record Transport.

8.3. The forms shall be cross referenced with CMS to verify the following documentation:

8.3.1. Decedents first and last name;

8.3.2. OCME Case Number (00-00000)

8.3.3. Decedents Age

8.3.4. Decedents Race

8.3.5. Decedents Sex

8.4. METT members shall verify that all forms include the following:

8.4.1. Signatures of METT members and facility staff

8.4.2. Date of Transport

8.4.3. Time of Transport

8.5. Discrepancies noted during the peer review process shall be documented by METT on the tracking log and reported to METT supervisor or designee.