

NTSB's Family Assistance Program and Perspectives on Disaster Victim Identification

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Objectives

- Introduce the National Transportation Safety Board
- Provide an overview of the Transportation Disaster Assistance (TDA) Division's interface with medicolegal authorities
- Describe the TDA role in family assistance following legislated aviation and rail accidents
- Share experiences on the management of disaster victim identification operations

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Agency Overview

- Independent federal agency
- Report directly to Congress
- Five Board Members nominated by the President
- No regulatory or enforcement authority



Jennifer Homendy
Chair



Michael E. Graham
Member



Thomas B. Chapman
Member



Todd Inman
Member



Alvin Brown
Member

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Legislative Mandate

- Maintain congressionally mandated independence and objectivity
- Conduct objective, precise accident investigations & safety studies
- Perform fair & objective airman and mariner certification appeals
- Advocating and promoting safety recommendation
- Assist victims of transportation accidents and their families

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What types of transportation accidents does the NTSB investigate?

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Investigative Responsibilities

All U.S. civil aviation and commercial space accidents

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Selected surface mode accidents

- Highway
- Marine
- Rail
- Pipeline
- Hazmat

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Law Enforcement Investigations

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- Aviation crashes are assumed to be accidents
- LE takes lead if evidence indicates intentional criminal act. NTSB supports.
- Public release of information can be complicated

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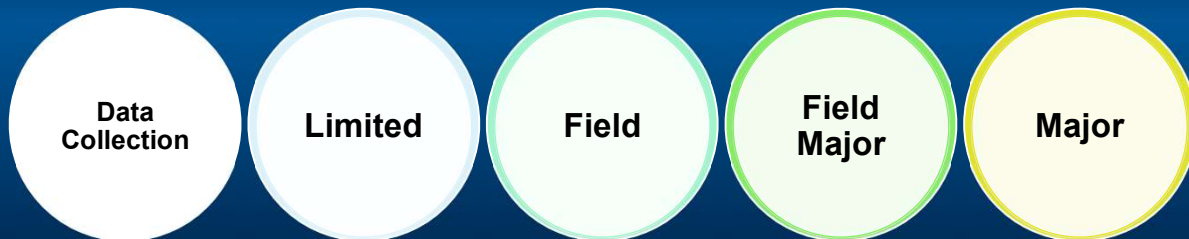
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Do NTSB investigators travel to the scene of every accident we investigate?

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Investigations



Data Collection

Limited

- NTSB not on-scene

Field

- 1 regional investigator
- 1-2 fatal general aviation

Field Major

- 1-2 regional investigators
- HQ support staff

Major

- NTSB Go-Team
- Multiple deaths & injuries

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Major Investigations Team Composition

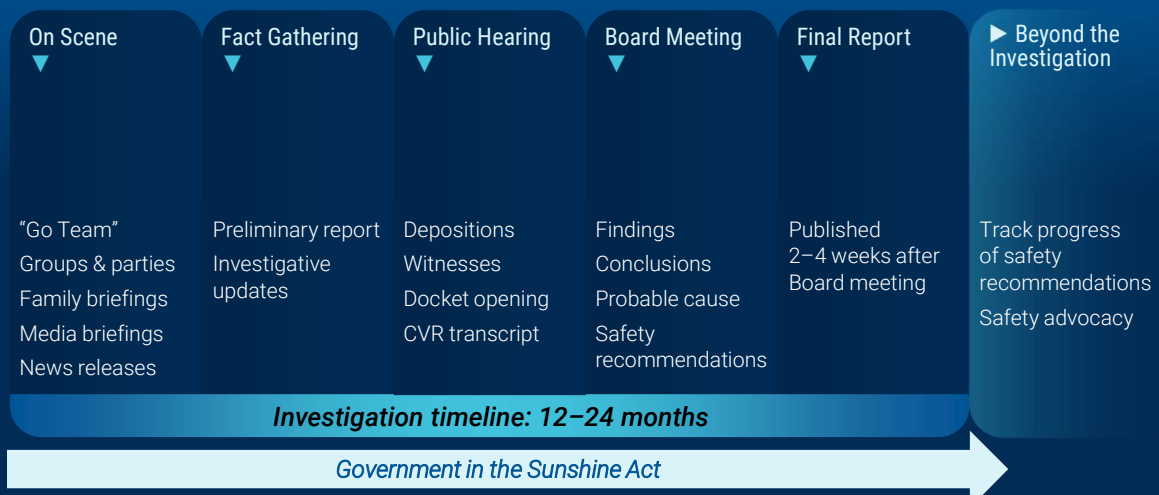
- Board Member
- 25-30 team members
 - Investigator-in-Charge (IIC)
 - Investigative specialists
 - Government Affairs
 - Media Relations
 - Transportation Disaster Assistance
 - IT specialists

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Investigation Process



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On-Scene Information Flow

- NTSB Organizational Meeting**
 - Designate parties and party coordinators
 - Establish and organize groups
- NTSB Progress Meetings**
 - Summarize findings
 - Info for briefings
- Family Briefings**
- Media Engagement**
 - Briefings
 - Press releases
 - Social media

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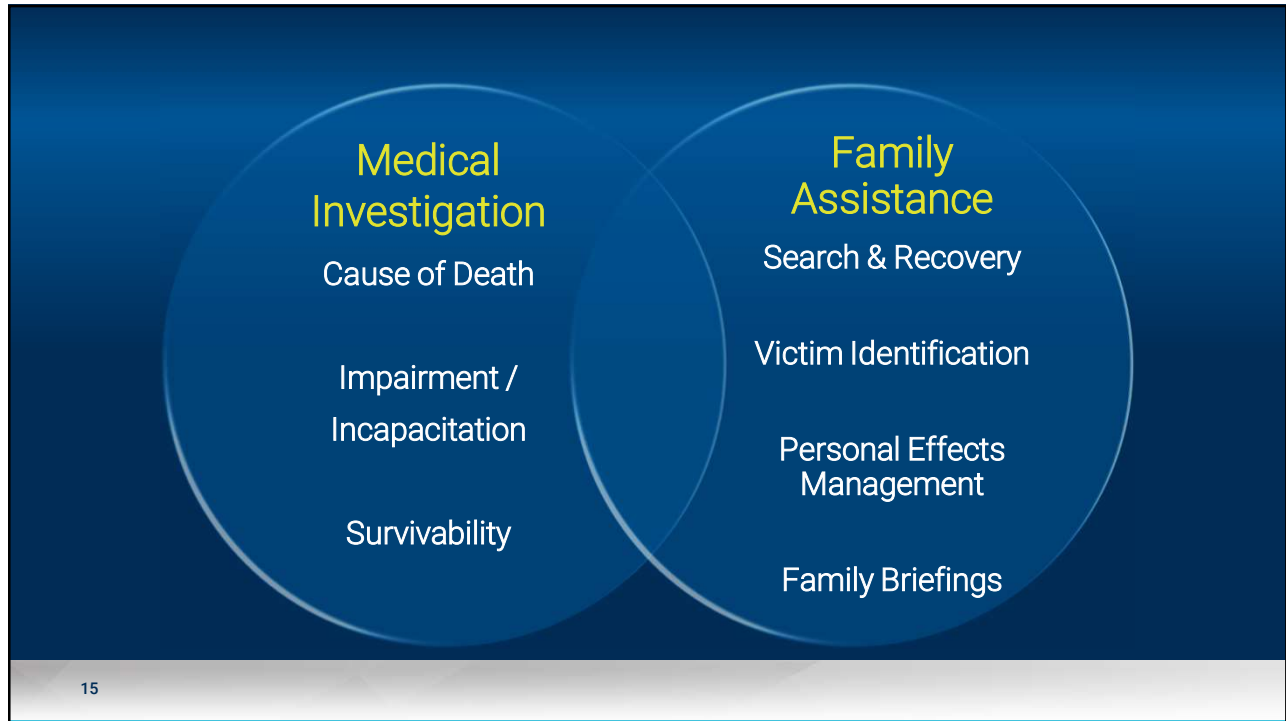
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What is the interface between the medicolegal jurisdiction and the NTSB?

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NTSB Medical Investigations

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NTSB Authority: Medical Investigations

49 CFR § 831.9: Authority during investigations.

- Inspect, photograph, or copy any **records** or **information...** and correspondence regardless of the date of their creation or modification, for the purpose of investigating an accident;
- For purposes of the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act of 1996 (HIPAA)... the NTSB is a “**public health authority**” to which protected health information may be disclosed by a HIPAA “covered entity” without the prior written authorization of the subject of the records.

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NTSB Authority: Medical Investigations

49 CFR § 831.10: Autopsies and postmortem testing

- NTSB **may order an autopsy or other postmortem tests** of any person as may be related to its investigation of a transportation accident
- Provisions of local law protecting **religious beliefs** with respect to autopsies shall be observed to the extent they are consistent with the needs of the investigation

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Autopsy

- Flight Crew
 - Autopsy and FAA CAMI Toxicology
- Survivable accidents
 - Restraint use, tox on all occupants
- Documentation of injuries
- Pre-existing disease
- Medical Devices
 - Vision: glasses, contact lenses
 - Indwelling devices
- Medications

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FAA CAMI Tox-Box

- Available from local FAA FSDO, CAMI, or NTSB
- Normally requested for flight crew
- Tested for > 1000 substances
- Instructions for collecting and shipping specimens
- Chain of custody form
- Call CAMI before shipment to obtain FedEx acct #



FREE!

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<http://www.faa.gov/go/toxlab>

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Transportation Disaster Assistance Program and Interface with Medicolegal Authorities

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Victim Services

Emergency Management

Victim Accounting

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What is Family Assistance?



The policies and procedures used to address the fundamental concerns of victims and their family members following a critical event.

Fundamental Concerns

<p>Notification of Involvement</p> 	<p><i>Was my loved one involved?</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Initial notification of passenger involvement Immediate and factual information about the accident
<p>Victim Accounting</p> 	<p><i>Where is my loved one?</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Search and rescue efforts, tracking of injured transported to hospitals Search and recovery of fatalities Victim examination, identification, and repatriation process
<p>Information and Resources</p> 	<p><i>Where can I get help?</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Basic needs, financial, and logistic support Emotional, psychological, and spiritual care Investigative updates
<p>Personal Effects</p> 	<p><i>Where are my loved one's belongings?</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Recovery, processing, and return of associated and unassociated personal items

US Federal Family Assistance Legislation

Aviation (49 USC §1136, 41113, 41313)

- US and foreign air carriers (CPCN/Economic Authority)
- Any loss of life
- NTSB is the lead investigative agency

Rail (49 USC §1139, 24316)

- Interstate intercity rail passenger carrier (Amtrak), or interstate or intrastate high-speed rail
- Any loss of life
- NTSB is the lead investigative agency

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Air/Rail Carrier Responsibilities

49 USC §41113, 41313, 24316

Assurances filed with DOT and NTSB

Notification of involvement

- Toll-free number
- Emergency contact outreach

Provision of manifest to NTSB

Personal effects management

Logistic support for families

- Transportation, lodging, childcare
- Equal treatment for revenue, non-revenue, and ground

Consult with families prior to construction of memorial

Resources and training for staff

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The NTSB's Role "Facilitate Victim Recovery and Identification"

Expedient
**access to
federal
resources** to
support the
medicolegal
operation



Guidance
based on
practical
experience
responding to
numerous
mass casualty
incidents

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Victim recovery is the responsibility of the presiding medicolegal authority

What support do you already have for victim recovery?



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Federal Support for the Medicolegal Authority



- Evidence/wreckage documentation
- Fingerprint identification



- Antemortem (AM) and postmortem (PM) data collection



- Disaster morgue operations
- AM and PM data collection

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Additional Federal Partners

Department of State

- Support engagement with foreign consulates and embassies when foreign nationals killed or injured



American Red Cross

- Disaster Mental Health Services, Spiritual Care, and Mass Care



Department of Homeland Security

- Family Assistance Center security assessment and coordination



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What is the interface between the medicolegal jurisdiction and the family assistance operation?

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The Joint Family Support Operations Center (JFSOC)

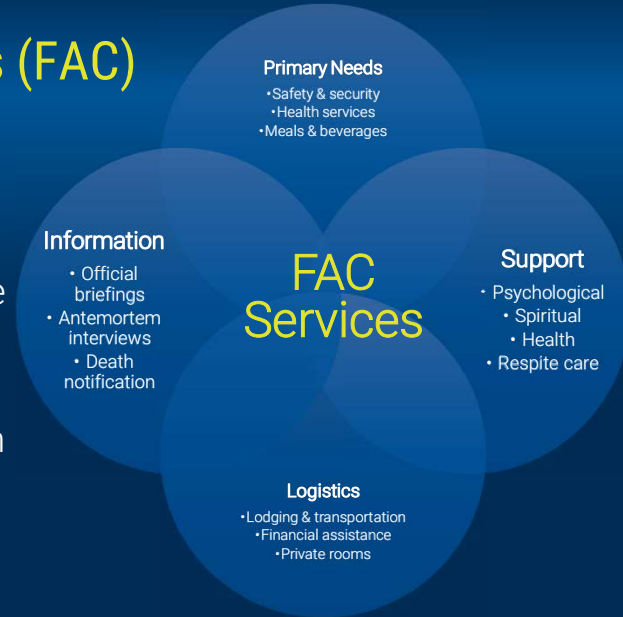
- Central location where participating organizations are brought together to monitor, plan, coordinate, and execute a family assistance response operation.
- Maximize utilization of all available resources.

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Family Assistance Centers (FAC)

- "Long-term" operation
- Safe and secure gathering place
- Central location for family members to receive information and access to services



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Medicolegal Role at the FAC

Antemortem Data Collection

- Interviews with family members

Victim Recovery and Identification Briefings

- Establish realistic expectations
- Dispel misconceptions

Notification of Identifications

Process Close-Out

- Final disposition paperwork
- Additional remains notifications
- Group remains management

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Family Member Briefings

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Who is a family member?

- No definition in legislation
- NTSB maintains an inclusive policy for briefings
 - Extended family and friends allowed
- Attorneys and media are only allowed if they are family
- May limit attendees due to space constraints

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Briefing Preparation Meetings

- Identify speakers and briefing order
- Discuss potential issues areas and concerns
- Develop talking points
- Develop answers to potential questions
- Discuss logistics
 - Speaker transitions, question and answer moderation, remote participation, interpretation services, etc.

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Common Family Member Questions/Concerns

- How is the search and recovery progressing?
- What is the condition of my family member's remains?
- When can we see the remains?
- How will you identify my family member?
- Why are you asking for dental, medical, and other records?
- Who will be notified of identification?
- Who makes decisions about release and final disposition?
- What happens to remains that are unidentified?

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"Legislated" vs. "Non-legislated" Accidents

Legacy Legislated

- Support at federal level
 - NTSB and Federal partners
- Support from carrier
- Support from Red Cross

Non-legacy legislated

- Cannot count on support from NTSB, federal partners, operator
- TDA tries to implement family assistance support working with local agencies and operator

City/County/State responsibilities remain the same:

- Incident command
- Victim recovery & identification
- Personal effects management
- Emergency management/logistic support
- Coordination with other agencies (NTSB, DoS)
- NGO response & support

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Perspectives on Managing Disaster Victim Identification (DVI) Operations

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Factors Influencing Operational Complexity

- Open or closed victim population
- Number of fatalities
- Condition of remains
- Types, availability, and accuracy of antemortem (AM) data

Highly fragmented and calcined human remains

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Factors Influencing Operational Complexity

- Search/recovery challenges
- ID focus - victims or remains
- Role of DNA - ID and/or reassociation
- Concerns/expectations of society and NOK

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Recovery Scene Operations

- Search
- Detection
- Documentation
- Recovery

Victim documentation before recovery

DCA09MA027

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Recovery Scene Operations

- Who is responsible for victim recovery?
 - **Coroner/medical examiner**
- Who typically supports you with victim recovery?
 - Local, state, and/or regional resources
 - Others?
- *When possible, coordinate with NTSB prior to recovery*

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Recovery Scene Operations

- What is essential to document in transportation accidents?
 - In situ position of remains
 - Use of restraint systems
 - Any manipulation of wreckage during recovery

HWY21FH007

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Recovery Scene Operations

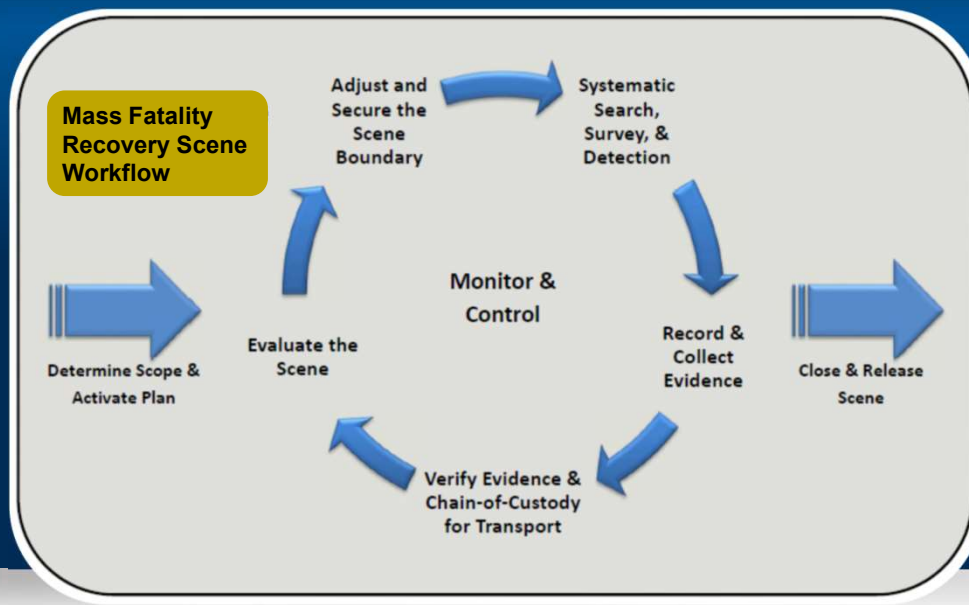
- How does proper search and recovery contribute to successful victim identification?
 - Mitigates additional commingling
 - Reduces loss/destruction of evidence

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How is high-volume, disaster victim recovery done?



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Quality Assurance: Scene Operations

- Numbering system
 - All remains or all assemblages assigned a number?
- Screening sediments
 - Spoil checks

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Quality Assurance: Scene Operations

- Scene/morgue communications
- Numbering system strategy
- Field recovery methods
 - Evidence preservation
 - Head/hand wrapping?

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Antemortem (AM) Data Collection

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Variables Influencing AM Data Collection

- Population impacted
 - Religious
 - Socioeconomic
 - Local vs. international
 - Open vs. closed
- Availability
- Accuracy

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AM Data Collection Challenges

- Incorrect information from the informant
 - Catherine vs. Katie
- Informant misunderstands the question
 - What is your relationship to the victim?
- Lack of standardized answers or recording
 - Sally Ritter-Dawkins, Sally Ritter Dawkins, Sally R. Dawkins

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AM Data Collection Challenges

- Information incorrectly recorded by the interviewer
 - Misspelling, transposed numbers
- Handwritten vs. direct data entry during interview
 - tt or H, o or a, m or n, 7 or 1
- Use trained interviewers

DMORT VIP form

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Postmortem (PM) Data Collection

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Mass Fatality Incident Morgues

EgyptAir 990
Quonset Naval Air Station

Hangar
Unoccupied warehouse
National Guard armory
ME/Coroner office

- Secure
- 5000-8000 sq. ft
- Hot/cold running water
- Electricity
- HVAC
- Drainage
- Parking
- Restrooms
- Communications

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DC OCME Field
Disaster Morgue

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High Throughput Morgue Operations

Decisions made before any remains are processed through morgue

- Numbering system / morgue reference number
- Identification threshold
- Attempt to identify every fragment
- Autopsy performed on intact remains
- Morgue flow

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Quality Assurance: Morgue Operations

- HR accountability
 - Trailer audits, bag inventories
- Group remains
 - Visual examination and radiography to determine if remains below the ID potential threshold
- PE and other classes of evidence
 - Disassociate remains prior to release to other agencies
- Case review prior to release
- Data collection and management
 - Paperwork audits, completeness of case files, numbering

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What are Group Remains?

- Not identified
- Not examined beyond initial triage
- Devoid of potentially identifiable characteristics
- Devoid of information relevant to death investigation or accident cause determination

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Group Remains Considerations

- Families must understand group remains may exist even after DNA analysis
- ME/C in conjunction with families decide final disposition
- Manage group remains process from beginning
- Communicate with clarity and establish realistic expectations

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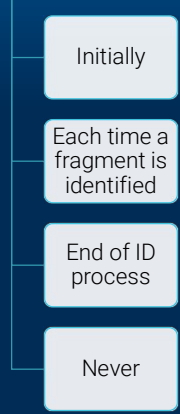
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Notification of Identification and Release of Remains

- Who should be notified?
- Straightforward with whole bodies
- Fragmentary remains pose a challenge
 - Inform NOK of potential for group remains
 - Explain reassociation process

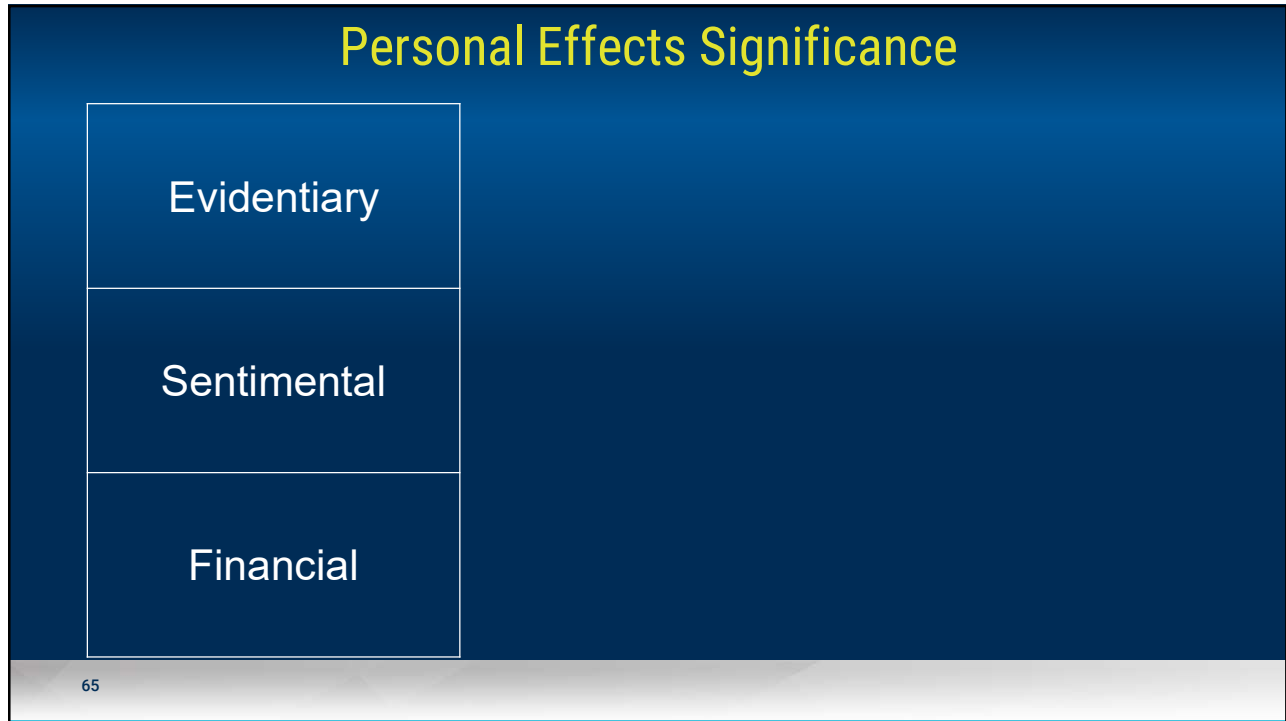
When and how often to notify the NOK?



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Personal Effects Management

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Categories	Who is Responsible?
<u>Associated</u> with human remains	ME/C
<u>Associated</u> with victim name	Carrier
<u>Unassociated</u>	Carrier

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Personal Effects Management





- Carrier responsibilities for a legacy legislated accident
 - Catalog → family member review
 - Unclaimed → retain for 18 months
- Responsibilities are **not prescribed** if accident does not meet criteria in family assistance legislation

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Fundamental Concerns

Notification of Involvement 	<i>Was my loved one involved?</i> Initial notification of passenger involvement Immediate and factual information about the accident
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Information and Resources 	<i>Where can I get help?</i> Basic needs, financial, and logistic support Emotional, psychological, and spiritual care Investigative updates
Personal Effects 	<i>Where are my loved one's belongings?</i> Recovery, processing, and return of associated and unassociated personal items

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TDA Family Assistance Resources

- TDA Family Assistance webpage →
- *Family Assistance Response Community*

- NTSB TDA Family Assistance Course
tdacourse@ntsb.gov



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Contact Transportation Disaster Assistance Division

assistance@ntsb.gov

(800) 683-9369

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