



VCEMS Training Bulletin



Bulletin 047

Date: August 9, 2018

Evidence Preservation

The Ventura County EMS Agency has been in contact with representatives from the Sheriff's Office, as well as the Medical Examiner's office, and we were asked to release some updated guidance related to evidence preservation and recommended best practices while on scene of an actual/potential crime scene. Both the VCISO and the Medical Examiner are appreciative of the work prehospital providers are doing, but also want responders to understand that evidence preservation is critical, and that alteration of any part of a scene may be detrimental in determining cause and manner of death, solving a crime, or securing a conviction of a perpetrator.

Below are some key points that we would like to highlight:

- Be observant of any possible evidence and make every effort to not disturb that evidence in any way.
 - If you need to enter a death scene, be deliberate and consistent with your movements, so as to disturb as little as possible.
 - Only disturb what needs to be disturbed for the purposes of patient assessment / care.
- Never cover a decedent with an item such as a bed sheet, blanket, towel, etc. Doing this may introduce fibers or foreign DNA that can/will contaminate evidence and has the potential to create significant challenges in solving a crime and/or securing a conviction of the suspect(s).
- Do your best to not move the decedent if death is obvious and no assessment is attempted.
 - Hangings may be left in place only if patient meets obvious death criteria outlined in VCEMS Policy 606 – Determination of Death.
 - Minors that are obviously dead, or those that appear to be dead with Rigor Mortis and/or Dependent Lividity who are determined to be dead in accordance with VCEMS Policy 606, should be left in place and not transported.
- For cases involving a suspected crime scene and/or a dead body (determination of death with no resuscitation attempted), leave medication bottles or other drugs where they are so that the medical examiner's investigator and/or law enforcement personnel can effectively assess and document the scene. *VCEMS Policy 624 – Patient Medications will be updated in the next EMS Update to account for this type of situation/circumstance.*
- Do your best to limit the number of people at a scene
- If you have entered an actual/potential crime scene, you should be prepared to stay and be interviewed by law enforcement.
- If anything at the scene of a crime scene / potential crime scene does need to be moved for any reason, the narrative section of the ePCR would be an ideal place to note the original location and what necessitated the move.
- Documentation is critical in these types of cases and can be extremely helpful to law enforcement and the medical examiner as they conduct an ongoing investigation. Details related to the patient environment, positioning, clothing, etc. should be well documented in the narrative section of the ePCR.

Prehospital personnel are expected to assess and treat in accordance with VCEMS policies and procedures. There are times where disturbing the scene of an obviously dead victim(s) will do more harm than good. Please use your best judgement but do your best to consider downstream implications of disturbing a scene.

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