



D49 Mass Fatality Incident Planning and Preparation in Montgomery County, Ohio

Kenneth M. Betz, MS, Robert L. Hunkeler III, MFS*, and Kent E. Harshbarger, MD, JD, Montgomery County Coroner's Office, 361 West 3rd Street, Dayton, OH 45402*

After attending this presentation, attendees will understand how to prepare for a mass fatality incident by conducting exercises, procuring equipment and supplies, and preparing a written plan.

This presentation will impact the forensic science community by providing the necessary tools for a coroner/medical examiner office to process remains and property in a mass fatality incident.

In the past decade, mass fatality incidents came to the forefront through a series of terrorist-related incidents and natural disasters, where deaths ranged from the dozens to the thousands. The definition of a mass fatality incident is an incident where the number of fatalities overwhelms local resources. Some jurisdictions would be overwhelmed with five bodies; whereas others may be able to handle 50 or more with current resources. It is absolutely imperative for coroner/medical examiner offices to be as prepared as possible to handle a mass fatality incident.

Montgomery County Coroner's Office in Dayton, OH investigates over 4,500 deaths per year and conducts approximately 1,300 autopsies per year. In addition to investigating deaths in Montgomery County proper, Montgomery County Coroner's Office provides contract autopsy support for 28 additional counties, making up approximately one-third of the state of Ohio. Many of the counties supported are rural in nature and have relatively few resources should a mass fatality incident occur in their jurisdiction. Supported counties have clearly stated that should a mass fatality incident occur in their county, the Montgomery County Coroner's Office would be called to assist. Ohio has a Disaster Mortuary Operational Response Team (DMORT) which has a significant response capability; however, if there is a multi-focal event as was seen with the 9/11 Terrorist Attack, resources to assist lesser-affected areas may be harder to obtain. In light of this, the Montgomery County Coroner's Office designed an incidence response team which would be able to stand alone for a short period of time, or be attached to a larger DMORT response should the need for additional resources arise.

The most important component to handling a mass fatality incident is a well-written plan. The Montgomery County Coroner's Office Mass Fatality Incident Plan took over two years to complete. The plan is 48 pages in length and has 31 references, 23 of which are hot-linked directly to the plan for easy access. The references include county, state, and federal documents. The plan was coordinated locally with organizations to include the Montgomery County Office of Emergency Management, the American Red Cross, and the Greater Dayton Area Hospital Association. The plan was also coordinated at state-level. The plan includes sections on roles and responsibilities, processing capacities, incident management, scene investigation, temporary morgue/examination centers, identification of remains, personal property, mass burial, communications, media interaction, Family Assistance Centers, Weapons of Mass Destruction, pandemic events, transportation, storage of remains, and local hospital and university body storage capacities. This plan was provided to all counties supported as well as other counties upon request. The plan currently serves as a baseline for much of Ohio, with each jurisdiction changing location-specific guidance. This allows all entities to be working off of the same general concept.

In addition, Montgomery County Coroner's Office has participated in and helped design multiple exercises within Montgomery County as well as with two neighboring counties. Equipment is essential in processing a mass fatality incident. Montgomery County Coroner's Office has two 18-foot refrigerated morgue trailers, each capable of refrigerating 18 sets of remains. A third trailer is a 26-foot command trailer consisting of supplies, global positioning systems, and radio communications equipment. In addition, a 22-foot mass fatality trailer has been procured, containing a 20-kilowatt generator, two 3.5 ton HVAC systems, one 13' x 21' Small Fatality Management Center, one 13' x 33' Medium Fatality Management Center, lighting, and flooring. Other equipment includes portable digital x-ray technology, automated fingerprint identification system, portable dental x-ray equipment, and portable lighting capable of lighting up areas as large as two football fields.



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This equipment is available for use upon request in Ohio or in neighboring states. It is vital to ensure this type of equipment and supplies are made available to those jurisdictions needing additional resources which may be required to handle a large mass fatality incident.

Mass Fatality, MFI, Disaster