



D46 Law Enforcement and the Missing/Unidentified Person Crisis

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After attending this presentation, attendees will have a better understanding of the complexities of the missing and unidentified crisis in the United States and a protocol to manage this crisis.

This presentation will impact the forensic science community by giving the law enforcement community forensic tools to handle this never-ending mass fatality disaster.

If you ask most Americans about a mass disaster, they're likely to think of the 9/11 attacks on the World Trade Center, Hurricane Katrina, or the Southeast Asian tsunami. Very few people, including law enforcement officials, would think of the number of missing persons and unidentified human remains in our nation as a crisis. However, it is what experts call the nation's silent mass disaster; a mass fatality disaster over time and space.

Should law enforcement agencies be in the missing and unidentified person business? The missing and unidentified persons have, over the years, been thrust upon law enforcement from the largest to the smallest of agencies. Neither is equipped to handle what is essentially a forensic problem — identification of the unidentified via scientific evidence: DNA; fingerprints; medical and dental X-rays. Solving cold cases is not a matter of chance or luck; it is quite simply a matter of hard work, design, protocol, and the passion of the investigator. Law enforcement is neither equipped for nor do they want the job. Law enforcement agencies are understaffed, under budget constraints, under time limitations, and consider the missing person and unidentified as a very low priority. It is estimated that there are over 100,000 missing persons and approximately 40,000 unidentified deceased persons in the United States. The fact that no one actually "knows" the exact numbers is itself a condemnation of the current handling of the missing and unidentified cases in the United States.

Sir William Gladstone (1809-1898), the former Prime Minister of Britain, said, "Show me the manner in which a nation or community cares for its dead and I will measure with mathematical exactness the tender sympathies of its people, their respect for the laws of the land, and their loyalty to high ideals." Improvements can be made to the current system and the National Missing and Unidentified System (NamUs) is a step in the right direction. This presentation will describe the protocol used to process missing and unidentified persons cases by a medium-sized law enforcement agency and medical examiner's office over the past ten years. The presented protocol may serve as a "model" for investigating missing and unidentified person cases at a local/county level and provide attendees with the tools necessary to implement a similar system in their jurisdictions.

Missing, Unidentified, Protocol