



D67 The Role of the Mexican Consulate in the Identification of Human Remains of Those Who Perish in the Desert Attempting to Cross the Mexican Border Into Arizona

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After attending this presentation, attendees will gain an understanding of the critical role played by the Mexican Consulate in conjunction with the Maricopa County Medical Examiner's Office with regard to the identification process of decedents believed to be Mexican nationals who have died attempting to cross the Mexican border.

This presentation will impact the forensic science community by demonstrating the increased success rate of a comprehensive approach between the Maricopa County Medical Examiner's Office and the Mexican Consulate during the identification process of human remains of those who succumb to the elements while attempting to cross the border from Mexico to Arizona.

The Mexico-Arizona border is crossed by thousands of immigrants every year. Due to many dangerous elements in the Arizona desert, many who attempt to cross the border do not make it alive. Arizona is ranked third in the United States with regard to unidentified human remains and Maricopa County is ranked second in the state of Arizona. Many of the unidentified decedents in Maricopa County, Arizona, are those who subsequently die while attempting to cross the border from Mexico to America due to the heat and menacing desert terrain. The effects of these environmental elements on the remains, combined with the fact that those crossing the border purposely try to keep their identification information hidden, make the identification process extremely challenging. There is often personal property found with the decedent that indicates they had been trying to cross the border from Mexico. Personal items that are found include Mexican currency, reading materials in Spanish, documents, and, occasionally, a Mexican identification card is also found.

The Unidentified Coordinator for the Medical Examiner's Office will review the personal property and provide a detailed summary for the Mexican Consulate representative that includes demographic information about the remains. The extreme heat and the effects of environmental elements typically leave human remains found in the desert unidentifiable, both visually and by identifying features, as most are primarily skeletal remains. Due to the condition of the remains, the identification can only be made through dental records/radiograph, medical implant radiographs, and DNA; fingerprints are not usually an option with skeletal remains.

The Mexican Consulate plays a major role in the identification process as they are able to search their own missing persons information and compare it to the demographic information obtained from examinations conducted by forensic odontologists and anthropologists at the Maricopa County Medical Examiner's Office. The Mexican Consulate representatives are able to compare information from family that might have called the Mexican Consulate worried because they have lost contact with their family member and had knowledge they were going to attempt to cross the border. Due to language barriers and cultural beliefs, the Mexican Consulate is able to obtain the information from the family in Mexico and relay to the Unidentified Coordinator at the Medical Examiner's Office in order to confirm the identification and attempt to adhere to cultural beliefs. The representatives for the Mexican Consulate also assist with sending DNA buccal swab kits to family in Mexico, verify Mexican ID cards are valid, obtain fingerprints cards from Mexico, and obtain medical or dental imaging and other documents.

This study presents case scenarios and detailed information about the assistance the Mexican Consulate provides to the medical examiner's office when working unidentified human remains cases and finding family who live in Mexico. Coordinated multidisciplinary efforts are increasing the identification rate as a direct result from collaboration between the Mexican Consulate and the Medical Examiner's Office in Maricopa County, Arizona.

Identification Process, Mexican Consulate, Unidentified Remains