



## Breakfast Seminar - 2016

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### **BS4 One Night in August: The I-35W Bridge Collapse in Minneapolis**

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After attending this presentation, attendees will understand the role of, the challenges posed to, and the lessons learned by the medical examiner in a high-profile, multi-fatality mass disaster.

This presentation will impact the forensic science community by providing deeper insights into the role of the medical examiner and forensic pathologist in managing a mass fatality incident. Special attention will be paid to techniques for identifying remains, communicating with families, informing the public, and working with other agencies and elected leaders.

On August 1, 2007, during the height of rush hour, the eight-lane I-35W Bridge in Minneapolis collapsed, sending scores of vehicles into the Mississippi River.

Bridge construction started in 1964 at a cost of ~ \$5.2 million and the bridge opened in 1967. Originally striped for four lanes with an expected use of 66,000 vehicles per day, the bridge was restriped to eight lanes in 1988. At the time of the collapse, the 14-span, 1,907 foot long bridge carried an estimated 141,000 vehicles per day.

The medical examiner's office was one of some 75 city, county, state, federal, and private organizations that were eventually involved in the recovery of bodies and investigation of the collapse. Water visibility, current speed, biohazards, and steel and concrete in the river made the recoveries of the victims difficult. The medical examiner's office worked with law enforcement agencies and dive teams to develop a protocol for handling victims' remains with as much dignity and privacy as possible, given the challenges of the recoveries and the intense media scrutiny. Medical examiner investigators proactively contacted the families of the missing to obtain as much antemortem identifying material as possible to facilitate victim identification when bodies were found. In all but one case, identifications and autopsies were completed, and remains released to the families, in less than one day following recovery.

The challenges of the disaster site led to an operation spanning approximately three weeks before the last victim was found. This presentation focuses on the role of the medical examiner in the days and weeks following the bridge collapse, with an emphasis on identification techniques; communications with families, the media, and elected leaders; a review of what did (and did not) go well; and a summary of lessons learned.

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#### **Bridge, Collapse, Mass Fatality**