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### **E52 A Death Investigator's Perspective: Lessons Learned in Response to the Crash of Flight 3407**

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After attending this presentation, attendees will understand: (1) the essential components of a Medical Examiner (ME)/coroner mass fatality plan; (2) the role of the ME/coroner/death investigator in a mass fatality event; (3) the multi-agency/multidisciplinary collaboration, from the scene through the final disposition of remains; and, (4) the lessons learned from this incident.

This presentation will impact the forensic science community by providing a death investigator's perspective of a mass fatality response: how the plan was written, implemented, and the after-action report used to adjust and improve the plan for similar events. This presentation will also add to current research in mass fatality planning/response and what can be expected with the multi-agency/multidiscipline response that is required when a mass fatality event of a certain magnitude arises.

Just after 10:00 p.m. February 12, 2009, Continental/Colgan Flight 3407 en route to Buffalo Niagara International Airport in Cheektowaga, NY, from Newark Liberty International Airport in Newark, NJ, crashed into a house in Clarence Center, NY. All 49 passengers/crew on board and one occupant of the house were reported dead.

As stated in the mass fatality protocol for the Erie County Medical Examiner's Office, more than 25 fatalities in one event was a mass fatality requiring the plan be implemented and additional resources contacted. In all, the Medical Examiner's Office was one of more than ten municipal, county, state, federal, and private organizations involved in the recovery and investigation.

Throughout the following 5 days, the crash debris and the remains and personal belongings of all 50 victims were recovered from the scene; all of this work was complicated by a long burning-fire, a snow storm, and freezing temperatures. Due to the impact of the crash and subsequent fire that had burned overnight, there was much fragmentation and commingling of the remains. In the weeks and months that followed, all victims were identified and released to the families for final interment. In November 2009, a special ceremony and interment of the commingled remains that could not be distinguished was held.

This presentation focuses on the challenges of a mass fatality event in on-site recovery, management, and collaboration, as well as how the mass fatality plan was implemented, both for continuing operations of daily case work and for the mass fatality response. Also, the lessons learned, involving external assistance, family communications, and multiple phases for identification of remains will be discussed.

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#### **Mass Fatality, Planning, Death Investigator**