E104   Disaster-Related Deaths and Data: A New Toolkit and Training to Enhance Death Scene Investigations After Disasters

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After attending this presentation, attendees will understand how disaster death scene data can improve public health emergency preparedness, response, and recovery efforts. Attendees will be familiar with the new toolkit, Death Scene Investigation After Natural Disaster or Other Weather-Related Events, designed to help death scene investigators investigate deaths that occurred during natural disasters or other weather-related events. Attendees will learn how information collected at the death scene can enable death certifiers to more accurately and consistently attribute deaths to disasters, and how this in turn helps public health departments identify risk and protective factors associated with disaster-related deaths and refine their strategies to prepare for, respond to, and recover from future disaster events.

This presentation will impact the forensic science community by highlighting the toolkit and new training resources available to assist death scene investigators in collecting data about disaster-related deaths and reporting this information to their Medical Examiner/Coroner (ME/C).

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) contracted with the non-partisan and objective research organization referred to as NORC at the University of Chicago and collaborated with state and local ME/Cs, forensic pathologists, death scene investigators, forensic anthropologists, and epidemiologists to create a new toolkit to assist death scene investigators with disaster-specific data collection. NORC presented an overview of the toolkit at the 2017 AAFS Annual Scientific Meeting; the final toolkit was released in July 2017. This presentation will focus on the forthcoming training resource.

The new toolkit contains supplemental forms and checklists to ensure event-specific data are collected at death scenes of commonly occurring natural disasters or weather-related events (e.g., hurricanes, tornadoes, extreme heat exposures). In addition to their routine data collection form, investigators can use the supplemental forms or checklists to aid in collecting important disaster-specific data. Both the forms and checklists prompt investigators to collect information specific to the disaster or weather-related event that is often available only immediately after the event. Examples of disaster-specific data include information about the decedent (e.g., engagement in activities related to disaster preparation or clean up) and the disaster or event itself (e.g., weather conditions or ongoing alerts).

To supplement the toolkit, NORC and CDC are developing a training resource to assist ME/Cs in preparing their staff to investigate disaster-related deaths. Using a variety of educational approaches and presentation techniques, the training resource provides information about disaster-related mortality data, such as the importance of timely and accurate mortality data in measuring the effect of a disaster as well as the number and type of agencies that benefit from these data after a disaster. The training resource is designed for both new death scene investigators and the continuing education of advanced death scene investigators. NORC is partnering with the American Board of Medicolegal Death Investigation (ABMDI) to pilot and disseminate this new training.

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