



G8 The Drowning of 26 Koreans in the Danube in Budapest

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Learning Overview: After attending this presentation, attendees will be aware that the success of a Disaster Victim Identification (DVI) mission is founded on the unity of all national and international agencies involved; in a spirit of learning and collaboration, these agencies can provide their very best to serve society by recovering the dead and ensuring a dignified handling of their remains, as well as ensuring closure for the victims' loved ones and the survivors of any tragic event.

Impact on the Forensic Science Community: This presentation will impact the forensic science community by exploring the recovery and identification process, according to the International Criminal Police Organization (INTERPOL) standards, of the victims of a ship collision disaster on the Danube river in Budapest at the end of May 2019. This presentation seeks to point out that each DVI operation is unique in its nature and provides a large variety of challenges that need to be overcome in a relatively short period of time.

On May 28, 2019, at 10:00 p.m. in the evening during heavy rainfall, a sightseeing ship named “Hableány” (Mermaid), fully booked by 31 South Korean tourists, accompanied by two South Korean tour guides, with a Hungarian captain and one other crew member on board, collided against a much bigger cruise ship and sank within seven seconds. Seven tourists survived the accident and were rescued from the 10°C–15°C cold water. Consequently, seven other victims were found dead and were removed from the water under very difficult circumstances. The rescue operation, which already faced massive challenges due to the high tide, the heavy rainfall, lack of light, low water temperature, and dirty conditions, was unsuccessful in the recovery of the remaining 21 persons, who were either on the deck or inside the ship at the moment of the accident. While South Korean officials dispatched fingerprint specialists, divers, and logistical personnel, the Hungarian DVI team received its first mission to register and identify the dead bodies that were found at different spots of the Danube, the furthest 120km away. Over the following two weeks, 19 bodies were recovered from the Danube.

The mission itself stood out by the great level of cooperation between the different agencies, such as the Hungarian Counter Terror Unit, which supervised the entire operation, the Budapest Police Department, the Catastrophe Rescue Department, and the National Bureau of Investigation's DVI team. In addition to that, a very close collaboration was established with the South Korean Crime Scene Investigator (CSI) fingerprint specialists and their respective INTERPOL liaisons, the Austrian Counter Terror Unit Cobra, and foreign diving specialists.

DVI, Korea, Disaster