

E42 A Forensic Approach to a Fatal Harbor Accident in Genoa, Italy, in 2013

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Learning Overview: The goal of this presentation is to show a morgue organization in the event of a single fatal accident with a large number of victims as well as stressing the concept of teamwork to guarantee an adequate service for the community, authorities, and victims' relatives.

Impact on the Forensic Science Community: This presentation will impact the forensic science community by demonstrating how important forensic investigation is in order to reach the correct postmortem diagnosis, even in the case of a traumatic accident, and to provide the best service to the judicial authorities concerning criminal and civil questions.

On May 7, 2013, at 11:30 p.m., a container ship crashed into a pilot control tower in the port of Genoa, causing it to collapse into the sea. Twelve persons were involved in the accident: nine died and three were wounded. The bodies were recovered in the sea, outside and inside the wreckage of the tower: the bodies of seven victims were found and taken to the town morgue of Genoa the day after the crash, another victim three days later, and the last one was found after ten days in the water. Victims' relatives arrived at the Departmental Section of Legal and Forensic Medicine, where the morgue is located in Genoa, the day after the accident.

Immediately, all the medical staff of the morgue worked in unison with harbor authorities, the Civil Protection Agency, psychologists, and the public prosecutor. After the authorization of the latter, all bodies underwent forensic examination to determine the cause of death: in accordance with Italian law, in five cases, a single gross examination sufficed as the traumatic injuries had forced brain tissue out from the skull, so revealing a clearly traumatic death. Also in the sixth case, the body arrived in the morgue dismembered after having been in the sea for ten days in addition to advanced decomposing phenomena and multiple lesions, both antemortem and postmortem; an external examination was performed.

In the last three cases, gross and internal examinations were performed; shaving lather froth and petechiae were present in all cases. Sectioning revealed marked lung edema and multi-organ congestion without fatal traumatic lesions. Consequently, the cause of death was attributed to drowning. In one case, tissue samples were collected in order to perform a microscopic investigation in the presence of a consultant appointed by the relatives of the victims. The consultant in question, during the Civil Court trial, aimed to demonstrate through the histological pattern the timing of death. To conclude, this presentation illustrates the vital role a correct forensic approach and teamwork involving different professional profiles has in providing sound evidence in both civil and criminal investigations and in offering adequate answers to relatives.

Forensic Approach, Traumatic Deaths, Teamwork