



G1 Limousine Fire

Roland G. Chew, DDS, Fremont, CA 94538*

Learning Overview: After attending this presentation, attendees will understand the importance of having and coordinating a mass disaster plan. When a disaster occurs, it may require multiple people be dentally identified. Having a disaster plan ready has been discussed many times. Disasters can be small or large, but the fundamental preparation is needed. On a large-scale disaster, we have the Disaster Mortuary Operational Response Team (DMORT) at the federal level to help with the recovery and identification. However, on a smaller scale such as a wildfire, multiple victims in a motor vehicle accident, or even a house fire, the local forensic dentist needs to be prepared to deal with multiple victims. The case presented will provide the fundamental preparations required to handle dental identifications in an orderly and systematic fashion.

Impact on the Forensic Science Community: This presentation will impact the forensic science community by serving as a reminder that multiple victims in an accident need to be processed in a systematic way to make sure all key information is obtained from antemortem records to postmortem records. As a result, an accurate identification may be made by minimizing any loss of information, inaccuracy, and/or confusion.

The case began on an evening in the spring of 2016; a couple had just been married. The bride and her bridal party were off to the hotel for the wedding reception. The limousine carrying the driver and nine passengers was traveling over the San Mateo Bridge in the San Francisco Bay Area when it caught fire. There was panic in the back cabin of the car but the driver was unaware it was because of a fire. He interpreted the noise as people celebrating a recent marriage. By the time the driver became aware of the fire in the back cabin of the limousine, the driver stopped in the middle of the bridge. Minutes later, the back cabin was engulfed in flames. The driver and four females were able to escape the fire, but the bride and four other occupants did not survive.

A call was received from the county sheriff's office. It was confirmed that records needed to be obtained and instructions were given as to what the adequate records were, such as X-rays with date, written treatment records, and/or a list of completed services.

The bodies were severely burned and not viewable for an open-casket funeral. Since this was a case involving multiple victims, accuracy of the bodies was critical so that the families could grieve for their loved ones and lay them to rest. In the morgue, help was divided into different groups with different responsibilities such as starting paperwork with case number and postmortem pictures, resecting jaws, X-rays of the teeth and jaws, postmortem charting, antemortem charting, and lastly, comparison for identification.

Attendees will understand that there needs to be an orderly process involved in the identification to be complete and thorough.

Postmortem, Points of Concordance, Positive Identification