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NCIS Death Investigations Briefing

Presented to DOD Task Force on Suicide Prevention

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Death Investigation Protocol

SECNAVINST 5430.107 – Mission and Functions of the Naval Criminal Investigative Service

“NCIS shall investigate...any non-combat death, on or off naval installations, facilities, vessels, or aircraft, where the cause of death cannot be medically attributable to disease or natural causes...NCIS shall investigate the circumstances until criminal causality can be reasonably excluded.”



Death Investigation Protocol

Every case is treated with the same diligence as a homicide --

- Prevents destruction or loss of valuable evidence at the scene and loss of important information from witnesses

Death Investigation Protocol

- Medical Examiner determines cause and manner of death
- NCIS investigates circumstances surrounding the death
- NCIS presents results to medical, command and/or prosecutors for action deemed appropriate

Death Investigation Protocol

Timeline:

- Initial notification to duty agent and assignment of case agent
- Death scene response and review by Forensic Consultant
- Investigation and worldwide pursuit of all logical investigative leads
- Autopsy/Pathologist consult
- Family interviews and Family Liaison contact
- NCIS Field Office Death Review Panel
- NCIS HQ Death Review Board
- Authorization to close

Death Investigation Protocol

NCIS Death Scene Responders

NCIS Special Agents

- Training at FLETC and advanced crime scene training

Major Case Response Team (MCRT)

- Advanced training and evidence collection equipment
- Extensive death scene examination, measurements, photography, videotaping and gathering and packaging of evidence

NCIS Forensic Consultants

- Masters Degrees in Forensics
- Consult with MCRTs on every death scene and review the physical evidence in every death case



Death Investigation Protocol

Suspected Suicide – Investigative Steps

- Interviews of family, witnesses, friends, etc.
- Review of 911 calls
- Review of death scene examination by MCRT
- Review of cyber evidence
- Review of all records (service, medical, psychological, emergency room and ambulance)
- Criminal History: Data base checks
- Sworn statements obtained from witnesses

Death Investigation Protocol

Suspected Suicide – Investigative Steps (cont.)

- All logical leads are pursued worldwide
- Role of NCIS Forensic Psychologist
- Consultation with outside experts – U.S. Army Criminal Investigative Laboratory (USACIL), Armed Forces Institute of Pathology (AFIP), and other state, local and federal agencies
- NCIS HQ Death Desk Officers monitor the case and interact with the case control agent

Death Investigation Protocol

Suspected Suicide – Autopsy

NCIS Special Agents work closely with Pathologist and Medical Examiners who conduct the autopsy

- Attend the autopsy and provide scene photos, evidence and personal records to MEs at autopsy
- Autopsy photos are obtained for the case file
- Agents obtain the final autopsy report and final death certificate
- Outside agency reports may be referred to AFIP for consult and opinion

Death Investigation Protocol

Suspected Suicide – NCIS Family Liaison

- Specially trained Social Worker
- Point of contact for family on all questions and information regarding the death investigation

Death Investigation Protocol

Suspected Suicide – FOIA and Privacy Act

Background:

- Death cases routinely take one year or more to close
 - FOIA requests may take an additional two to three months to complete following closure
- FOIA requests
 - Executed to the letter of the law
 - Privacy and document control