

# WILSON COUNTY EMERGENCY OPERATIONS PLAN

## MASS FATALITIES

### I. PURPOSE

This section outlines the procedures to be followed when a disaster results in mass fatalities to the extent that the number of dead exceeds the resources of the local medical examiner's office.

### II. ORGANIZATION

By law, the Wilson County Chief Medical Examiner is responsible for the dead. The mass fatalities team and other local funeral service personnel, when activated, will be available to assist under the direction of the county medical examiner.

### III. SITUATION AND ASSUMPTIONS

Any major disaster may result in extensive property damage and possibly, a large number of deaths, which may require extraordinary procedures.

### IV. CONCEPT OF OPERATIONS

- A. The mass fatalities team focus is to establish the means and methods for the sensitive respectful care and handling of deceased human remains in multi-death disaster situations. The team will be available to aid in the necessary acts of evacuation, identification (sanitation, and preservation such as preparation or embalming as authorized), notification of the next of kin or their representative under the direction of authorized persons.
- B. When disaster conditions permit, and an estimate can be made of the dead, temporary morgue sites will be selected and activated. Remains will be recovered and evacuated to the temporary morgues for identification purposes and safeguarding of personal effects found on the dead. Necessary information about each victim will be compiled and processed for the medical examiner. When authorized by officials and the family, mass fatalities team shall prepare, process and release the remains for final disposition.
- C. As an assistance group to the medical examiner, the local funeral directors will provide needed supplies, equipment, vehicles, and personnel as available. The state funeral director's association may also assist in identifying other necessary resources.
- D. **Only when registered burial sites are exhausted, losses are massive, and as a last resort**, should interment be in burial areas selected by local, county, and/or state agencies.

### V. DIRECTION AND CONTROL

- A. Operations will be coordinated by the medical examiner, working with the Emergency Medical Services Director, and where designated, the mortuary response team's coordinator.
- B. When a disaster occurs, the county medical examiner should immediately contact the state funeral directors association through its offices or through staff members. They in turn, will notify the appropriate members of the mortuary response team.

## **VI. TEMPORARY MORGUE SITE**

- A. A morgue site is to be selected, organized, and put into operation if the number of dead exceeds the resources of the medical examiner's office. Once a morgue site is selected, the medical examiner, or the designated mortuary response team coordinator will organize its operations and assign personnel to the following duties:
- Uniformed Guards
  - Information Control
  - Counselors
  - Interviewers
  - Telephone Communicators
  - Admissions Clerks
  - General Supervisor
  - Identification Personnel
  - Orderlies
  - Personal Effects Custodian
  - Embalming Supervisor
  - Embalmers
  - Secretaries
  - Inventory/Distribution Clerk
- B. The temporary morgue should be located as near as possible to the area with heavy death toll, and should be equipped with the following:
- Electricity
  - Shower facilities/hot and cold water/rest rooms
  - Heat and A/C
  - Ventilation
  - Parking areas
  - Communications capabilities
  - Rest areas for personnel
  - Locked/Secured for remains and personal effects
  - Removed from public view
  - Sufficient space for body identification procedures
  - Acceptable for temporary partitioning for separation of functions (body handling, interviewing, records, etc.)

## **VII. MASS BURIAL GUIDELINES**

- A. Mass burial may become necessary when the number of remains cannot be managed and become a public health concern, or when remains cannot be adequately refrigerated or embalmed, identified, or processed in an acceptable manner.
- B. Any decision to begin mass burial must be made at the highest levels of state government. Their direction will be essential before such an effort can be initiated for the public health, safety and welfare.
- C. The location of any mass burial site must also be agreed upon by the responsible agencies, taking into consideration the number of remains to be buried, distance and transportation requirements. Plans should include the probability of exhumation at a later time.

**VIII. CREMATIONS**

- A. Cremations should not take place for a minimum of seven days after the last body has been processed. Cremation should never be used as a form of disposition for unidentified remains or tissue. Religious considerations as well as the possibility for future identification affect this decision.

**IX. REMAINS NOT RECOVERED**

- A. Conditions and circumstances sometimes preclude the recovery of remains in spite of exhaustive efforts and resources expended by those involved. Once the determination has been made that one or more remains are unrecoverable, non-denominational memorial services should be arranged. All efforts should be made to notify and include the surviving family members. The family should be given the opportunity to select the locale of the non-denominational service if so desired.