



## **-Process Map- Basic Steps in Medicolegal Death Investigation**

The attached Process Map was prepared by the SWGMDI for the following reasons:

- 1) To give the public and other interested parties a better understanding of the basic steps involved in a medicolegal death investigation;
- 2) To provide a visual understanding of critical steps in medicolegal death investigation around which SWGMDI projects, reports, and recommendations may be developed.

The Process Map is not meant to be an all-inclusive summary of every procedure that may be required in death investigations, especially complicated ones. Rather, it is a generic summary of steps that are typically involved in day-to-day death investigation practice.

Included below are:

- a) The Process Map (first page)
- b) Available standards and recommendations which are applicable to various steps indicated in the Process Map (second page)

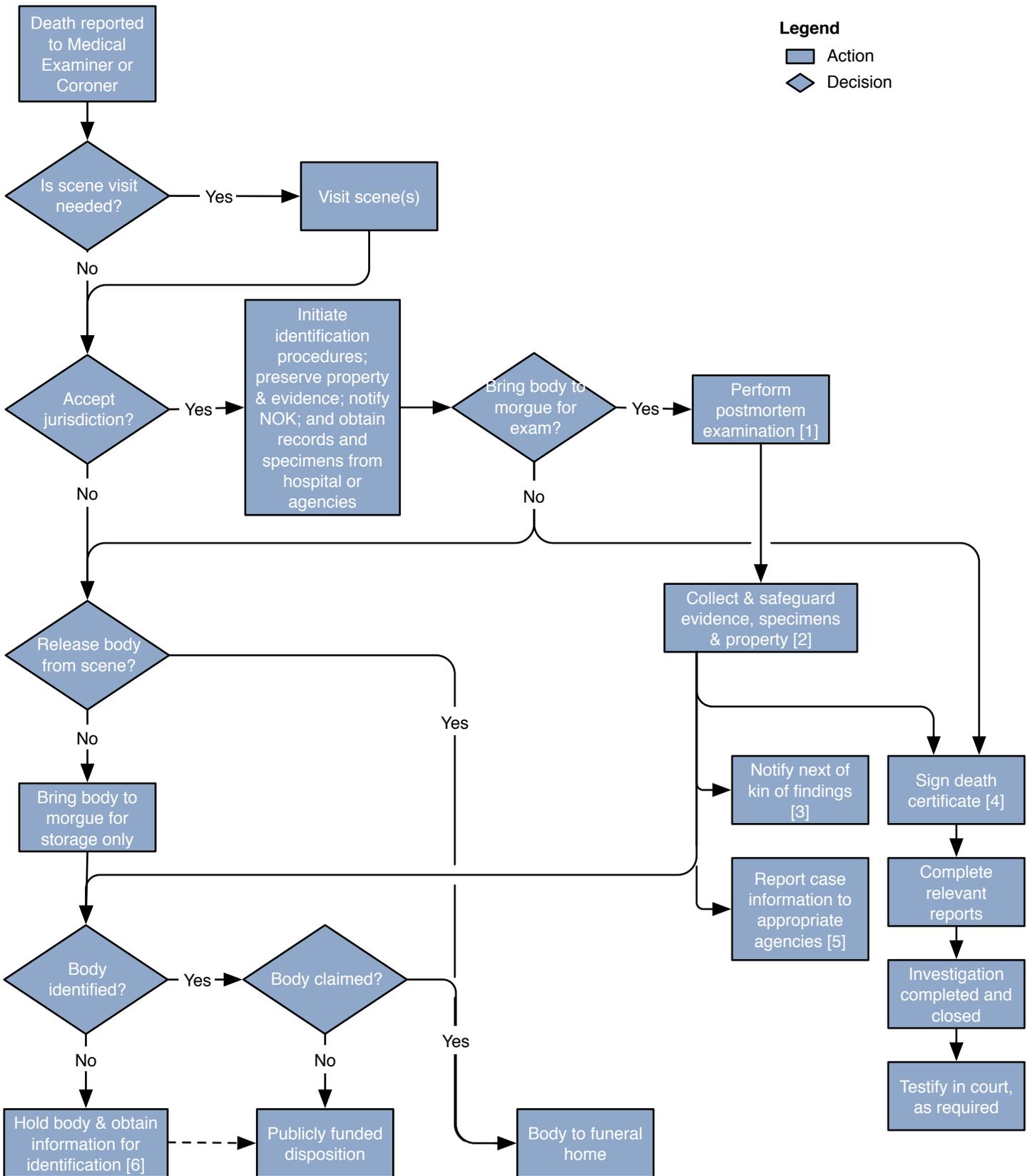
This document did not go through a public review and comment period as it is simply a working document without recommendations. It was approved by the SWGMDI Board of Directors on December 12, 2013. At that time, the SWGMDI Board of Directors included:

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# Basic Steps for Medicolegal Death Investigation and Applicable SWGMDI Standards

## DRAFT version 10.3: 12 December 2013



**Notes for diagram:**

1. The type and extent of postmortem examination will depend on the circumstances and apparent cause and manner of death. Postmortem exam can include external examination; chemical, toxicological, microbiological, and other laboratory tests; radiological examination; and partial or full autopsy, including pathological examination of tissues removed during postmortem exam.
2. Depending on the situation and investigation, additional actions might include submitting specimens to appropriate laboratories for analysis, archiving specimens for possible future use (e.g., facilitate identification, conduct research), disposing of specimens when no longer needed, returning property to family, and sending property to police.
3. This would typically include notifying next of kin of final cause of death and other relevant findings.
4. In some cases, signing the death certificate requires that a pending certificate be completed and filed and then amended (updated) at a later time.
5. This includes notifying government agencies and officials, as appropriate, of the cause of death and other relevant findings from the investigation. Examples include reports to child fatality reviews conducted by the State, consumer product-related deaths to Consumer Product Safety Commission, and occupational fatalities to OSHA.
6. In some cases a body cannot be identified even after exhaustive investigation. In such cases and given that there is limited body storage space in morgues, an unidentified body may need to be disposed of. In these causes, adequate information and specimens (e.g., photographs, dental radiographs, DNA samples) should be taken and stored for possible future efforts to identify the decedent. Prior to burial, the results of DNA analysis should be completed and useable (i.e., a profile was developed). Disposal of the body should be through burial, rather than cremation, should the body ever require exhumation for further examination.

**SWGMDI Guidelines and Standards applicable to steps in medico legal death investigation**

<b><u>Step in Death Investigation</u></b>	<b><u>SWGMDI Document</u></b>
Death reported to Medical Examiner or Coroner	PRC-4; NK-2
Is scene visit needed?	DSI-x
Visit scene(s)	DSI-y
Accept jurisdiction?	AUT-3
Obtain records and specimens from hospital or agencies	-
Bring body to morgue for exam?	AUT-3
Perform autopsy?	PRC-12
Conduct autopsy	AUT-3
Perform external exam	-
Notify next of kin of findings	NK-2