

7 FAM 230

DEATHS OF NON-NATURAL CAUSES – HOMICIDE, SUICIDE, ACCIDENTAL DEATH

(CT:CON-153; 01-11-2007)
(Office of Origin: CA/OCS/PRI)

7 FAM 231 SUMMARY

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- a. This subchapter discusses deaths from non-natural causes, in particular homicide, suicide and accidental death. 7 FAM 220 provides guidance about the difficult consular responsibility of notifying families of the deaths of loved ones abroad. Consular officers should also review 7 FAM 200 Appendix B for guidance about grief and bereavement and 7 FAM 1800 Appendix A for guidance about managing stress and consular crisis work.
- b. Any unexpected death is tragic, but when the death is the result of non-natural causes the wound to families is exponentially greater.
- c. If the death is the result of homicide, suicide or accidental death, the host country is responsible for the investigation of the death. There may also be a role for U.S. law enforcement, particularly in deaths involving acts of terrorism or transportation safety. (See 7 FAM 1800). Consular sections will coordinate with the Regional Security Officer (RSO), the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) Legal Attaché and other U.S. law enforcement representatives. CA/OCS Crime Victim Assistance Specialists will coordinate with the U.S. Department of Justice Office for Victims of Crime and the FBI. (See 7 FAM 1900).
- d. Section 204(c) of Public Law 107-228, the Foreign Relations Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2003 (22 U.S.C. 2729), mandates that, to the maximum extent practicable, the Department of State collect and make available on the Department's Bureau of Consular Affairs Internet web site certain information with respect to each U. S. citizen who dies in a foreign country from a non-natural cause. The information required is:
 - (1) The date of death;
 - (2) The locality where the death occurred; and
 - (3) The cause of death, including, if the death resulted from an act of

terrorism, a statement disclosing that fact. The information on the web site must be listed on a country-by-country basis, and must cover deaths occurring since the date of enactment of the legislation on September 30, 2002, or occurring during the preceding three calendar years, whichever period is shorter. The information is updated every six months.

- e. The post should keep the Department informed of all significant developments in the police investigation and judicial actions involving the murder or suspected murder. In addition, keep the next of kin (NOK) informed of developments as much as possible. If the consular officer believes certain information should not be divulged to the NOK because it would compromise a sensitive source, the post should seek Department guidance.
- f. Relay requests from local law enforcement authorities for assistance from U.S. law enforcement authorities through appropriate legal attache channels, if available at post, or through the Department (CA/OCS). If the post has reason to believe that local authorities are not pursuing the investigation as vigorously as possible and/or are covering up evidence, seek guidance from the Department.
- g. If the post believes it must take a more active role in the case, such as suggesting leads for the police to follow, request Department guidance before taking such action.

See: The Deaths by Non Natural Causes report on the CA Internet page

7 FAM 232 LESSONS LEARNED REGARDING HOMICIDE CASES

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- a. The murder of a U.S. citizen abroad may come within the jurisdiction of the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI). 7 FAM 1820 provides guidance regarding the role of the FBI in the event of the death of a hostage or kidnap victim and special provisions regarding disposition of remains. The consular section would work closely with the RSO and FBI Legal Attaché in such cases.

See: FBI Information for Families About Autopsies

- b. **CA/OCS Crime Victim Assistance Program Materials:** In addition to 7 FAM 1900, the CA/OCS Crime Victim Assistance Resource Notebook include the following materials about homicide:

- Guidelines for Victim Assistance in Homicide Cases
- Homicide Background
- Homicide Case Referrals

- c. **Support Organizations for Families:** You should be aware of support organizations for families in Homicide Cases:
- (1) U.S. Department of Justice, Office for Victims of Crime, Homicide – Survivors and Co-Victims;
 - (2) Compassionate Friends;
 - (3) Parents of Murdered Children;
 - (4) AARP Grief and Loss (American Association of Retired Persons); and
 - (5) AARP Ways Parents Can Cope.

7 FAM 233 LESSONS LEARNED REGARDING SUICIDE CASES

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- a. Death notification in an apparent suicide case is extremely difficult.
- b. In notifying a family of the death of a loved one in circumstances which suggest it may have been a suicide, you should describe the circumstances of the death, rather than using the word suicide. A finding of suicide is usually made by a medical or legal authority in the foreign country.
- c. Shock and denial are common emotions experienced by friends and family of a suicide victim. Often this manifests into insisting that the death was an accident, despite all evidence to the contrary.
- d. Family and friends may become angry, feeling that someone should have seen warning signs and prevented the suicide. They may be angry with their loved one for killing himself or herself and causing such sorrow. If the loved one's emotional turmoil had made him or her difficult to handle, family and friends may be struggling with guilt over the relief of not having to deal with that stress any more. All of these are normal reactions, especially for parents and spouses.
- e. It is not unusual for family members to question the conclusions of local law enforcement and medical examiners and to take out their grief, frustration and anger on the consular officer. Do not take such reactions personally. You will need all your compassion, communication skills and listening skills to help these families. See the suicide feature on the OCS Intranet where you will find additional reading material on this subject.

(See 7 FAM 348 Attempted Or Threatened Suicide, the Stages of the Grieving Process, and 7 FAM 1800 Appendix A Managing Stress and the Consular Crisis Worker).

- f If posts notice trends in suicide of particular categories of citizens, such as students, the elderly, etc. in the consular district, bring these to the attention of CA/OCS, the regional medical officer, etc. to discuss outreach strategies. We have added sections to consular information sheets (CIS) dealing with isolation and outreach and host country resources when appropriate. (See the CIS for Japan).
- g. **Suicide Survivors Support Organizations:** You should be aware that there are a variety of private organizations offering support to surviving family members of suicide victims. Do not offer such referrals in your initial conversations with NOK. Over time, should families ask if there is such a support mechanism, provide the information. If the NOK is in the host country and expresses a desire for spiritual support, you may direct them to local religious organizations. 7 FAM 270 provides guidance on the disposition of remains report which includes a suggestion for links to such local resources. If the NOK is in the host country and there are local support organizations for family members of suicide victims, you may also wish to make that information available to the family at an appropriate time, if the family asks you for further support.

Note: It is important not to presume to impose such referrals on families and to respect their privacy and grieving process.

Suicide Resources:...

Survivors of Suicide Materials

Survivors of Suicide (SOS)

Compassionate Friends

Surviving Your Child's Suicide

What Causes Someone to Commit Suicide and What You Can Do About It

National Funeral Directors Association – Coming to Terms With Suicide

Reference Material

CDC Suicide Fact Sheet

Suicide and Mental Health Association International

National Institute of Mental Health (NIMH) Publications

NIMH Suicide Prevention

NIMH In Harms Way Suicide in America

NIMH Research on Suicide Survivors

Suicide Prevention

National Suicide Prevention Lifeline

National Suicide Prevention Initiative

American Foundation for Suicide Prevention – International Strategies

Canadian Centre for Suicide Prevention

International Association for Suicide Prevention

Suicide Vulnerable Age Groups

National Mental Health Association Teen Suicide

NIMH Older Adults: Depression and Suicide

7 FAM 234 LESSONS LEARNED REGARDING ACCIDENTAL DEATHS

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- a. Posts are familiar with the Consular Affairs Road Safety Information Program. Every consular information sheet includes this material. In addition, CA has a section of travel.state.gov devoted to road safety. Families of victims of road accidents abroad have been very helpful in suggesting improvements to our road safety program and have established foundations to try to achieve something positive from the tragic death of loved ones in such accidents.
- b. The consular information sheets also include information about other safety concerns including crime and safety standards as appropriate.
- c. Deaths from other accidental causes have also resulted in changes to consular information sheets. For example, the general safety section of the consular information sheet for Mexico, includes falls from balconies, drowning deaths in hotel pools, and other tragic incidents.
- d. The Deaths by Non Natural Causes report on the CA Internet page includes incidents of accidental death.
- e. CA also issues periodic announcements primarily focusing on student travel abroad and women traveling alone which emphasize safety concerns.

See:

- Media Note International Travel Safety Information for Students

- International Travel Safety Information for Students
- Travel Tips for Students
- Tips for Women Traveling Alone
- Travel Tips for Older Americans

f. Other Reference Sources:

See:

- Journal of Travel Medicine, Death and Dying Abroad the Canadian Experience

g. Private Organizations and resources about accidental death.

See:...

- ASIRT – Association for Safe International Road Travel
- MADD - Mother’s Against Drunk Driving

7 FAM 235 LESSONS LEARNED ABOUT WORKING WITH SURVIVING MINOR CHILDREN

(CT:CON-153; 01-11-2007)

- a. We have some experience with death cases in which minor children are left alone in a foreign country following the unexpected death of a parent or parents. 7 FAM 1760 and 1770 provide general guidance regarding working with unaccompanied minors. 7 FAM 300 provides guidance regarding repatriation.
- b. You should also review the following reference materials:
 - (1) U.S. Department of State, Office of Medical Services, Stress and Disaster Response;
 - (2) DOS Human Resources – Children’s Reaction to Trauma;
 - (3) U.S. Department of Justice (DOJ), Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Programs (OJJDP) and, Working with Grieving Children After Violent Death;
 - (4) **Royal College of Psychiatrists;**
 - (a) Traumatic Stress in Children; and
 - (b) Death in the Family – Helping Children to Cope

- (5) National Child Traumatic Stress Network; and
- (6) National Association of School Psychiatrists – Helping Children Cope with Loss, Death and Grief.

7 FAM 236 THROUGH 239 UNASSIGNED