

MASS FATALITY OPERATIONAL RESPONSE PLAN

Section 5: Identification

2021



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5 Identification Center

The ultimate goal of any mass fatality response is the identification and reunification of the deceased with their surviving family members. In addition to post-mortem data input into the VIP database and the maintenance of all post-mortem electronic and hard copy files, the Identification Center is responsible for comparing all ante-mortem and post-mortem data to achieve positive identifications of the deceased.

The State of Louisiana ESF-8 LDH is responsible for confirming all positive identifications. The public, coupled with increased political pressure, may contribute to a demand that identifications be made faster than forensic science will allow. Despite public pressure, whenever possible, only scientifically sound, positive identifications based on forensic science shall be acceptable. Under no circumstances shall the State of Louisiana ESF-8 LDH allow compromises in the due to external pressure.

5.1 Identification of Human Remains

5.1.1 *Identification Standards and Guidelines*

Whenever possible, the State of Louisiana ESF-8 LDH shall follow the applicable parts of the following guidelines and standards:

- FBI's Scientific Working Group on Disaster Victim Identification (SWGDIV)
- Recommendations Regarding the Role of Forensic Genetics for Disaster Victim Identification (DVI), DNA Commission of the International Society for Forensic Genetics (ISFG), 2007
- Disaster Victim Identification Guide. Interpol, 2009.
- Missing People, DNA Analysis and Identification of Human Remains: A Guide to Best Practices in Armed Conflicts and Other Situations of Armed violence, International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), 2009
- Guidelines for Mass Fatality DNA Identification Operations, AABB, 2010

While each of these publications outlines varying approaches with varying levels of detail, and may not be applicable to every project, they can serve as good references.



Once identification standards are defined by the State of Louisiana ESF-8 LDH, they should apply to all identifications. The identification procedures shall be robust and shall withstand a court challenge.

5.1.2 *Categories of Identifications*

The following are three categories of identification that the State of Louisiana ESF-8 LDH may use throughout the identification effort:

Tentative (this term should only be used internally)

- Based upon non-scientific, non-forensic information.
- Designation assigned by investigators (starting point of ID process).
- Helps to initially eliminate some of the options of who the deceased might be. There may be multiple tentative identifications for the same individual.

Presumptive (this term should be used internally)

- Based upon a large amount of compelling non-scientific, non-forensic positive comparative information.

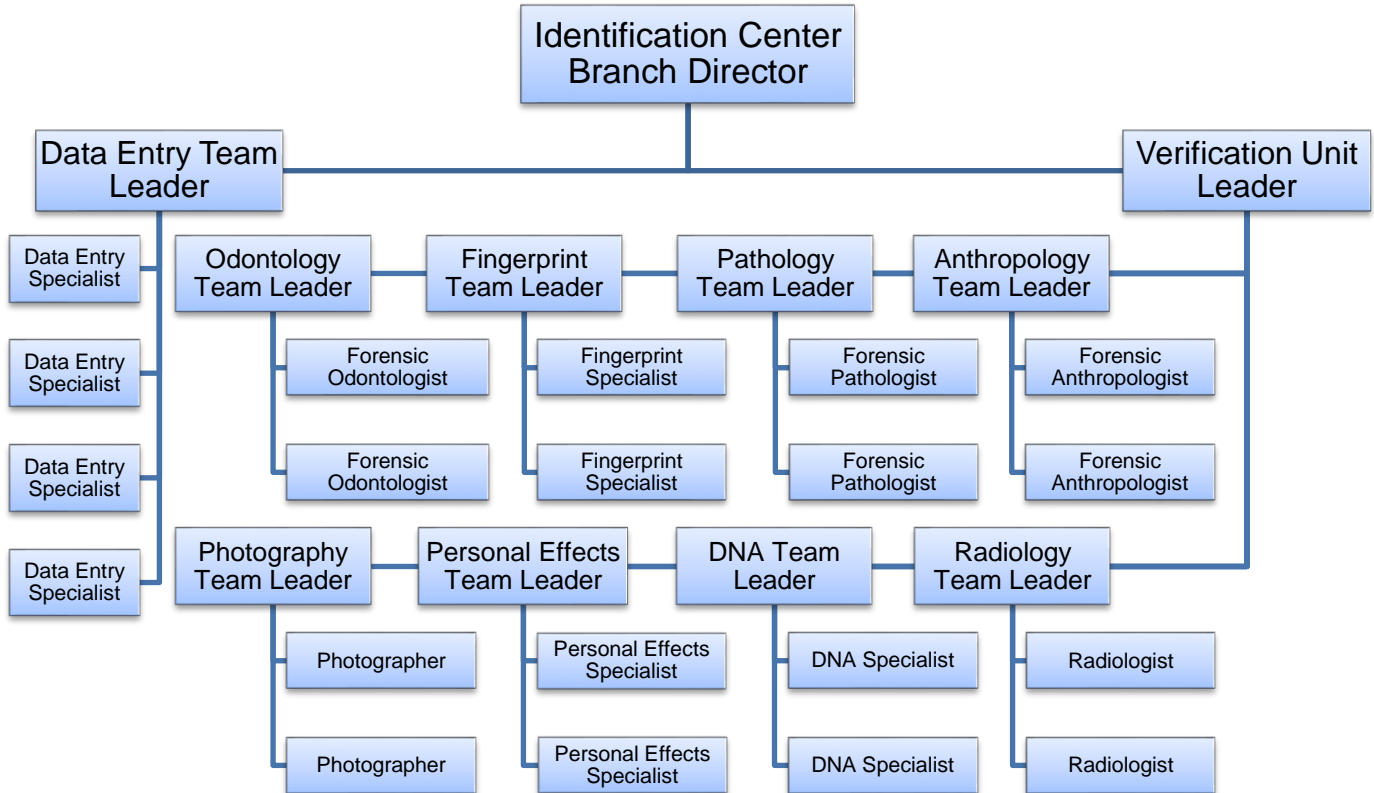
Positive Identification (Reported)

- Based upon scientific and forensic-based data from fingerprints, dental, DNA and pathology (medical implants with recorded serial numbers).

The State of Louisiana ESF-8 LDH should only release bodies once positive identifications have been made. Identifications using physical characteristics (e.g., ears, scars, moles, tattoos, dental art, etc.) should be an identification method of last resort and only used solely at the discretion of the State of Louisiana ESF-8 LDH.

5.2 Incident Command Structure

Working within the NIMS command structure, the Identification Center Branch will report directly to the Operations Section Chief. Clear and effective lines of communication must be maintained for the timely identification of the deceased and reunification with surviving family members. The Identification Center Branch Director will oversee the Data Management Team Leader and the Verification Unit Leader. **NOTE:** *In incidents resulting in fewer than 300 deaths, there may not be the need for a Verification Unit Leader as the Identification Center Branch Director can assume verification responsibilities.*



5.2.1 Identification Director

The Identification Director is responsible for all activities related to Identification Branch Operations. He or she is responsible for coordinating the assembly of data indicating a positive identification. The Identification Director will present relevant data to the State of Louisiana ESF-8 LDH for final verification and will complete a Report of Positive Identification form (see [Attachment B](#) for example form).

The Identification Director should meet with the Verification Unit Leader and Forensic Team Leaders daily to consider cases that appear to meet the criteria for positive identification.

In a daily meeting with the State of Louisiana ESF-8 LDH, the Identification Branch Director, along with Verification Unit Leader (and Forensic Team Leaders as needed), should present all cases that have sufficient forensic evidence to make a positive identification.



Additional Identification Center Branch Director duties include:

- Supporting the Data Management Team Leader and ensuring he or she has all equipment and supplies needed for the proper storage and maintenance of all data.
- Supporting the Verification Unit Leader and ensuring he or she has all equipment and supplies necessary to support the activities of the Verification Unit.
- Coordinating with all Forensic Unit Team Leaders to ensure representation from each Unit is present on the Identification Team.
- Working directly with the Morgue Branch Director to address any issues or needs that may arise, thus ensuring smooth and effective operations in the Identification Center Branch.
- Supplying the Morgue Branch Director Operations Section Chief, State of Louisiana ESF-8 LDH, and the PIO with the ongoing status of the Identification process.

5.3 Operational Tasks and Personnel

The specifics of the identification process will vary from incident to incident depending on the size of the response, agencies, organizations (other than the State of Louisiana ESF-8 LDH's Office) involved in the response, and the incident command structure established in the Morgue.

5.3.1 *Data Management*

The Data Management Team is responsible for inputting post-mortem data collected at the morgue into the VIP database, as well as the ongoing maintenance of all post-mortem electronic and hard copy files. Additionally, the Data Management Team is responsible for checking hard copy files in and out of the Data Management Unit.

5.3.1.1 *Data Management Team Leader*

The Data Management Team Leader is responsible for all Data Management Team activities, including:

- Input of all post-mortem data collected at the Morgue
- Ensure creation of hard copy ante-mortem files from the VIP database
- Ensure creation of hard copy post-mortem files from the VIP database
- Maintenance of all electronic and hard copy files
- Security of all electronic and hard copy files
- Ensure sufficient staffing of the Data Management Unit



- Ensure proper conduction of routine auditing of post-mortem files for quality control
- Ensuring proper close out of all ante- and post-mortem files after positive identification has been made and the remains have been released to a funeral establishment

5.3.1.2 Data Entry Specialists

Data Entry Personnel will enter all post-mortem data collected at the Morgue into the VIP database. Data Entry Personnel are also responsible for:

- Creating hard copy files of ante-mortem files from the VIP database.
- Creating hard copy files of post-mortem files from the VIP database.
- Proper numeric filing of all ante- and post-mortem files.
- Maintaining electronic and hard copy ante and post-mortem files in the Morgue.
- Performing routine auditing of post-mortem files in the Morgue to ensure consistency between the electronic and hard copy files.
- Checking hard copy files in and out of the Data Management Unit.
- Closing out files once remains have been positively identified and released from the Morgue.

5.3.2 Verification

The Verification Unit is responsible for analysis of all ante- and post-mortem data. A Verification Unit Team is comprised of the Identification Center Director, Verification Unit Leader, and Forensic Team Leaders. As remains are processed through the Morgue and post-mortem data is collected, there will be an ongoing process of comparing the post-mortem data with ante-mortem data collected at the Family Assistance Center. This ante-mortem and post-mortem data will be stored in the VIP database and printed out in hard copy at the Morgue for comparison purposes.

The Verification Unit, with possible support from the Identification Center Director and the State of Louisiana ESF-8 LDH, will conduct the ongoing comparison process.

Once the Verification Unit has determined a potential positive identification, the Verification Unit Leader, or designee, will cross match ante-mortem and post-mortem data to check for conflicting indicators or significant differences. See [Attachment A](#) for a comparison worksheet template. If there are no conflicting indicators, a Report of Positive Identification form will be completed and



submitted to the State of Louisiana ESF-8 LDH for concurrence and verification. See [Attachment B](#) for an example report template.

Once presented with the Report of Positive Identification and forensic findings, the State of Louisiana ESF-8 LDH, or designee, will either verify the positive identification and sign off on the Report of Positive Identification or return the file to the Verification Unit Leader for further investigation. If verified by the State of Louisiana ESF-8 LDH, the Verification Unit Leader, or designee, will change the status of the case in the VIP database to “Positive Identification”.

5.3.2.1 Verification Unit Leader

The Verification Unit Leader oversees all activities related to the Verification Unit and reports directly to the Identification Center Branch Director. Working with the Forensic Team Leaders, the Verification Unit Leader will assemble all related files for a potential positive identification and review collected files prior to consideration by the Verification Unit Team. As needed, he or she will work with the FAC in obtaining additional ante-mortem information.

5.3.2.2 Verification Team Leaders

The Verification Team is comprised of the Verification Unit Leader and the Team Leaders, or designees, from all forensic areas of Morgue Operations. These forensic areas are:

- Odontology
- Pathology
- Anthropology
- Fingerprint
- Radiology
- DNA
- Photography
- Personnel Effects

The Verification Unit Team will initiate the preliminary ante-mortem and post-mortem data comparison based on a variety of possible match points (e.g., scars, tattoos, surgical procedures, unique clothing or other personal effects).



This team will analyze the post-mortem and ante-mortem data carefully and thoroughly in hopes of finding possible matches in data that will lead to a positive identification of the deceased.

The Verification Unit will meet with the Identification Center Branch Director at least once daily (more often if necessary) to consider possible positive identifications.

5.4 Notification of Death

If the State of Louisiana ESF-8 LDH is making notifications of death to surviving family members, then the State of Louisiana ESF-8 LDH will transmit the Report of Positive Identification form to the designated persons(s) in the State of Louisiana ESF-8 LDH's Office. Once the family has been notified of the positive identification, the State of Louisiana ESF-8 LDH's Office will forward the Report of Positive Identification form to the Family Assistance Center's Family Affairs unit.

If the Family Affairs Unit at the Family Assistance Center is making notifications of death to surviving family members, then the State of Louisiana ESF-8 LDH will transmit the Report of Positive identification form to the Family Affairs Unit.

5.4.1 *Death Certificates*

If the Morgue will be generating the Death Certificate, the Death Certificate will be based on ante-mortem found in VIP and will be signed by the State of Louisiana ESF-8 LDH or designee.

If the Death Certificate will be generated by the State of Louisiana ESF-8 LDH's Office, then once the Report of Positive Identification form has been transmitted to the State of Louisiana ESF-8 LDH's Office, normal daily procedures for producing death certificates will follow.



Sample Forms and Documents

- Attachment A: Ante-mortem – Post-Mortem Comparison
- Attachment B: Example Report of Positive Identification



Identification: Attachment A

ANTE-MORTEM – POST-MORTEM COMPARISON

Ante-mortem – Post-mortem Comparisons by _____ on _____

Feature	Ante-mortem Record #	Post-mortem Record #	Consistent?
Sex			
Age			
Race			
Height			
Build			
Complexion			
Earlobes – attached or unattached			
Hair Length & Color			
Facial Hair			
Fingernails			
Toenails			
Dentition			
Prosthetics/Objects in Body			
Scars, Marks, Deformities			
Surgeries			
Tattoos			
Body Piercing			
Body Modification			
Fingerprints			
Clothing			
Eyes/Opticals (glasses, contacts, implants, glass eye, missing eye, etc.)			
Residence/Recovery Location			
Conditions of Remains – consistent with information on circumstances of last known sight of missing person?			
DNA Results			



Other			
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Identification: Attachment B

EXAMPLE REPORT OF POSITIVE IDENTIFICATION

**Orleans Parish Coroner's Office
Report of Positive Identification**

Coroner's Case Number **Field Number**

Identified As: _____

First Name Middle Name Last Name Jr./Sr.

Date of Birth Social Security Number Ante-mortem Record #

Method of Identification

- Fingerprint
- Dental
- DNA
 - Positive ID _____ Consistent _____ No Inconsistencies _____
 - _____ %
- Pathology Findings
 - Description: _____
 - _____
- Personal Effects
 - Description: _____
 - _____
- Field Scene Information
 - Description: _____
 - _____
- Other:
 - Description: _____
 - _____
 - _____

Coroner's Office: _____

Signature Date



Name Printed