

OSAC REVIEW SPRING 2025 (OSAC = Organization of Scientific Area Committees)

NAME OSAC UPDATE #12: OSAC 2022-N-0020

Standard for Mass Fatality Incident Management

This standard was put forth by the Disaster Victim Identification Task Group within the Medicolegal Death Investigation Subcommittee of OSAC. It originated from the Scientific Working Group on Disaster Victim Identification (SWGDIV). It has been submitted to a standards development organization, and may change as it undergoes revisions in that consensus based process.

*This is a brief summary of OSAC 2022-N-0020, and as such may leave out or misinterpret important details. **See link to full document (below).***

Value: Useful as an outline when developing a mass fatality plan, or as a checklist when reviewing an existing plan.

Foreword:

This standard is intended to be the overarching standard in the Medicolegal Death Investigation Subcommittee's series of standards and best practices regarding mass fatality events. (The other documents are focused on scene response, data management, identification of decedents, and requirements for other professionals that partner in mass fatality response such as forensic odontologists.)

SCOPE: Lists the procedures and protocols that a medicolegal authority should have to successfully manage a mass fatality incident, but does not provide specific content.

REQUIREMENTS IN ESTABLISHING AN ORGANIZATIONAL RESPONSE FRAMEWORK:

- The medicolegal authority shall develop a locally applicable definition of a mass fatality incident which serves as a trigger.
- **Operational Objectives** include 13 specific objectives such as:
 - Creating a system for documentation and resource accounting

- Documenting and preserving all remains, personal effects, and evidence
- Certifying cause and manner of death
- **Policy Decisions and Considerations (prior to beginning response)** A 3-page list of decision points, with examples listed here:
 - **Scene operations**—asserting jurisdiction, site ingress and egress, body collection points and transportation, safety concerns
 - **Disaster morgue operations**—location and workflow, processing protocols for fragmented remains, numbering system
 - **Family engagement/victim information**—Briefings and outreach, antemortem data collection
 - **Victim accounting**—development of a centralized reporting process, developing a manifest of unaccounted for persons
 - **Disaster victim identification**
 - **Storage of remains and personal effects**—development of a transportation plan for movement of remains and personal effects; procedure for preservation, chain of custody, storage and release of effects
 - **Communication with families and release of remains and personal effects**—need to be transparent about condition of remains; development of a final disposition strategy for unclaimed and grouped remains
 - **Logistics support for all operations**—identify equipment, supplies, and personnel needs; determine security requirements for scene, morgue, family center
 - **Quality assurance**—Inventory remains at regular intervals; ensure the personnel are qualified and have adequate training
 - **Demobilizing operations**—personnel should be debriefed, preparation of after-action report

Annex A lists 5 foundation principles including: the need to make identifications using scientific modalities; reasonable efforts should be made

to account for all persons deceased or unaccounted for; the medicolegal authority is responsible for determining cause and manner of death.

Full Document:

<https://www.nist.gov/document/osac-2022-n-0020-standard-mass-fatality-incident-management>