

Identification of Unknown Deceased

Identification of an unknown deceased victim is of utmost importance and must be vigorously pursued until every investigative lead has been exhausted. Much information can be obtained by a detailed examination of the body, clothing on the body and personal effects found in clothing pockets or at the scene. Caution should be used, however, in attempting positive identifications from clothing and personal effects alone since it is possible an unknown body may be clothed in the garments and personal effects of another.

Identification Procedure

The condition of a body when recovered is a limiting factor in identification; however, a thorough examination may reveal information which initially would appear to be impossible to obtain.

The positive identification of a deceased victim should not be construed to be the duty of the Forensic Scientist or investigating officer, but rather a joint effort of all persons concerned. Few of the following listed “investigative leads” are, in themselves, a basis for positive identification. But several together, supported by a thorough investigation, may be sufficient basis upon which to establish a possible or probable identification.

The following checklist will provide investigative leads which, if properly pursued, may lead to a positive identification.

Visual external examination of body

- A.** Fingerprints, palm prints and footprints
- B.** Complete physical description to include:
 1. Sex
 2. Age
 3. Weight
 4. Height
 5. Build
 6. Color of eyes (Glass eye)

7. Race
8. Skin:
 - a. Complexion
 - b. Tattoos
 - c. Warts, moles, birthmarks
 - d. Skin disease
 - e. Scars – injury or surgical
 - f. Needle punctures (narcotic addicts or diabetics)
 - g. Ring mark on finger (ring missing)



Fig. 26-1
*Photograph of a tattoo
on a homicide victim*

9. Hair:
 - a. Color
 - b. Length and how combed
 - c. Straight, wavy and amount
 - d. Natural, wig or toupee
 - e. Beard, mustache, type
10. Teeth:
 - a. Natural or false
 - b. Appearance (shape, stains)
 - c. Dental work (fillings, missing teeth, bridgework)
11. Fingernails:
 - a. Long, short, chewed or broken
 - b. Manicured, fingernail polish

- c. Discolored due to occupation
 - d. Artificial nails
12. Amputations and deformities

Examination of clothing

- A. Description and size of all garments
- B. Manufacturer, store, tailor labels
- C. Laundry markings (some can be seen by use of ultra-violet light)
- D. Laundry tags left on clothing
- E. Monograms
- F. Repair of tears and holes
- G. Belt buckles
- H. Buttons (missing, broken, special type)
- I. Trace material which may indicate occupation

Identification photographs

Include frontal and side views of the victim's head and any scars, tattoos, jewelry or other visible identifying characteristics or objects

Review of missing person reports

Viewing of body by family or acquaintances of missing person(s)

Internal examination of the body

- A. X-ray examination. A body which is unidentifiable by external means should be subjected to a complete x-ray examination in order to determine the presence of:
 - 1. Foreign bodies:
 - a. Pieces of shrapnel
 - b. Fired bullets
 - c. Prosthetic devices (metal skull plate, metal pins in bone, etc.)
 - 2. Mended bone fractures
 - 3. Other abnormalities which may aid in identification
- B. Body organs missing as a result of surgery
- C. Improper location of body organs
- D. Evidence of a present or prior illness:
 - 1. Heart disease
 - 2. Ulcers
 - 3. Arteriosclerosis

4. Pathological changes due to age, occupation or geographical residence
5. Stomach contents

Personal effects

- A.** Driver's license
- B.** Credit cards
- C.** Social Security card
- D.** Identification card
- E.** Identification tag
- F.** Photographs:
 1. Self
 2. Family
 3. Acquaintances
 4. Locations
 5. Names and other writing on photographs
- G.** Letter or other notes
- H.** Company checks or check stubs
- I.** Paid and due invoices
- J.** Rings:
 1. Wedding rings
 2. Class rings
 3. Organization rings
 4. Initials
- K.** Cigarette case and lighter
- L.** Car and house keys
- M.** Key rings: initials or other personalization, registration number for lost key return service
- N.** Monogrammed wallet
- O.** Watch:
 1. Engravings
 2. Jeweler repair marks
- P.** Corrective lenses:
 1. Contact lenses
 2. Prescription
- Q.** Hearing aids

Additional Techniques

- A. X-ray examination of teeth (see Chapter 27, Dental Identification of Human Remains).
- B. X-ray of skull superimposed over negative or print of photograph of victim's head.
- C. DNA profiles from the body may be matched to DNA collected from personal effects of missing persons or searched against national data bases.
- D. Blood type and factor: the type may be rare and the victim a donor whose name may be on file at hospital or blood bank. ABO and Rh typing is no longer performed at the Crime Laboratory. If required, a private or clinical laboratory should be contacted.
- E. Facial reconstruction.

National Crime Information Center (NCIC)

Information regarding the unknown deceased including physical description, fingerprints, medical information, and internal and dental characteristics should be entered as soon as possible by the investigating agency into the NCIC Unidentified Person database. The Data Collection Entry Guide for input of this information is available from the FBI at leo.gov. If you have any questions regarding completion of this form, contact the FBI's Criminal Justice Information Services (CJIS) Division at (304) 625-3000.

