

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 a 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.

A. Visual external Examination of Body

1. Fingerprints, palm prints and footprints
2. Complete physical description to include:

- a. Sex
- b. Age
- c. Weight
- d. Height
- e. Build
- f. Color of eyes (Glass eye)
- g. Race
- h. Skin:
 - (1) Complexion
 - (2) Tattoos
 - (3) Piercings
 - (3) Warts, moles, birthmarks
 - (4) Skin disease
 - (5) Scars—injury or surgical
 - (6) Needle punctures (narcotic addicts or diabetics)
 - (7) Ring mark on finger (ring missing)
- i. Hair:
 - (1) Color
 - (2) Length and how combed
 - (3) Straight, wavy and amount
 - (4) Natural, wig or toupee
 - (5) Beard, mustache, type
- j. Teeth:
 - (1) Natural or false
 - (2) Appearance (shape, stains)
 - (3) Dental work (fillings, missing teeth, bridgework)
- k. Fingernails:
 - (1) Long, short, chewed or broken
 - (2) Manicured, fingernail polish
 - (3) Discolored due to occupation
 - (4) Artificial nails
- l. Amputations and deformities

B. Examination of Clothing

1. Description and size of all garments
2. Manufacturer, store, tailor labels
3. Laundry markings (some can be seen by use of ultra-violet light)

4. Laundry tags left on clothing
5. Monograms
6. Repair or presence of tears and holes
7. Belt buckles
8. Buttons (missing, broken, special type)
9. Visible stains
10. Trace material which may indicate occupation

C. Identification Photographs

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



Fig. 28-1 Photograph of a tattoo on a homicide victim

D. Review of missing person reports

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

E. Internal Examination of the Body

1. X-ray examination and/or body scanning. A body which is unidentifiable by external means should be subjected to a complete x-ray examination and or body scan in order

to determine the presence of:

- a. Foreign bodies such as pieces of shrapnel, fired bullets, etc.
 - b. Body Implants such as prosthetics (metal skull plate, bone screws and nails, breast implants, etc.), medical monitoring devices, etc.
 - c. Mended bone fractures
 - d. Other abnormalities which may aid in identification
2. Body organs missing as a result of surgery
 3. Improper location of body organs
 4. Evidence of a present or prior illness:
 - a. Heart disease
 - b. Ulcers
 - c. Arteriosclerosis
 - d. Pathological changes due to age, occupation or geographical residence
 - e. Stomach contents

F. Personal Effects

1. Driver's license
2. Credit cards
3. Social Security card
4. Identification card
5. Identification tag
6. Photographs:
 - a. Self
 - b. Family
 - c. Acquaintances
 - d. Locations
 - e. Names and other writing on photographs
7. Letter or other notes
8. Company checks or check stubs
9. Paid and due invoices
10. Rings:
 - a. Wedding rings
 - b. Class rings
 - c. Organization rings
 - d. Initials

11. Cigarette case and lighter
12. Car and house keys
13. Key rings: initials or other personalization, registration number for lost key return service
14. Monogrammed wallet
15. Watch:
 - a. Engravings
 - b. Jeweler repair marks
16. Corrective lenses:
 - a. Contact lenses
 - b. Prescription
17. Hearing aids

G. Additional Techniques

1. X-ray examination of teeth (see [Chapter 29 - Dental Identification of Human Remains](#)).
2. X-ray of skull superimposed over negative or print of photograph of victim's head.
3. DNA profiles from the body may be matched to DNA collected from personal effects of missing persons or searched against national data bases.
4. 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.
5. Facial reconstruction.

Notes