Determining and Completing Death Certificates for Disaster-Related* Deaths

Scan or click the QR code to review the Vital Statistics Reporting Guidance on Disaster-related Deaths



NO

*Disasters include natural disasters, severe weather, and human-induced hazards

DEATH IS REPORTED TO THE MEDICAL EXAMINER OR CORONER

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IS THERE INFORMATION TO SUGGEST THAT THE DECEDENT EXPERIENCED ANY OF THE FOLLOWING?

NATURAL DISASTER OR SEVERE WEATHER

- Hurricane
- Tornado
- Torrential rains
- · Damaging winds
- · Snow or ice storm
- Hail

- Excessive cold or heat
- Lightning
- Avalanche or landslide
- Earthquake or tsunami
- Volcanic eruption
- Marine hazards

HUMAN-INDUCED HAZARD

- Industrial explosion or chemical release
- Chemical or biological contamination of environment
- Transportation incident
- Bombing
- · Radiation emergency

UNSAFE OR UNHEALTHY CONDITIONS AS A RESULT OF THE DISASTER

- Structural collapse
- Flying debris, falling trees
- Flooding or other high water
- · Wildfires or structural fires
- Downed power lines
- Power outage
- Carbon monoxide exposure

TIP: Use sources such as these:

- Official warnings and watches from the National Weather Service or emergency management officials
- Official alerts, such as a state of emergency notice or a FEMA declaration

DEATH IS NOT DISASTER-RELATED



DIRECT

WAS THE DEATH CAUSED BY THE DIRECT PHYSICAL FORCES OF THE DISASTER?

Examples include the following:

- Traumatic injury
- · Burn or smoke inhalation
- · Chemical or toxic exposure
- Drowning
- Electrocution
- · Hyperthermia or hypothermia
- Radiation effects
- Suffocation

TIP: Apply evidence from the death scene investigation, autopsy, and laboratory findings.



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INDIRECT

WAS THE DEATH A
CONSEQUENCE OF THE UNSAFE
OR UNHEALTHY CONDITIONS
CREATED BY THE DISASTER?

Examples include the following:

- Evacuation
- Loss or disruption of health care, utilities, or transportation
- · Preparation for disaster
- Repair or cleanup activities after the incident
- · Returning to unsafe or unhealthy environments

TIP: Consider the "but for" principle: **But for** the disaster, would the person have died when they did?

Apply evidence from the death scene investigation, autopsy, and laboratory.





RECORD TYPE AND/OR NAME OF THE DISASTER ON THE DEATH CERTIFICATE

The type (e.g., tornado) and/or name (e.g., 2023 Hawaii wildfires, 9/11) of the hazard can be put in Part I, Part II, or the Describe How Injury Occurred Field.



Determining and Completing Certificates for Disaster-Related Deaths Text Version

This flow chart demonstrates the process for considering whether a death is disaster-related and if so, how to complete the death certificate.

After a death is reported to the medical examiner or coroner, consider: is there information to suggest that the decedent experienced 1) natural disaster or severe weather (e.g., hurricane, excessive cold or heat), 2) human-induced hazard (e.g., industrial explosion, bombing), or 3) unsafe or unhealthy conditions as a result of the disaster (e.g., structural collapse, power outage). If no, the death is not disaster-related.

If yes, next consider: was the death caused by the direct physical forces of the disaster (e.g., traumatic injury, chemical or toxic exposure). If yes, record the type (e.g., tornado) and/or name (e.g., 2023 Hawaii wildfires) of the disaster on the death certificate. This can be put in Part I, Part II, or the Describe How Injury Occurred Field. Apply evidence from the death scene investigation, autopsy, and laboratory findings.

If no, consider: was the death a consequence of the unsafe or unhealthy conditions created by the disaster (e.g., evacuation, repair or cleanup activities after the event). Consider the "but for" principle: but for the disaster, would the person have died when they did?

If no, the death is not disaster-related. If yes, record the type and/or name of the disaster on the death certificate.