	COUNTY OF SACRAMENTO OFFICE OF EMERGENCY MEDICAL SERVICES	Document #	2033.07
	<u>PROGRAM DOCUMENT:</u> Determination of Death	Page:	1 of 3
		Draft Date:	09/01/92
		Effective:	06/01/07
		Revised:	03/08/07
		Review:	03/01/09

EMS Medical Director

Chief, Emergency Medical Services

I. INTENT:

To outline the procedures to be utilized in the field by SCEMS EMT-Ps and EMT-Is for the determination of death of emergency patients.

II. AUTHORITY:


- A. Health and Safety Code, Division 2.5, Ch. 4, Art. 1, §1797.220 & Ch. 5, §1798.
- B. California Code of Regulations, Title 22, Division 9, Ch. 4, Art. 2, §100147.

III. POLICY:

EMT-Is and Paramedics need not initiate nor continue cardiopulmonary resuscitation (CPR) when death has been determined, respective to the individual's scope of practice, using the steps outlined below.

A. DEFINITIONS:

1. Visual examination of the remains is the viewing of the body with sufficient proximity and lighting to assure existence of the death determining condition.
2. Physical examination is the touching of the body and exposing the area to sight as necessary to determine the existence of the condition.
3. Absence of palpable pulses is the absence of pulses after palpating for carotid pulses for at least ten (10) seconds.
4. Asystole by monitor is the attachment of leads and the running of at least six (6) second strips in two (2) different leads. Asystole is the absence of **all** cardiac electrical activity
5. Rigor Mortis - The stiffness seen in corpses. Rigor mortis begins with the muscles of mastication and progresses from the head down the body affecting legs and feet last (Tabor's). Generally manifested in one (1) - six (6) hours and maximum six (6) - twenty-four (24) hours.
6. Livor Mortis – Cutaneous, dark spot on dependent portion of a cadaver

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(Tabor's). Generally manifested within one-half (½) to two (2) hours. Reaches maximum in eight (8) - twelve (12) hours.

- B. Conditions with minimal confirming examination and assessment necessary to determine death without a physician's order.

Where more than one criteria is listed, all (elements) must be present to confirm death in the identified setting. These apply only to the initial assessment and will determine whether or not cardiopulmonary resuscitation efforts will be initiated. In all cases when determination is considered, it is assumed that there is no breathing, no pulse and no response to stimuli. If there is any doubt, initiate cardiopulmonary resuscitation. Assessment for confirming conditions shall take thirty (30) seconds or less.

EMT-I or EMT-Paramedic:

1. Decapitation
 - a. Visual examination of remains.
2. Incineration
 - a. Visual examination of remains.
3. Decomposition
 - a. Visual examination of remains.
4. Separation of brain and/or heart from the body
 - a. Visual examination of remains.
5. Rigor Mortis
 - a. Physical examination of jaw and one limb with findings of rigor.
6. Submersion greater than or equal to six (6) hours:
 - a. Visual examination of the remains.
 - b. Accurate history.

