Investigating the Causes of Death

(4.5) Four and a half Days
First 4 Days - Training from 8:00am - 4:00pm
1-hour Lunch Break from 12 noon – 1:00pm
Last Day of Training 8:00am to 12 noon
*Total of **32** In-Service Training Hours*
Instructor: Professor Don V. Haley

Course Summary: This comprehensive and interactive course will build a solid foundation in regards to the methodology and best practices for investigating the causes of deaths. The law enforcement professional will learn to differentiate between the forensic *"Cause of Death"* and the legal *"Manner of Death"*, while executing the primary rules in death investigations.

The curriculum focuses on the analysis of various death types, including traumatic injuries (*e.g., mechanisms, wound patterns, and firearm wounds*) and complex fatalities like strangulation (e.g., *manual, ligature, autoerotic*) and poisoning. Key topics include postmortem changes (e.g., *rigor, livor, and algor mortis*) and what those changes tell us.

A strong emphasis is placed on crime scene management, including safety protocols, comprehensive scene documentation, and the best practices for collecting, preserving, and packaging evidence. Students will gain proficiency in analyzing evidence and contextual data to accurately determine the manner of death (such as suicide) and reconstruct the sequence of events in complex cases like Dyadic Deaths.

The course also covers advanced investigative techniques, including the evidentiary value of 911 transcripts, the distinction between Modus Operandi, Ritual, and Signature, and the utilization of digital foot printing avenues *(e.g., social media, device data, DNA analysis, Investigative Genetic Genealogist and many more)* to generate leads and locate an individual's information and forensic footprint. We will also provide digital footprint and forensic checklists, so that no stone is left unturned.

The course concludes with the teaching of cognitive interviewing techniques for witnesses and persons of interest. We will teach the investigator critical skills and effective methods on extracting critical information from hardened suspects, while breaking down their false alibis.

Learning Objectives:

Upon completion of this course the student will be able to:

• Differentiate between the forensic definition of the Cause of Death and the legal categories of the Manner of Death

• Comprehend the critical and primary rules found in death investigations.

• Analyze and document suspect injuries to correlate physical findings with witness statements and defensive struggle patterns.

• Explain the defining physical characteristics and underlying mechanisms for the five most common types of traumatic injuries, by correctly matching detailed photographic examples of each wound type to its forensic description and mechanism of injury with high degree of accuracy.

• Summarize the key physical differences between firearm entry and exit wounds and the forensic significance of associated phenomena *(such as soot and stippling)* to determine the approximate range of fire.

• Analyze crime scene evidence and victimology data to accurately determine the manor of death in suicides.

• Apply the best practices for safely and efficiently collecting, preserving, packaging, and shipping various types of evidence.

• Execute effective crime scene management, safely applying proper safety protocols and comprehensive scene documentation.

• Evaluate the evidentiary value of a 911 call transcript to determine its relevance to a death investigation.

• Synthesize evidence and contextual data to accurately reconstruct the sequence of events and motives in a Dyadic Death investigation.

• Distinguish between the physical findings associated with manual strangulation, ligature strangulation, traumatic hanging, ligature decapitation, and suicidal hanging wounds.

• Interpret specific findings within an autopsy report to accurately diagnose death resulting from dehydration.

• Differentiate between the key scene characteristics, bindings, and safety mechanisms present in cases of Autoerotic Asphyxia from those associated with homicidal strangulation.

• Identify the physical and environmental attributes that indicate potential poisoning at a death scene.

• Explain the characteristics of postmortem changes (e.g., *livor mortis, algor mortis, and rigor mortis*).

• Differentiate cadaveric spasm from postmortem rigidity (*rigor mortis*) by accurately identifying its distinguishing characteristics.

• Identify the critical physical, environmental, and forensic observations that guide the investigation of a potential drowning death.

• Differentiate the core investigative concepts of Modus Operandi, Ritual, and Signature, while applying each to the analysis of violent crime and homicide.

• Utilize the numerous digital avenues (e.g., *social media, communication records, device data, geo-fencing, investigative genetic genealogist, fusion centers, ERAD Lead Generation Services, FOG*) available for locating an individual's forensic footprint and collecting other relevant data to death investigations.

• Utilize a provided simple checklist for death investigations in relation to online digital foot-printing, device digital foot-printing, and forensic testing.

• Understand the basics behind behavioral analysis and know how it may be utilized as an effective tool in solving violent crimes and homicides.

• Apply advanced forensic techniques, including DNA analysis, to generate leads and narrow down suspect pools in homicide investigations

• Appy effective crime scene management by utilizing proper investigation and safety protocols.

• Know the best practices for obtaining information and theme development when interviewing persons of interest, victims, and witnesses.

• Understand how and when the investigator may utilize Investigative Genetic Genealogy (IGG) in their violent crime and homicide cold cases.