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SUBJECT: Investigations of Sudden Infant Death

ISSUED BY: Fernando Solorzano

I. PURPOSE:

This Order is provided to support the officer investigating the report of a sudden infant death, to appropriately assess the incident and to investigate the death in an appropriate manner as prescribed by law.

II. DEFINITION:

Sudden Infant Death Syndrome (SIDS) is the leading cause of death among infants. SIDS is the sudden, unexplained death of an apparently healthy infant, generally occurring within one year of birth. Yearly in California there are approximately 800 deaths that are attributed to SIDS. A SIDS death affects the grieving parents and care providers in many ways. It is critical that responding officers possess the skill, knowledge, and sensitivity necessary to conduct the investigation in a manner that ensures a competent inquiry while remaining aware of the impact upon the survivors.

SIDS is not child abuse and should not be confused with infant death that results from some criminal action, or as the result of an accident.

III. POLICY:

It shall be the policy of the CSU Long Beach University Police Department to investigate all cases of reported Sudden Infant Death. These investigations shall be completed by the University Police, and will incorporate the assistance of the City of Long Beach Police Department, when necessary. This assistance will be guided by the CSU Long Beach and City of Long Beach *Memorandum of Understanding*, pursuant to California Education Code 67381.

IV. PROCEDURE:

A complete inquiry into the circumstances surrounding the sudden death of an infant is essential in order to separate incidents of natural or accidental death from criminal misconduct. A reliable conclusion can only be determined through a complete investigation and medical examination of the events leading to the sudden death of an infant.

Police officers shall attempt to do the following when responding to reports of sudden infant death.

- (a) Determine the need for emergency medical response.
 - (1) Immediately check for signs of life and obtain and/or render medical assistance.
 - (2) Coordinate the efforts of those at the scene rendering medical assistance.
 - (3) If appropriate, assist the parents or care providers in preparing to accompany the infant to the hospital. This assistance may include arranging for the immediate care of any children remaining at the scene, securing the location, etc.

- (b) Implement death scene procedures.
 - (1) Establish control of the death scene (location where the infant was first discovered), and preserving and gathering all items of evidence that may assist in the determination of the cause of death.
 - (2) Identifying and recording the names of all persons who may be involved in the incident.
 - (3) Make appropriate field notes to be later used in preparing a written report to detail the time when the infant was last seen alive through discovery of the infant's death.
 - (4) Detailed recording of the officer's observations of the immediate location where the infant was located.

- (c) Identification and Interviewing of persons at the scene. Officers should note the following before attempting any interview.
 - (1) Parents, care providers and even first responders may suffer severe emotional responses to the sudden death of an infant.
 - (2) Emotional responses vary between individuals, and cannot be predicted.
 - a. Some individuals may become violent or show outpourings of grief and shock, anger/frustration.
 - b. Some individuals may give a guilt-ridden statement such as "It's all my fault..." or "I killed my baby"
 - (3) Inform the person to be interviewed why the interview is necessary.
 - a. In cases of an apparent SIDS incident, the parents or care providers should be informed as to how the interview and the investigation will proceed.
 - (4) Avoid accusatory phrases such as "suspect", "homicide scene" and other law enforcement jargon.
 - (5) Document the results of each interview.

(d) Notifications

- (1) Make appropriate notifications to law enforcement and coroner staffs.
- (2) The watch commander shall request an investigator to the scene.
 - a. Upon arrival, the investigator should explain that to the parents that follow up contact may occur from those who will provide support and information concerning the death of an infant.
- (3) The watch commander or his/her designee shall notify the Chief and the Field Services Division Commander.

(e) Preparing a written report. The officer shall complete this report of the initial response prior to completing his/her shift.

- (1) This report will explain the area and circumstances of where the infant was discovered.
- (2) Any known medical problems or concerns the infant had.
- (3) The physical appearance and condition of the infant.
- (4) Documentation of any illnesses and/or injuries the infant had prior to this incident.
- (5) A description of the resuscitation attempts including the names of the persons who attempted the resuscitation of the infant.
- (6) All relevant witnesses.
- (7) A diagram and/or photograph(s) of the incident scene.

V. RESOURCES:

The following are supplemental resources to support the field officer in the investigation of Sudden Infant Deaths.

- (a) The California POST *Guidelines for Law Enforcement Response to the Sudden Death of an Infant*. This manual is kept in the Report Writing Room.
- (b) The Los Angeles County Department of Children and Family Services

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