

Medicolegal Collaboration with NTSB

The National Transportation Safety Board (NTSB) is an independent federal agency that investigates accidents in all modes of transportation (aviation, highway, marine, rail, hazmat, and pipeline), to determine their probable cause, examine safety issues, and develop recommendations to prevent the occurrence of similar accidents. Medicolegal death investigation authorities play a critical role in transportation accident investigations by providing essential documentation, accident data, and facilitating family communication. The primary areas for collaboration encompass the crash scene investigation, autopsies, toxicology, personal effects and evidence, as well as next of kin communications.

1. Crash Scene

- **Coordination:** Collaborate with the NTSB before victim recovery when feasible to obtain information regarding potential vehicle hazards and accident investigation priorities.
 - If there are any questions or concerns, contact the NTSB Transportation Disaster Assistance (TDA) division by calling the Response Operations Center (844-373-9922).
 - **Documentation:** Document the following before recovering victims:
 - Overall location of the victim(s) within the broader scene and the specific position of the victim(s) within or in relation to the vehicle.
 - Use/condition of restraint systems.
 - Use/condition of lifesaving equipment.
 - Any intentional or accidental manipulation of the wreckage, or vehicle controls during the recovery process.
 - **NTSB may request:**
 - Scene photographs, investigative reports, and any video evidence collected and/or supplied by witnesses.
 - If additional human remains are discovered by NTSB personnel during on-scene operations, the investigator-in-charge or appropriate representative will notify the medicolegal authority.
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2. Autopsies

- **Authority:** NTSB can order autopsies, postmortem testing, and obtain autopsy reports ([49 U.S.C. §1134\(f\)](#); [49 CFR 831.10](#)).
- **NTSB will request:**
 - Full autopsies on vehicle operators (e.g., pilots), other crew, passengers with access to controls, and other individuals whose conditions or injuries may be of interest to human performance or survival factors investigations.
 - NTSB investigators may request to attend autopsies.
 - To be notified of the results of the interrogation of any implanted medical devices found during the examination.
 - Copies of autopsy reports.

- Note: In general, the NTSB does not publicly release autopsy reports or imagery of fatally injured individuals.
 - **Religious Objections:**
 - Local laws protecting religious beliefs regarding autopsies will be observed if consistent with NTSB accident investigative needs.
 - In cases where an autopsy is not performed, the NTSB will request:
 - Collection of blood, vitreous, and urine.
 - A detailed external examination with photographs, and
 - Radiographic imaging (including CT scan, if available).
 - **NTSB will share (upon request):**
 - Passenger list/manifest, as available.
 - Electronic copies of antemortem fingerprint records, if available.
 - **Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) Autopsy Team:**
 - The FAA Autopsy Team may contact the medicolegal authority following fatal aviation accidents to confirm an autopsy will be performed and that an FAA toxicology box (Tox Box) is available for specimen collection.
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3. Toxicology

- **NTSB will request:**
 - Collection of specimens from all vehicle operators, other individuals whose actions may be relevant to the accident, and passengers/others when toxicological factors may be relevant to the investigation.
 - **FAA Civil Aerospace Medical Institute (CAMI)**¹ Forensic Sciences Laboratory performs testing for NTSB investigations in all modes of transportation.
 - An FAA **Tox Box** is used for the collection of NTSB specimens.
 - There is no cost to the medicolegal authority for this testing.
 - Please do not ship completed Tox Boxes to CAMI on Fridays, weekends, or the day before a federal holiday.
 - CAMI will share its final toxicology report with the medicolegal authority if the chain-of-custody form includes the medicolegal authority's contact information.
 - **Federal Rail Administration (FRA) regulated rail accidents:**
 - For fatally injured railroad employees, the railroad will deliver an FRA Fatality Kit. The NTSB may also request collection of additional specimens for an FAA Tox Box. Priority for specimen collection must be given to the FRA kit.
 - If the medicolegal authority conducts toxicology testing in addition to FAA's analysis, the NTSB will also request copies of those reports.
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¹ See FAA Forensic Sciences Section webpage for current specimen collection instructions and chain of custody form https://www.faa.gov/about/office_org/headquarters_offices/avs/offices/aam/aam600/aam611.

4. Personal Effects and Evidence

- **NTSB will request:**
 - Inventory of all personal effects.
 - A temporary hold on personal electronic devices (PEDs) like smartphones, cameras, or wearables as they may contain evidence.
 - Please notify the NTSB of any such device.
 - The NTSB will coordinate the transfer of PEDs from the medicolegal authority to the NTSB Recorder's Laboratory for examination. Upon completion of the investigation, the devices will be returned to their respective owners.
 - **NTSB can share** factual information with the medicolegal authority from PEDs that may be relevant to the death investigation.
 - Notification of any medications, documents/notes, or logbooks found on or with the remains.
 - Access to personal protective equipment worn by individuals fatally injured while at work.
- The medicolegal authority should inform the NTSB of any potential evidence and/or recovered aircraft parts/components. The NTSB can then determine the appropriate disposition of these items.

5. Next of Kin Communications

- **NTSB may request:**
 - Next of kin contact information to assist the Transportation Disaster Assistance division with its mandate to communicate with families (49 U.S. Code §[1136](#), §[1139](#), and §[1140](#)).
- NTSB may interview next of kin as part of the investigative process.
- Note: The NTSB will not publicly release the identities of victims or survivors of accidents. Such information may be released by local officials or the transportation company involved.

Contacts

- **NTSB**
 - Response Operations Center (24/7): 844-373-9922
- **FAA**
 - Before shipment of specimens, call 405-954-6254 or email 9-AMC-AAM600-Specimens@faa.gov to alert the laboratory of pending Tox Box shipment and to receive the FAA's FedEx account number.