



World Bank/OECS Emergency Recovery and Disaster Preparedness Project

Government of Saint Lucia

Mass Fatalities Policy and Guidelines

Document of the Saint Lucia National Emergency Management Plan

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1- Introduction.

The present document establishes the policies and guidelines for the adequate management of dead bodies after a disaster. It intends that the management of dead bodies is done as close as possible as in 'peace time' and always with respect to the relatives of the dead and their customs. This document is the result of the revision of the NEMAC of the previous version of this policy. On that occasion, December 17th, 2002, the NEMAC resolved to totally reduce the previous document and produce a "three-paged document". This is the result of the reduction of the initial comprehensive draft.

2.- Objectives.

To establish policies and guidelines in Saint Lucia for the adequate management of dead bodies after a disaster.

To assign responsibilities to the different organisations involved in disaster management and in the collection, storage, transportation, identification, delivery to the next of kin and proper burial of the dead after disasters.

To establish policies and guidelines that ensure a proper burial of the dead, that respect the right of the dead to be buried, and the right of the living to receive the bodies of their deceased relatives so as to give them an adequate burial according to their customs and religious beliefs.

To establish policies and guidelines for the proper management and burial of the dead in disasters that avoid myths that have been proved wrong and that are based on false assumptions.

To establish policies and guidelines for the management and burial of the dead that completely, and once and for all eliminate the false assumptions that mass burials are needed, and that epidemics are occasioned by dead bodies.

To initiate an awareness campaign through the media to disseminate these guidelines in order to eliminate once and for all the existing myths concerning dead bodies that are currently believed by disaster management organisations, private and social organisations, donors, the media and the population.

3.- Dead Bodies' Management Capacity in Saint Lucia.

3.1.- Refrigeration Capacity.

Normally the dead are kept in refrigeration in the hospitals and/or the funeral homes; the capacity is the following:

1. Hospital morgue: 9
2. Funeral Homes: 56-60

So the total normal capacity is for 65-69 dead bodies.

In the case of an emergency they all mentioned that this capacity could be doubled; that is, we would have a capacity for a 130-138 dead bodies refrigerated. Let us say 130.

3.2.- Post Mortem Capacity.

There are only two pathologists in Saint Lucia, 1 at Victoria Hospital and 1 at St. Jude's Hospital; a Post Mortem would take one to two hours per body. Working at the same time they could handle, in an extreme case, up to 6 dead bodies each every 24 hours = 12 per day at 12 hours shifts. This rate could increase if pathologists work more than 12 hours a day or if pathologists come from abroad.

So, in the remote case of a disaster with several dozens or hundreds of dead bodies, we would have to bring pathologist-teams from abroad. The teams have to be tailored to the need. Arrangements have to be made with PAHO (through MOH) for the establishment of mechanisms for the provision of pathologist-teams under the request of Saint Lucia, while the CDERA medical assistance may also be sourced.

3.3.- Identification Capacity.

Identification in 'peace time' is done visually by the relatives who identify the dead bodies. This can be done in the case of a disaster causing up to 130 dead for there would be enough storage capacity and time for the relatives to identify them at the morgue or at the funeral homes.

It has to be mentioned that, in the unlikely case that the number of the dead is more than 130 and the dead are nationals from Saint Lucia, the faster they are identified and claimed, the higher the number of dead that could handled. That is, at least a higher number could be handled at a rate of 2 every 2 hours or so. There would be a flow of dead people in (coming from funeral homes) and out the morgue until all the dead bodies are identified and delivered to the next of kin.

In the scenario in which the number of the dead is larger than 130 and some or all of the dead are foreigners, protocols for the management of the dead still have to be debated and adopted in the Legislation. In this case, it is suggested that information from the dead should be taken as follows:

- Sample of blood
- Sample of hair
- Samples of tissue from liver, kidney, etc.
- Personal belongings found with the body: clothes, chains, rings, wallet, ID's, glasses, cash and other valuables, etc.
- Photographs of the body according to the number and type specified by the existing regulations and practices.
- X rays from the teeth and other significant X rays such as broken bones, etc.
- General information on the dead and results of Post Mortem.

All this information must be put in a box and sealed until it is claimed by the relatives of the dead from abroad. All the boxes should be kept by the Police in a safe and secure place.

The Ministry of External Affairs and the Ministry of Tourism will be involved in any activity regarding the death of tourists/ foreign citizens. The embassies would be contacted by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Both the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Ministry of Tourism will inform NEMO about their activities.

The Saint Lucia Red Cross will assist through the International Federation of Red Cross to conduct activities of tracking persons after disasters.

The final disposal and/or shipment of the dead, in the case of the death of foreigners, will be decided by their relatives. Costs incurred in the shipment/disposal of their dead will be paid by relatives.

3.4.- Funeral Home Capacity.

At present, there are 5 funeral homes in Saint Lucia run by three companies. They all provide refrigeration and transportation services. Only one funeral home has the facilities to cremate bodies.

In a case with less than 65 dead, there will be no problem with the transportation, storage and disposal of the dead by the authorities and the funeral parlours. In a case with more than 65 dead and less than 130 there is still refrigeration capacity for those figures by storing twice the number of dead in the refrigerators, depending, of course, on the size of the dead.

All Funeral Homes provide transportation for the dead.

Currently, the Police have an arrangement with the Funeral Homes. It has to be revised to find out if it covers all the assistance that would be needed from funeral homes (transportation, refrigeration); if it doesn't, it has to include them. In any case, mechanisms for the assistance of the funeral homes and for the reimbursement of their services by NEMO should be included. It has to be discussed by NEMO and the Police if the new agreement should be signed between the Funeral Homes and the Police, or between NEMO and the Police.

Once the dead are identified by the relatives and delivered to them by the Police with the death certificate, it is responsibility of the relatives to cover all further expenses like additional refrigeration, transportation, coffin and burial.

Funeral homes could also embalm bodies if requested and ship them abroad in hermetically - sealed caskets (ziggler). In the case of shipment of dead bodies abroad, embalming and shipment costs will be responsibility of the relatives.

3.5. - Cremation Capacity.

At present, there is only one funeral home that has a crematorium. This crematorium can cremate a body at a rate of 100 pounds per hour.

The cost for cremation is between \$4500 and \$5000 EC (2002 prices). The ashes are given to the relatives who can dispose of them according to their beliefs and customs.

Again, the decision and the responsibility for the costs of cremation are the responsibility of the relatives after the delivery of the dead bodies to them by the Police.

3.6.- Final Disposal Capacity.

There are at least 15 cemeteries in Saint Lucia (source: Ministry of Community Development). The average cost of a grave is \$400 EC. In general, disposal capacity is not a problem in Saint Lucia. It can be done in a family tomb or by common burial; in the latter case the grave lasts for 5-7 years, thus augmenting the capacity for burial in cemeteries.

There is no problem, then, with disposal capacity in the cemeteries. Therefore, there is no need, again, to dig mass graves to put all unidentified (or identified) dead bodies.

Regarding unidentified body parts and human blood and tissues, the Ministry of Health and the Saint Lucia Solid Waste Management Authority will follow any applicable protocols for their management and final disposal.

4.- Policies for the Disposal of Dead Bodies in Disasters in Saint Lucia.

- 1.- The Government of Saint Lucia recognises, respects and protects the human right and the human need of the people of Saint Lucia to give their dead a proper burial according to their religious beliefs, traditions and customs at all times, and, particularly, after disasters.
- 2.- The Government of Saint Lucia will be prepared to adequately manage the dead bodies after disasters.
- 3.- Regarding the management of dead bodies in disasters, the Government of Saint Lucia will have as its first priority the identification of the dead bodies for their delivery to their next of kin.
- 4.- The Government of Saint Lucia will plan and be prepared to follow all applicable legal and public health regulations and procedures as best and as fast as possible to manage dead bodies after a disaster.
- 5.- The Government of Saint Lucia will not, under any circumstances whatsoever, permit, promote, or conduct the burial of dead bodies in a mass grave in disasters or in any other situation.

6.- The Government of Saint Lucia will ensure, as far as possible, that all dead bodies are collected, adequately stored, properly and accurately identified and that, finally, all bodies are delivered, as soon as possible and according to existing regulations, to their next of kin.

7.- The Government of Saint Lucia will pay the utmost respect to the religious beliefs, traditions and customs of the people regarding the final burial of dead bodies after disasters.



Appendix 1
PAN AMERICAN HEALTH ORGANIZATION
WORLD HEALTH ORGANIZATION



XVII PAN AMERICAN SANITARY CONFERENCE
XVIII REGIONAL COMMITTEE MEETING

RESOLUTION XXIX

Adopted in Washington, October 7th, 1966

INTERNATIONAL TRANSPORTATION OF
HUMAN REMAINS

SOURCE: <http://www.interpol.int/Public/DisasterVictim/guide/appendices.asp#c>

THE XVII PAN AMERICAN SANITARY CONFERENCE....

Resolves

1. To approve and transmit to the Governments of the Organization the following Declaration and Regulations concerning the International Transportation of Human Remains:

DECLARATION

The greater ease of communications today and the considerable increase in tourism make the international transportation of human remains a matter of practical interest that justifies the establishment of uniform standards.

The international transportation of human remains should be simplified so as not to increase the problems of the families with complicated and unnecessary procedures that appear to overlook the moral and social considerations involved in such cases.

It is possible to simplify the administrative procedures involved in obtaining authorization for the international transportation of human remains if it is borne in mind that, contrary to a deep rooted opinion, a corpse does not constitute a health risk even when death was due to a quarantinable or communicable disease, since its power to infect disappears when it is suitably embalmed.

Embalming might become the general practice in the countries of the Americas since it is the most appropriate method of preserving human remains; however, this in no way implies that other, simpler, and equally effective methods, cannot also be used.

DEFINITIONS

Article 1. International transportation of human remains is understood to be the shipment of the body from the country where the death occurred to the country of its final destination after either death or disinterment.

Article 2. The transportation of bodies between frontier districts within 48 hours after death shall not be subject to these standards.

Article 3. For the purpose of these standards an impervious coffin shall be any container or box, of whatever material, which can be hermetically sealed and so maintained by plastic or rubber gasket or by metal or similar material which has been soldered or welded. The body may also be encased in a plastic container which has been sealed by heat or by adhesive materials prior to being placed in a non-impervious coffin, and which, for the purpose of these standards, will be considered the same as an impervious coffin.

DOCUMENTATION

Article 4. For international transportation of human remains, the following documents shall be required:

- a. An official certificate of cause of death issued by the local registrar of death, or similar authority;
- b. A statement by the person authorized to prepare the remains, certified by an appropriate authority, indicating the manner and method in which the body was prepared and indicating that the coffin contains only the body in question and necessary clothing and packing;
- c. A transit permit stating the surname, first name and age of the deceased person, issued by the competent authority for the place of death, or the place of burial in the case of exhumed human remains, and;
- d. Copies of the documentation required under subparagraphs a, b, and c shall accompany the shipment of remains. The outside of the coffin should bear an immovable plaque or other appropriate marking, in a conspicuous place, indicating name, age and place of final destination of the body.

HEALTH MEASURES

Article 5. The human remains shall be subject to the following measures:

- a. Thorough washing with an effective disinfectant; disinfection of all orifices; packing of all orifices with cotton saturated with an effective disinfectant; wrapping in a sheet saturated with an effective disinfectant; and placing in an impervious coffin; or,
- b. Proper embalming (arterial and cavity) and placement in an impervious coffin; or,
- c. Proper embalming (arterial and cavity) and encasement in a plastic container which has been sealed by heat or by adhesive materials prior to placement in a non-impervious coffin.

SHIPMENT REQUIREMENTS

Article 6. Human remains prepared for international shipment must be placed in an impervious coffin. Where the cause of death was a quarantinable disease, as defined in the International Sanitary Regulations, the human remains must be embalmed (arterial and cavity) and placed in an impervious coffin.

The impervious coffin must thereupon be hermetically sealed and may be shipped without any other covering (except in the case of shipment by sea), or for protective purposes may be fitted in a wooden box, or one made of other material, so as to prevent movement; or may be wrapped in a specially designed fabric.

TRANSPORTATION BY LAND, AIR OR SEA

Article 7. The following regulations shall apply to the transportation by rail:

- a. The impervious coffin may be transported in the baggage compartment of a passenger car.
- b. Each country shall be responsible for fixing the time limit within which the body must be removed at its final destination.

In case of transportation by road the impervious coffin must be conveyed preferably in a closed hearse or failing such, in an ordinary closed van (truck) or automobile, placed in such a way as to prevent movement.

The impervious coffin may be conveyed also in the baggage compartment of a passenger aircraft or in a cargo aircraft and may be equipped with a vent or safety valve provided that precautions are taken to prevent the escape of liquids or nauseous gases.

In case of transportation by sea the impervious coffin, in order to preclude movement, must be packed in an ordinary wooden case, or one made of other material, or may be placed in specially designed fabric container.

COMMON PROVISION

Article 8. Regardless of the mode of transportation, wreaths, flowers and other similar funeral articles may be sent with the coffin only when it is permitted by the provisions in force in the country to which it is being sent.

FINAL PROVISIONS

Article 9. The above formalities may be reduced either through bilateral arrangements or by joint decision in particular cases.

Article 10. The transportation of remains exhumed after the period established in the local provisions in force have elapsed, and the transportation of ashes, shall not be subject to health or other special measures.

2. To recommend to the Governments that they apply the above mentioned regulations in the way they deem most appropriate.
3. To invite the Governments to inform the Bureau of the steps taken to implement the above mentioned regulations so that he may report them to the other Governments and to the Governing Bodies of the Organization.
4. To urge the Director that he endeavour to ensure in the way he deems the most appropriate that the Governments of the Organization take appropriate measures to implement in their territories the regulations on International Transportation of Human Remains mentioned in the first operative paragraph of this resolution.
5. To recommend to the Director that he transmit this resolution to the Director-General of the World Health Organization.