

Forensic Anthropology in Disaster Victim Identification: Best Practice Recommendations for the Medicolegal Authority



WHAT IS AN AAFS STANDARD FACTSHEET?

The AAFS produces clear, concise, and easy-to-understand factsheets to summarize the contents of technical and professional forensic science standards on the OSAC Registry. They are not intended to provide an interpretation for any portion of a published standard.

WHAT IS THE PURPOSE OF THIS STANDARD?

This document presents best practice recommendations for the forensic anthropologist's role in a disaster victim identification (DVI) response. DVI operations should be multidisciplinary in nature, and forensic anthropologists should be employed in positions beyond postmortem examination. This document discusses the different roles covered by forensic anthropology.

Specific topics that are discussed include search and recovery, triage and anthropology stations as a component of the human remains examination process, and reconciliation in the identification process. Properly followed, these recommendations promote the full utilization of forensic anthropology in a DVI response.

WHY IS THIS STANDARD IMPORTANT? WHAT ARE ITS BENEFITS?

Forensic anthropology plays an important role in disaster victim identification. Properly applied, the efforts of the forensic anthropologist will aid in an effective and efficient recovery effort, separation of nonhuman and commingled remains, creation of informative inventories of skeletal tissues represented, and documentation of skeletal features that may lead to positive identification. DVI operations are most effective when using a multidisciplinary approach that includes principles, methods, and techniques from the field of forensic anthropology.



HOW IS THIS STANDARD USED, AND WHAT ARE THE KEY ELEMENTS?

Jurisdictions responsible for establishing a DVI operation should implement these best practice recommendations. There are five areas of recommendations, with a primary focus on the triage and anthropology stations in disaster morgue operations. Forensic anthropologists should be aware of planning and preparedness considerations prior to the start of DVI operations to ensure their proper integration into those operations.

The standard provides a general overview of the goals for the triage station and the role forensic anthropology should play. This is followed by considerations on the proper location of the triage station in disaster morgue design, qualifications for triage personnel, and an outline of triage station activities.

The standard then focuses on anthropology stations and the considerations for station location and personnel qualifications. Recommendations for relevant analyses pertaining to elements of the biological profile are included.

The involvement of forensic anthropologists in identification reconciliation efforts is supported by the standard.