



CITY OF PHILADELPHIA

DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC HEALTH

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Philadelphia Department of Public Health Response to the Investigation of the Handling of the Remains of the MOVE Victims by the Philadelphia Medical Examiner’s Office

PHILADELPHIA — The City of Philadelphia released reports from the two independently conducted investigations of the handling of the remains of the MOVE victims by the Medical Examiner’s Office. The City’s statement on those reports can be found online. In light of the many recommendations made by Montgomery McCracken Walker & Rhoads LLP, the Philadelphia Department of Public Health is issuing the following statement.

The Philadelphia Department of Public Health is committed to the health and well-being of all city residents. The Medical Examiner’s Office (MEO) determines the cause and manner of death for sudden, unexpected, and unnatural deaths in Philadelphia. Our doctors, scientists, and technicians work to investigate these deaths and to find answers for families who have suffered the loss of a loved one. Our staff interact with family members of victims at an incredibly difficult time. We take pride in doing this work with scientific accuracy and with compassion.

Unfortunately, the response of the MEO to the killing of 11 Philadelphia residents in 1985 fell far short of these goals. We are grateful to the authors of the reports for their thoroughness and insights and commit to using these findings to improve our processes, the equity with which we do our work, and to win back the trust of the community. Some of the changes recommended are already in process. Some will be challenging due to funding constraints. In addition to the changes recommended by the investigators, we are committed to working with the families of the victims to identify a respectful plan for how to handle the remains and will be reaching out in the near future to initiate those conversations.

The table below lays out the recommendations related to the MEO and the PDPH responses/plans related to those recommendations.

Recommendation	Response/Comments
1. The MEO Should Make Homicide Scenes a Priority for Independent Investigations, Particularly When Law Enforcement is Involved.	The MEO has been prioritizing certain homicide investigations (in custody deaths and police involved shootings); with increases in funding for MEO, we could better achieve this goal.

<p>2. The MEO Should Assess Their Current Staffing Levels and Make Appropriate Requests to Hire Additional Investigators that Will Support Independent Investigations.</p>	<p>Accept</p>
<p>3. The MEO Should Adopt the Department of Justice's Death Investigation Guide for the Scene Investigator As the Standard for All of Its Scene Investigations. It should Also Develop Training Manuals for Investigators to Establish Uniformity.</p>	<p>Accept</p>
<p>4. The MEO Should Review Its Mass Fatality Incident Response Plan and Update It to Align With Best Practices. The MEO and Other City Agencies Should Also Conduct Regular Training and Tabletop Exercises on Its Mass Fatality Incident Response Plan.</p>	<p>Accept</p>
<p>5. The MEO Should Amend the Death Certificates of All Eleven MOVE Victims to Reflect that their Manners of Death Were Homicides, Not Accidents.</p>	<p>The Acting Chief ME agrees and will be issuing new certificates.</p>
<p>6. The MEO Should Review The Case Files of the MOVE Victims and Amend the Causes of Death on their Death Certificates Where Appropriate to Reflect that At Least Some of the Victims' Causes of Death Were Unknown.</p>	<p>The Acting Chief ME agrees and will be issuing new certificates.</p>
<p>7. The MEO Should Have Access to Independent Legal Counsel When Legal Conflicts Arise.</p>	<p>If legal conflicts arise, the City will comply with the Charter and provide independent legal counsel to the MEO.</p>
<p>8. The MEO Should Adopt a Formal Policy Statement on Independence and Impartiality.</p>	<p>Accept</p>
<p>9. The MEO Should Provide All Employees Training on Cultural Diversity and Sensitivity that Is Specifically Tailored to the MEO.</p>	<p>Accept and will research appropriate training sources</p>

<p>10. MEO Leadership Should Reflect a Reform-Minded Approach that Will Ensure the Independence and Neutrality of the MEO.</p>	<p>Accept</p>
<p>11. When Consulting With Outside Experts, the MEO Should Use Contracts that Sufficiently Define the Experts' Scope of Work and Provide Guidelines Setting Out What the Experts Can and Cannot Do With the Remains or Specimens at Issue.</p>	<p>Accept. MEO will work with the Law Department on these contracts.</p>
<p>12. The MEO Should Develop Formal Policies and Procedures Concerning Communications and Interactions With Next of Kin and Other Family Members During Death Investigations And Develop Resources to Provide Pertinent Information to Family Members.</p>	<p>Accept. MEO will review its policies and procedures, work with experts and evaluate and update those policies with the principles of transparency, equity, and sensitivity at this incredibly difficult time for families.</p>
<p>13. The MEO Should Be Transparent with Family Members When Bones, Tissue, and/or Organs Are Retained for Extended Examination As Part of an Investigation.</p>	<p>Accept. MEO will review its policies and procedures, work with experts and evaluate and update those policies with the principles of transparency, equity, and sensitivity at this incredibly difficult time for families.</p>
<p>14. The MEO Should Develop Formal Policies and Procedures Concerning Documentation and Record-Keeping.</p>	<p>Accept. These policies and procedures will also be part of the accreditation process.</p>
<p>15. The MEO Should Pursue Accreditation.</p>	<p>Accept. Note that we anticipate that this process will take several years to complete.</p>
<p>16. The MEO Should Develop Formal Policies and Procedures Concerning the Retention of Specimens and Personal Effects. The MEO Should Also Regularly Audit All Storage Rooms.</p>	<p>Accept. These policies and procedures will also be part of the accreditation process.</p>