

Minnesota Department of Health

Disaster Mortuary Emergency Response Team (D-MERT) Plan

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Mission Statement

To plan with and coordinate a team of volunteers able to effectively respond to emergency situations where death tolls overwhelm local mortuary resources.

Authority

The Commissioner of Health is authorized to oversee the scene of death and oversee the disposition of dead human bodies when the governor declares a public health emergency. (See Minnesota Emergency Health Powers Act)

Introduction

A. Purpose

The Disaster Mortuary Emergency Response Team (D-MERT) exists to provide assistance to cities and counties in Minnesota in the care and preparation of human remains following a major disaster or emergency of natural or manmade origin. D-MERT would be activated when local mortuary resources are overwhelmed.

B. Scope

1. D-MERT support offers assistance in the follow categories:
 - a. *Temporary morgue site selection*
 - b. *Temporary morgue set up*
 - c. *Mortuary volunteer solicitation*
 - d. *Body bags*
 - e. *Caskets*
 - f. *Airline shipment trays*
 - g. *Hearse livery*
 - h. *Refrigeration trucks*
 - i. *Preparation of human remains & return to Next of Kin*
 - j. *Insurance coverage for its volunteers*
 - k. *Critical Incidence*

2. D-MERT will coordinate assistance from other local, state and federal agencies when needed. Other assistance would include but not be limited to:
 - a. *Minnesota Funeral Directors Association (MFDA) **763-398-0115***
 - b. *Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) D-MORT Teams*
 - c. *National Transportation Safety Board (NTSB)*

3. D-MERT would not be responsible for, but could assist, upon request, in securing resources and personnel for the autopsy area of the morgue.

Policies

A. D-MERT will be under the authority and direction of the Minnesota Department of Health, Mortuary Science Section.

B. D-MERT planning, training, and implementing will be the responsibility of the Minnesota Department of Health, Mortuary Science Section.

C. D-MERT will be activated upon an appropriate request and after determination has been made that a response is appropriate. The Commissioner of Health will have the sole authority to activate D-MERT and will confer with the Governor of the State prior to activation.

D. D-MERT is a volunteer organization. As such, volunteers cannot expect to be paid for their services, although in some cases insurance carriers may pay for work performed. Expenses such as a per diem may also be paid in some situations.

E. D-MERT will act at the will and discretion of the lead Medical Examiner or Coroner at the scene of the disaster or emergency.

F. To ensure confidentiality of the sensitivity of the task performed, D-MERT volunteers will not release any information to the general public or to the media. All media requests should be referred to the appropriate agency for response.

Concept of Operation

A. Notification

1. To notify D-MERT, medical examiners or coroners, fire chiefs, police chiefs, or other public officials should contact the State Duty Officer at the Division of Emergency Management, Department of Public Safety, in St. Paul by calling **1-800-422-0798**.
2. The State Duty Officer will contact the Mortuary Science Section to notify them of the request to activate D-MERT by calling **1-651-201-3829**.
3. The Mortuary Science Section will contact the Commissioner of Health to activate D-MERT.
4. The Commissioner of Health will confer with the Governor of the State to activate D-MERT.
5. The Commissioner of Health will either deny or approve activation of D-MERT and notify the Mortuary Science Section.
6. Upon authorization from the Commissioner of Health , D-MERT will be activated.
7. The Mortuary Science Section will assign a D-MERT Coordinator and will alert the primary D-MERT coordinators.

B. General

1. Upon notification of a major disaster or emergency, the Mortuary Science Section will request the Commissioner of Health to activate D-MERT. Once activation is authorized, D-MERT will alert its primary coordinators and assemble in an agreed upon location (most likely the State's Department of Emergency Management's (DEM) Operation Center (EOC) in St. Paul or the Mortuary Science Section office.)
2. D-MERT will notify likely volunteers via fax, e-mail, and/or telephone of the need for their assistance. A log of potentially available volunteers will be initiated as responses are received.
3. The D-MERT Temporary Morgue Supervisor will begin the task of selecting a potential site for a temporary morgue based on the size and scope of the incident. Local assistance will be made use of to identify likely locations for the morgue. Once a site is chosen, the D-MERT Temporary Morgue Supervisor will assemble a team to set up the morgue.

4. The D-MERT Temporary Morgue Supervisor will evaluate and proceed to secure items required for the temporary morgue. (D-MERT will not be responsible for volunteers of other organizations such as fire, rescue, sheriff, local law enforcement, etc.) Lodging, food service, transportation, preparation room supplies, etc. will be ordered as necessary.

5. The D-MERT Coordinator will begin to notify support agencies and organizations (i.e. National Guard to airlift mobile morgue if necessary) as needed.

6. The D-MERT Coordinator will notify volunteers as to where and when their assistance will be needed based on the nature of the disaster or emergency and the estimated length of the support requirement.

C. Organization

1. D-MERT will be activated and directed by the Mortuary Science Section of the Minnesota Department of Health. D-MERT will operate out of the State's DEM EOC in St. Paul, or in an agreed upon location selected upon activation by the Commissioner of Health.

2. The D-MERT Coordinator will assign officers and supervisors for specific job functions that need to be performed. Volunteers will answer to their assigned officers and supervisors.

3. D-MERT will act at the will of the Medical Examiner or Coroner with jurisdiction.

D. Communication

1. D-MERT will communicate with local officials and to themselves by normal means such as telephone or cellular telephone. If telephone communication is inoperable, other means such as two-way radio or ham radio will be used.

2. D-MERT will communicate with its volunteers by fax and or e-mail, as well as telephone. D-MERT will be responsible to establish communications necessary to effectively coordinate their operation.

Temporary Morgue Sites

A. General

A temporary morgue may need to be established if the number of dead exceeds the resources of the medical examiner or coroners office or local mortuaries. D-MERT will assist in locating and setting up a temporary morgue when requested by the medical examiner or coroner with jurisdiction.

B. Potential Sites

Temporary morgue sites will be determined after analyzing the size and scope of the emergency.

Potential temporary morgue sites would be:

- National Guard Armories
- schools with gymnasiums (without wooden floors)
- airport hangers
- V.F.W. and American Legion Halls
- warehouses
- reception halls
- county fair grounds

Other considerations:

- proximity to disaster site
- electricity
- hot and cold running water
- restrooms
- adequate office space
- ventilation
- large open area of sufficient size to accommodate the number of dead to be cared for
- area for securing valuables
- parking
- secure from public

C. Blueprint

A temporary morgue will need to have the following offices and designated areas:

- badging
- dressing/shower
- break room
- restrooms (portable toilets)

- refrigeration trucks (in some cases)
- body holding
- body processing
- property
- x-ray
- dental
- data
- FBI (in some cases)
- NTSB (in some cases)
- anthropology
- autopsy
- embalming
- casketing
- shipping
- interview
- death certificate

A suggested outline of a temporary morgue can be found on the following page.

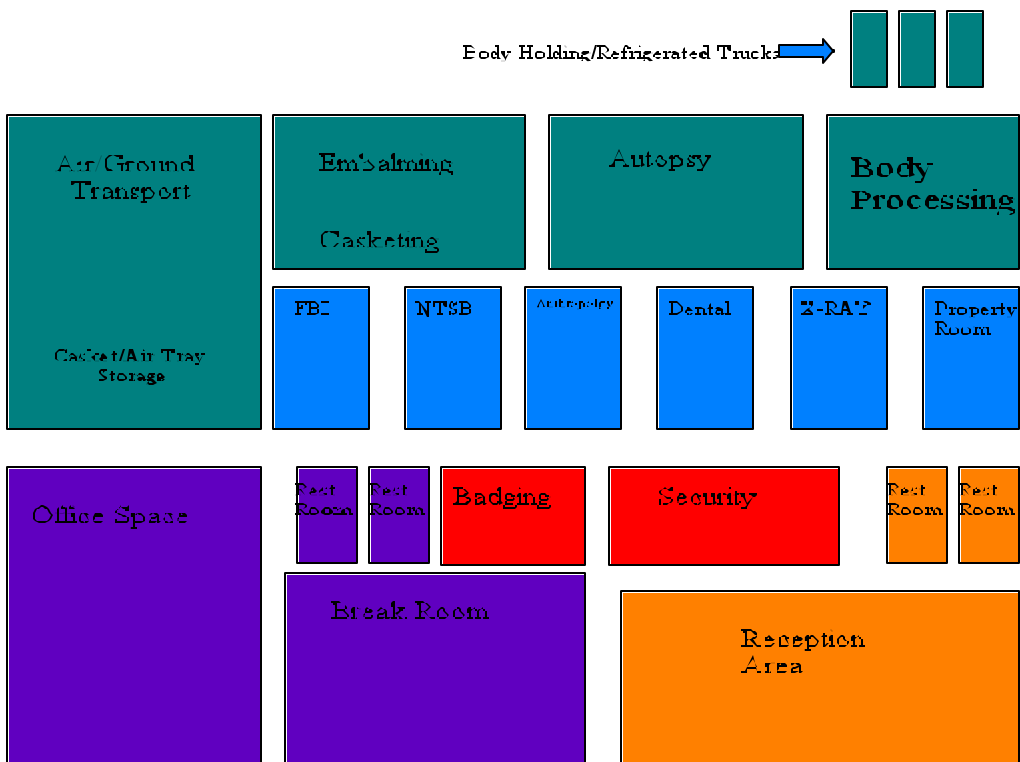
D. Mobile Morgue

There are two mobile morgues available upon request. Each mobile morgue contains most of the equipment and supplies to set up a temporary morgue. The morgues available are:

1. National Foundation for Mortuary Care **1-262-639-8000** (Gary Strand)
2. FEMA's D-MORT (Upon request through FEMA D-MORT Region 5 **618-372-3311** (Brad Targhetta)

Use of a mobile morgue and its supplies will be considered by the D-MERT Temporary Morgue Site Supervisor when he or she is evaluating the needs of the emergency situation. A request for the mobile morgue would be made by the D-MERT Coordinator.

Temporary Morgue Floor Plan (example)



Metropolitan Airport Commission Temporary Morgue

A. General

The Metropolitan Airport Commission(MAC) at the Minneapolis/St. Paul International Airport maintains a temporary morgue which can quickly convert from its primary use. The morgue is located in the field maintenance buildings on the northwest side of the airport. The physical address of the facility is 6025 28th Avenue South, Minneapolis. A detailed plan of the morgue is found on the following page.

B. Non-Airport Use

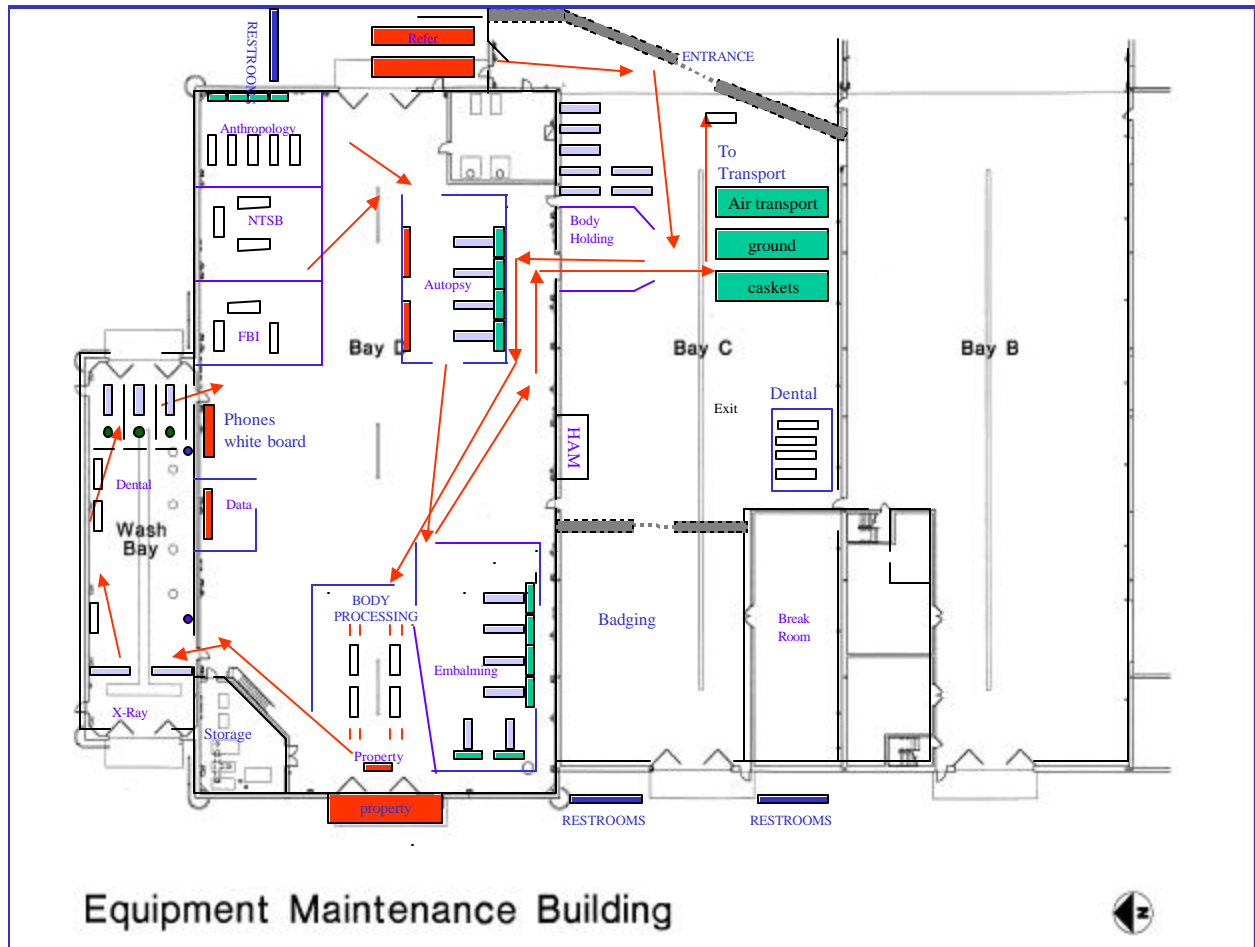
Although the MAC's temporary morgue primary purpose is for use in the event of an airline emergency, the morgue would be available under certain criteria and upon the approval of the MAC Airport Director. The basic criteria for its use are:

- more than 36 deaths
- emergency scene within 70 miles of airport

C. Requesting MAC's Morgue

A medical examiner or coroner may request use of the MAC morgue by contacting the State Duty Officer at the Division of Emergency Management in St. Paul at **1-800-422-0798**. The Duty Officer could then contact the MAC directly or the Mortuary Science Section who in turn will contact the appropriate person at the MAC.

Metropolitan Airport Commission (MAC) Temporary Morgue



Job Descriptions

1. D-MERT Coordinator

- Develop and maintain D-MERT plan. Update and maintain plan as needed to remain current.
- Appoint officers and supervisors for the various tasks which will need to be performed.
- Devise organizational chart.
- Provide training and maintain volunteer list.
- Develop forms, lists, and other necessary documents to accomplish the variety of tasks that will need to be performed.
- Maintain relationship with other local, state and national organizations to ensure the goals of D-MERT are achieved.
- Organize and coordinate overall mortuary operations when D-MERT is activated.

2. Emergency Mortuary Officer

- Assist the D-MERT Coordinator in all phases of the operation.

3. Financial Accounting Officer

- Maintain accurate accounting ledger of all D-MERT purchasing and receiving.

4. Human Resource Officer

- Maintain record of volunteers.
- Assist D-MERT Coordinator in notifying volunteers when activated.
- Ensure that volunteers receive proper training for their assignments.
- Ensure that food, lodging, and other necessary items of personal use are provided for volunteers.

- Assist with badging and other security clearance of volunteers.

5. Equipment and Supplies Officer

- Determine supplies required for the incident.
- Request donated equipment from area resources (i.e. hospitals, funeral homes)
- Order necessary supplies.
 - < *Preparation room supplies*
 - < *Body Bags*
 - < *Caskets*
 - < *Air Trays*
- Inventory and monitor all purchased and donated supplies.
- Confer with the Financial Accounting Officer.
- Confer with Temporary Morgue Site Supervisor.

6. Critical Incidence Officer

- Monitor the overall psychological well-being of D-MERT volunteers.
- Train all volunteers.

7. Temporary Morgue Site Supervisor

- Locate and set up temporary morgue site.
- Monitor temporary morgue site and make changes as needed.
- Infectious Waste disposal

8. Embalming Supervisor

- Develop and maintain schedules for volunteer embalmers.
- Oversee embalming standards of all embalmers.
- Maintain log of “Certificates of Removal.”

- Maintain log of “Embalming Record.”

9. Casketing Supervisor

- Oversee casketing of remains.
- Oversee temporary storing of casketed remains.

10. Transportation Supervisor

- Oversee transportation of remains to home-town funeral directors.
 - < Air transportation
 - < Ground transportation
- Oversee all contact with home-town funeral directors.

11. Death Certificate/ Death Certificate Work Sheet/Permit Supervisor

- Oversee data collection required for completion of death certificates/death certificate worksheets and transportation permits.
- Oversee system of completion of death certificates and transportation permits.
- Oversee medical certification of all death certificates/death certificate work sheets

Volunteer Notification

The D-MERT Coordinator will contact every funeral home in the response area as well as those volunteers who appear on the master volunteer contact list. Contact will be made by fax, telephone and/or e-mail.

D-MERT has divided the state into several zones, allowing volunteers nearest the emergency or disaster to be contacted first. If adequate volunteers are not available in the primary zone, the next closest zone will be contacted. This process will be followed until enough volunteers are available.

The following persons or groups will be notified following activation of the D-MERT:

- Primary D-MERT Coordinators
- Minnesota Funeral Directors Association (MFDA) **763-398-0115**
- D-MERT Officers and Supervisors

A staging area for D-MERT personnel will be established and the location will be announced when volunteers are contacted. At the staging area, volunteers will have their identification checked and receive their badging, critical incidence briefing, and other information about the incident. All volunteers must go through this check point each time they arrive and leave the temporary morgue site.

Forms

Certificate of Removal

The Certificate of Removal is required by Minnesota law and is used to establish a “chain of command” with the body once the medical examiner or coroner releases custody of the body.

Embalming Authorization

The Embalming Authorization form is required by Minnesota law and is used to record the reason embalming was done. In Minnesota, the Commissioner of Health would have the authority to require all bodies be embalmed in an emergency situation. The other reason a body would be required to be embalmed by state law would be if the body was to be viewed by the public, if the body was to be transported by common carrier (i.e. airline), or if the final disposition of the body (burial or cremation) would not take place within 72 hours of being released from the medical examiner or coroner.

Embalming Record

The Embalming Record is required by Minnesota law and is used to record details of the embalming process of each body. The Embalming Record is a valuable tool in the event that information about the condition of the body is required at a later date.

Death Certificate/Death Certificate Work Sheet

The Death Certificate is the official document confirming the death. The state of Minnesota issues death certificates through its Vital Records Office. The death certificates would be prepared by D-MERT office staff and certified by the signature of the medical examiner or coroner with jurisdiction. Demographic information would be gathered and recorded by specially selected morticians who would contact family members by telephone. D-MERT staff would file the death certificates as required by law and forward a copy to the funeral home where the body is released to. Instructions for the receiving funeral home to obtain certified copies of the death certificate should accompany the copy of the death certificate.

Transit Permit

The Transit Permit is required by state law and is used to transfer a body from one funeral home to another. The Transit Permit can be issued by any mortician in the state. The transit permit would accompany the casket remains to their destination.

Critical Incidence

The mental and emotional welfare of volunteer D-MERT personnel will be monitored by the D-MERT Critical Incidence Officer appointed by the D-MERT Coordinator. The D-MERT Critical Incidence Officer will be responsible for monitoring the mental and emotional state of all D-MERT volunteers from an initial orientation briefing through follow up de-briefings up to one year following the incident.

As the primary mental health provider for D-MERT volunteers, the D-MERT Critical Incidence Officer or his/her support staff will be on-scene throughout the event. At the discretion of the D-MERT Critical Incidence Coordinator, outside resources such as the American Red Cross may be used for support.

D-MERT volunteers will be required to attend all critical incidence meetings called for by the D-MERT Critical Incidence Officer.

Bereavement and Loss

*"It is difficult to come to terms with the feelings of devastation and total loss.
Some days I don't feel too bad, but other days I feel I cannot go on."*

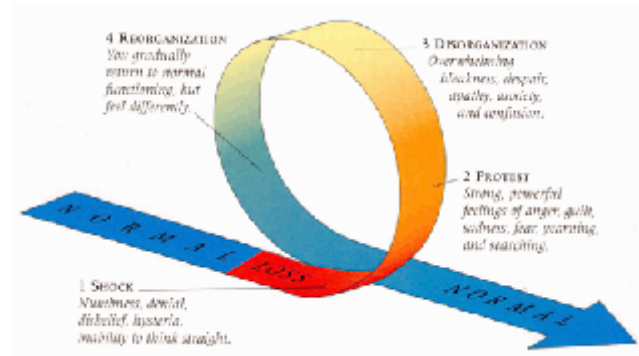
Bereavement means "the loss of something valued." Grieving is a process of adjusting to that loss and is universally recognized across all cultures. The process of grieving usually occurs when the loss involves a death, but it can also be applied to other situations, including the breakup of a relationship or divorce, loss of a job, or coming to terms with the loss of health through an illness or disability. Research into comparative levels of stress connected with important life events shows that the death of a spouse is regarded as the most stressful event. Grieving is more difficult if the death is sudden or violent, or if the relationship was very close or one in which one or both partners were very dependent. When you experience a serious loss of someone close, you can experience the following four recognized stages of grief, each of which is accompanied by a range of different emotions:

Stage One: Shock The reality of the loss often takes time to sink in. Your initial reactions may vary from numbness, denial, disbelief, and hysteria, to not being able to think straight. These are all natural emotions that cushion you against the loss and allow you to experience it more slowly and cope with it better in the short term.

Stage Two: Protest At this stage, it is normal to protest that the loss cannot be real, even though you are being confronted with evidence that it is. As you struggle between denying and eventually accepting the reality of what has happened, you experience waves of strong and powerful feelings, such as anger, guilt, sadness, fear, yearning, and searching.

The Grief Wheel

When you lose someone close to you, it is natural to experience a wide range of emotions that correspond with a number of recognized stages of grief. The emotions you feel vary from person to person, and you will not always move through these stages in a logical progression. Some people might experience them in rapid succession; other more haphazardly over a period of months.



Stage Three: Disorganization This is the stage when the reality of the loss is only too real. You are likely to experience overwhelming feelings of bleakness, despair, apathy, anxiety, and confusion. You may feel that this depression could go on forever and that there is no way out.

Stage Four: Reorganization You begin to rebuild your life and acquire a greater balance. At last you are able to choose to remember happier times. Gradually you return to previous functioning, but often with changed values and new meaning in life.

Face The Pain

Grieving, though painful, is a natural process that must be acknowledged and worked through. Some people will wrongly try to avoid that pain by keeping themselves very busy or burying themselves in work. Other people might defend themselves against the pain by saying to themselves, "I have to be strong for everybody else" or "It's no use crying."

The period of grieving cannot be hurried and may vary from days to weeks, months, or even years. Even when you feel you are over it, you must be prepared for occasional setbacks, perhaps when you hear a particular piece of music, smell a certain scent, or remember a shared anniversary.

It is understandable to want to spend time alone, but it does not help to become too isolated. Talking and listening are important throughout all stages of grief, but it is quite usual for friends and acquaintances to feel embarrassed and not know what to say. When you are ready, approach your friends and say, "I need to talk" or "I need some practical help." There will be days when you prefer not to talk about it. When this happens, it is best just to be honest and explain your feelings to other people.

Come to Terms With Your Grief

1. **Accept The Loss** It is natural to protect yourself from the full impact of the loss by holding on to the deceased's belongings. Although it may take time, being able to release those possessions is a positive sign of acceptance and reorganization.
2. **Feel The Pain** Recognize and experience your emotions. Crying helps, since it allows painful feelings to be expressed.
3. **Talk About It** Talking about the loss and reminiscing helps you to accept the situation. Expressing regrets, fears, and anger is helpful. Do not take the attitude that "it doesn't help to rake it up."
4. **Take One Day At a Time** Do not try to sort out everything at once. Grieving takes as long as it takes -

there are no fixed time limits and it cannot be hurried.

5. **Take Care Of Yourself** Get plenty of rest, eat well, take time to retreat, and time to talk. Try not to become isolated but seek out social support.

6. **Adapt To Change** This may mean taking on a new role, learning new skills, or learning how to live on your own.

7. **Let Go** When you are ready, let go. This does not mean forget.

©Powell,Trevor. 1997. Free Yourself From Harmful Stress. New York, NY:DK Publishing, Inc. WWW.DK.COM

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Vendors

Batesville Casket **812-934-1610**

Aurora Casket **1-800-457-1195**

Kelco Chemical **1-800-328-7720**

Dodge Supply Company **1-800-443-6343**

This is not meant to be an all inclusive list of vendors. If you have products that would be of use during an emergency situation and would like your company name and phone number added to this list, please contact the D-MERT at the Mortuary Science Section.

Hazardous Materials

When Hazardous Materials (HazMat) are known to be present, D-MERT will take every precaution to protect the health and safety of its volunteers. Volunteers will be notified of the additional risks associated with handling bodies contaminated by hazardous materials.

D-MERT will follow accepted HazMat procedures when encountering contaminated bodies. HazMat assistance is available on several levels:

- **County:** Each county in the state has an assigned HazMat officer assigned and trained through the state emergency management office. A list of HazMat officials can be located at the State Duty Officer at **1-800-422-0798**.
- **State:** The State of Minnesota Pollution Control Agency (MPCA) has qualified and trained personnel available to assist with HazMat situations. They can be contacted by calling the State Duty Officer at **1-800-422-0798**.
- **Federal:** When local or state capabilities are overwhelmed by a hazardous materials incident, federal assistance can be requested from the National Regional Response Team via the MPCA. Requests should be made by calling the State Duty Officer at **1-800-422-0798**.

Use of Licensed Morticians

Only morticians licensed in the state of Minnesota will be allowed to embalm dead human bodies as part of D-MERT.

When the situation calls for more licensed morticians than are available to volunteer, the Commissioner of Health has authorized the use of licensed morticians and embalmers from other states. (See MN Statutes 12.42 below.) The D-MERT Coordinator will have the authority to contact out of state assistance with the permission of the Commissioner.

MN Statutes 12.42 Out-of-state license holders; powers, duties.

During an emergency or disaster, a person who holds a license, certificate, or other permit issued by a state of the United States, evidencing the meeting of qualifications for professional, mechanical, or other skills, may render aid involving those skills in this state. The license, certificate, or other permit of the person, while rendering aid, has the same force and effect as if issued in this state.