

**§ 1471. Forensic pathology investigations**

(a) **AUTHORITY.**—Under regulations prescribed by the Secretary of Defense, the Armed Forces Medical Examiner may conduct a forensic pathology investigation to determine the cause or manner of death of a deceased person if such an investigation is determined to be justified under circumstances described in subsection (b). The investigation may include an autopsy of the decedent's remains.

(b) **BASIS FOR INVESTIGATION.**—(1) A forensic pathology investigation of a death under this section is justified if at least one of the circumstances in paragraph (2) and one of the circumstances in paragraph (3) exist.

(2) A circumstance under this paragraph is a circumstance under which—

(A) it appears that the decedent was killed or that, whatever the cause of the decedent's death, the cause was unnatural;

(B) the cause or manner of death is unknown;

(C) there is reasonable suspicion that the death was by unlawful means;

(D) it appears that the death resulted from an infectious disease or from the effects of a hazardous material that may have an adverse effect on the military installation or community involved; or

(E) the identity of the decedent is unknown.

(3) A circumstance under this paragraph is a circumstance under which—

(A) the decedent—

(i) was found dead or died at an installation garrisoned by units of the armed forces that is under the exclusive jurisdiction of the United States;

(ii) was a member of the armed forces on active duty or inactive duty for training;

(iii) was recently retired under chapter 61 of this title as a result of an injury or illness incurred while a member on active duty or inactive duty for training; or

(iv) was a civilian dependent of a member of the armed forces and was found dead or died outside the United States;

(B) in any other authorized Department of Defense investigation of matters which involves the death, a factual determination of the cause or manner of the death is necessary; or

(C) in any other authorized investigation being conducted by the Federal Bureau of Investigation, the National Transportation Safety Board, or any other Federal agency, an authorized official of such agency with authority to direct a forensic pathology investigation requests that the Armed Forces Medical Examiner conduct such an investigation.

(c) **DETERMINATION OF JUSTIFICATION.**—(1) Subject to paragraph (2), the determination that a circumstance exists under paragraph (2) of subsection (b) shall be made by the Armed Forces Medical Examiner.

(2) A commander may make the determination that a circumstance exists under paragraph (2) of subsection (b) and require a forensic pathology investigation under this section without regard to a determination made by the Armed Forces Medical Examiner if—

(A) in a case involving circumstances described in paragraph (3)(A)(i) of that subsection, the commander is the commander of the installation where the decedent was found dead or died; or

(B) in a case involving circumstances described in paragraph (3)(A)(ii) of that subsection, the commander is the commander of the decedent's unit at a level in the chain of command designated for such purpose in the regulations prescribed by the Secretary of Defense.

(d) **LIMITATION IN CONCURRENT JURISDICTION CASES.**—(1) The exercise of authority under this section is subject to the exercise of primary jurisdiction for the investigation of a death—

(A) in the case of a death in a State, by the State or a local government of the State; or

(B) in the case of a death in a foreign country, by that foreign country under any applicable treaty, status of forces agreement, or other international agreement between the United States and that foreign country.

(2) Paragraph (1) does not limit the authority of the Armed Forces Medical Examiner to conduct a forensic pathology investigation of a death that is subject to the exercise of primary jurisdiction by another sovereign if the investigation by the other sovereign is concluded without a forensic pathology investigation that the Armed Forces Medical Examiner considers complete. For the purposes of the preceding sentence a forensic pathology investigation is incomplete if the investigation does not include an autopsy of the decedent.

(e) **PROCEDURES.**—For a forensic pathology investigation under this section, the Armed Forces Medical Examiner shall—

(1) designate one or more qualified pathologists to conduct the investigation;

(2) to the extent practicable and consistent with responsibilities under this section, give due regard to any applicable law protecting religious beliefs;

(3) as soon as practicable, notify the decedent's family, if known, that the forensic pathology investigation is being conducted;

(4) as soon as practicable after the completion of the investigation, authorize release of the decedent's remains to the family, if known; and

(5) promptly report the results of the forensic pathology investigation to the official responsible for the overall investigation of the death.

(f) **DEFINITION OF STATE.**—In this section, the term "State" includes the District of Columbia, the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico, and Guam.

(Added Pub. L. 106-65, div. A, title VII, §721(a), Oct. 5, 1999, 113 Stat. 692.)

**SUBCHAPTER II—DEATH BENEFITS**

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