

## **NAME Position Statement on Disaster Victim Identification in Mass Fatality Incidents (7/2020)**

A mass fatality incident is defined as any incident resulting in more decedents to be recovered and examined than can be managed in the local Medical Examiner/Coroner (ME/C) jurisdiction. The specific details vary by jurisdiction, available resources, and type of fatality.

It is the position of the National Association of Medical Examiners (NAME) that scientific methods of victim identification (i.e. fingerprint, odontologic, radiologic, molecular), and other equivalent means of identification (i.e. serial numbers on surgical implants) be used in cases of mass fatality incidents. This practice has become a global standard.

Identification efforts in such incidents can take substantial lengths of time, often requiring weeks or months to complete. Families and other stakeholders should be engaged early in the victim identification process, in order to facilitate transparency and manage expectations.

The use of non-scientific methods of identification (visual or personal effects) is limited due to the increased potential for error. While useful for an initial presumptive identification, these methods should not be used in place of the scientific methods referenced above, except in rare circumstances where scientific identification is not an option.

Each mass fatality incident is unique, and decisions regarding victim identification should be based on the condition of remains and/or the availability of multiple identification methods. The systematic practice of integrating and relying upon scientific methods will significantly aid in preventing mistaken identifications, which have a profound negative impact on families and communities.