

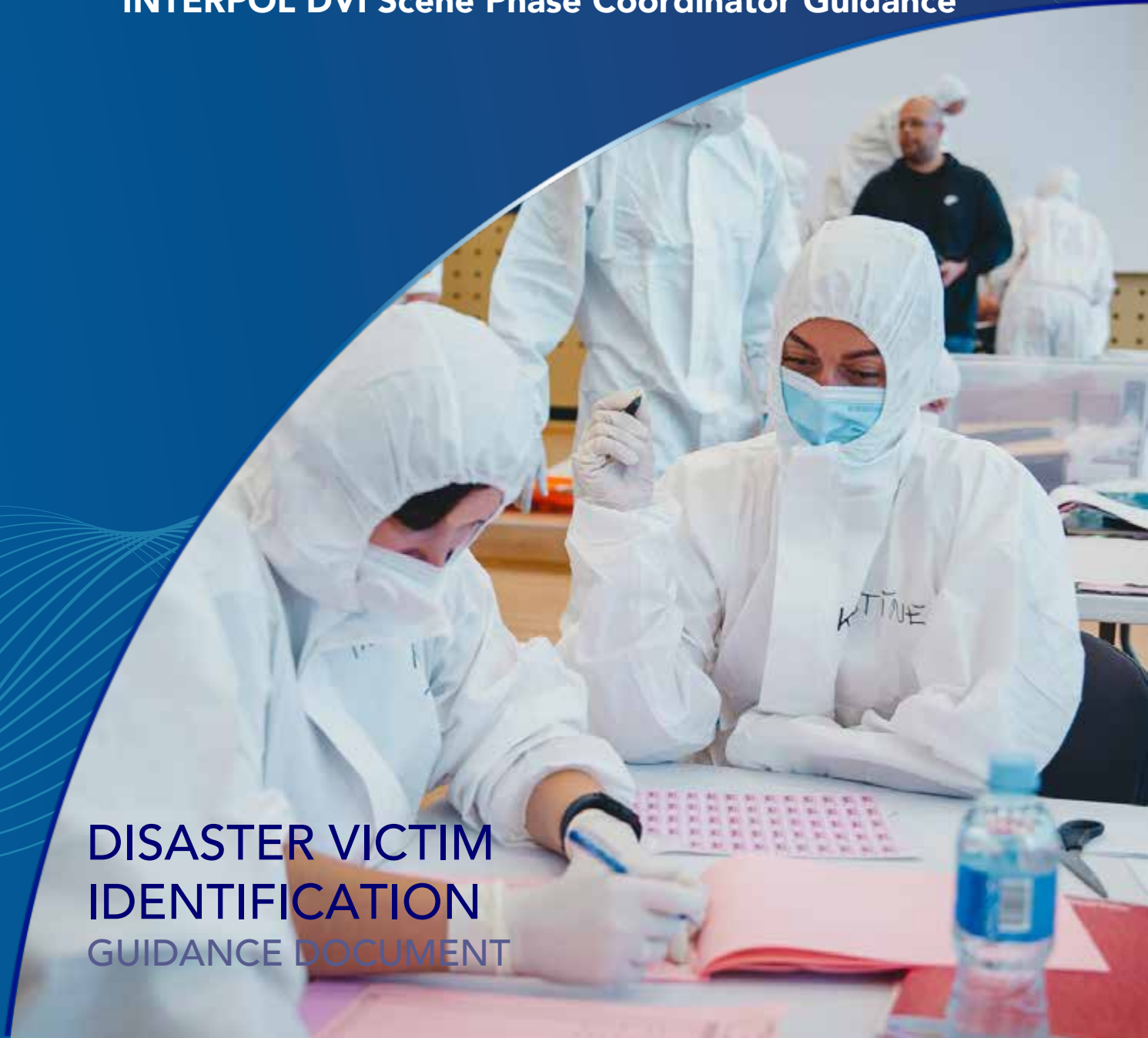


INTERPOL

FRAGILE HUMAN REMAINS STABILIZATION AT THE SCENE

INTERPOL DVI Scene Phase Coordinator Guidance

DISASTER VICTIM
IDENTIFICATION
GUIDANCE DOCUMENT



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Purpose

This document addresses the critical need for involving specialist forensic practitioners during an initial Disaster Victim Identification (DVI) scene assessment and subsequent recovery. In some past events, the lack of knowledge, consideration and/or care of fragile or burnt remains has delayed and/or compromised the outcome of the DVI process. Importantly, obtaining DNA profiles from severely burned and calcined human remains may prove challenging and therefore the recovery of compromised human remains may prove vital in establishing identifications by dental or skeletal comparison.

Initial Response Planning

The involvement of forensic specialists from the outset of a Mass Fatality Incident is essential, especially when human remains are fragmented, comingled or have suffered significant thermal damage rendering the remains fragile (4.4.1, 4.1.1).

- DVI is a multi-disciplinary process and the involvement of appropriate forensic specialists to locate and recover evidence at the scene has proven pivotal to the identification process (3.3.3).
- This may include the deployment of specialist forensic practitioners including anthropology, archaeology, odontology, pathology, ridgeology and DNA analysts.
- However, forensic specialists who have not been trained with the local scene officers or are unfamiliar with the Standard Operating Procedure (SOP) may lead to circumstances where the postmortem data is damaged, lost or remains unrecognized at the scene.
- All processes should be in accordance with the guiding principles of the INTERPOL DVI Guide including Annexures, and uphold the utmost respect and dignity of the victims.

The Scene Phase

To improve the recovery of human remains, information related to the event should be provided to forensic specialists. Details may include the nature of the event; the number of suspected deceased and their location at the scene. Scene processing should be in accordance with DVI Guide Annexure 3, phase 1 scene.

- If site access is restricted due to health and safety reasons or inaccessible due to remoteness or logistical difficulties, live streaming or video of the scene should be considered. Such measures may enable specialist forensic advice to be available for consideration by the scene coordinator and DVI commander
- This reduces the potential for loss of evidence due to fragmentation or post event comingling of remains
- Any agreed forensic guidance or stabilization protocol documented and in line with sections 3.2 Annexure 3, DVI Guide, phase 1 Scene and section 7.14 of the INTERPOL DVI Guide 2023.

- Liaising with other investigating agencies may be required depending on the cause of the disaster.

Stabilization and Protection for Transportation

Once human remains have been located, photographed and mapped in situ, stabilization may be undertaken onsite, provided safe working conditions allow. Should safety concerns not allow stabilization in situ then forensic advice regarding packaging and transportation to reduce the loss of identifying evidence should be duly considered.

Packaging/Handling/Uplifting of remains

The potential for destruction of evidence during the collection and transportation of human remains to either holding facilities or mortuary continues post stabilization. To minimize this:

- Victim recovery teams must be briefed with regard to the fragility of those remains to be recovered, and the agreed process for protecting those remains during the recovery process.
- On scene guidance by forensic specialists may be considered.
- Remains should be labeled as “FRAGILE” on the external body bag, with the head area denoted where practical.
- Following the initial removal of remains, site re-examination with supplemental photography is recommended for additional human remains that might have been missed, in particular teeth, and may also include dental/medical implants and medical devices.

Transportation

Following the removal of stabilized remains from the scene, it is essential that the potential for damage and loss of evidence is reduced as far as is practical during transportation by following the pre-agreed processes.

- Mortuary teams should already have been briefed regarding correct handling of human remains throughout the Post Mortem process.
- Confirmation of the fragile nature of recovered remains during the handover process is recommended.

PM phase considerations

Where logistically and practically possible, cases involving fragile remains should be imaged in the body bag prior to examination.

- This may include post-mortem computed tomography (PMCT).
- Any process or proposed process should be in line with INTERPOL DVI Guide Annexure 4, phase 2 PM and consultation with PM phase coordinator and forensic specialists.
- The prioritization of the anthropological and dental examination before the external examination should be considered when these analyses cannot be done simultaneously, in order to avoid additional handling – e.g. during undressing – that could alter remains with identifiers.
- Communication between forensic specialists is important to provide guidance for PM phase coordinators to preserve evidence pertinent to primary identifiers.