

	<p align="center"><b>TRAVIS COUNTY ESD #5 MANCHACA FIRE RESCUE</b></p> <p align="center"><b>Department Best Practices</b></p>	<h1>B319</h1>
	<p>Authorized by:</p>  <p align="right">Fire Chief Chris Barron</p>	<p><b>Effective:</b> 2/13/2018</p> <p><b>Rescinds:</b></p> <p><b>Reference:</b> AFD 319</p> <p><b>Application:</b> Shift Personnel</p>
<h2 align="center">Exigent Body Movement</h2>		

### I. Purpose

To establish guidelines for Manchaca Fire/Rescue when responding to events where, due to exigent circumstances, the movement or removal of a victim's body may occur.

### II. Background

In the normal course of their duties, firefighters will respond to a multitude of different types of events. Unfortunately, some of these events may involve the loss of life and can be emotionally charged situations for both the public and for first responders. Oftentimes, due to the circumstances and situations that may be present at these types of events, firefighters may find it necessary to act to safeguard themselves, assist with the preservation of evidence, and take precautions to protect the privacy of those affected by tragedy. Although past protocol has always dictated that obvious deceased on scene (DOS)/pronounced victims be left in place, it is recognized that certain situations (i.e. exigent circumstances) may dictate that the deceased, and/or other items of potential evidence may need to be relocated in order to ensure first responder safety, to aide in the preservation of any evidence that may be identified, and to protect the privacy of those involved.

Exigent circumstances are situations deemed an emergency condition requiring rapid removal of victims from the scene of an incident. These include circumstances that would cause the medics, firefighters, police officers or other first responders to believe that prompt action is necessary to prevent physical harm to themselves or others, or that would impede the provision of medical care, rescue, fire suppression or law enforcement efforts. Examples of an exigent circumstance may include but is not limited to a fire victim found during a search that is presumed to be a viable patient, a body that may potentially be washed away in rising flood water or a body that is blocking a highway.

*This document is a direct adaptation of the Austin Fire Department Policy on Exigent Body Movement. It has been adopted by Manchaca Fire Rescue as an Auto Aid partner to maximize standardization between partner agencies. Variations and additions to the language from the parent AFD document will be signified by text in italics. Generic changes that do not affect content such as formatting and changing "AFD" to "MFR" will not be noted.*

### III. Policy

- A. **State law.** The Texas Code of Criminal Procedures, Article 49.25, Subchapter B states that a “body shall not be disturbed or removed from the position in which it is found by any person without authorization from the medical examiner or authorized deputy, except for the purpose of preserving such body from loss or destruction or maintaining the flow of traffic on a highway”.
- B. **Intent.** Manchaca Fire/Rescue’s primary goal in any type of emergency is to save the lives of those in harm’s way, and nothing in this document shall be interpreted to mean otherwise. However, when a patient must be moved for the protection of the patient or response personnel, or a fatality event is suspected or confirmed, either through a pronouncement by medical officials or by a determination of obvious signs of death, members shall make every attempt to adhere to the guidelines outlined in this document. It is vital for firefighters to be cognizant of the fact that once a fatality has been confirmed, the victim and its surroundings are to be considered as items of potential evidence that will be examined by appropriate law enforcement agencies (reference Texas Code of Criminal Procedure, Title 1, Chapter 49, section 8 titled “Removal of Bodies”).

### IV. Best Practices

#### A. Movement of presumed viable patients.

1. **Relocation for safety.** After performing a risk/benefit analysis of the situation, firefighters shall make every attempt to rescue and or resuscitate any patient that is determined to be viable. These efforts may include the removal of a patient from a dangerous or hostile environment during the rescue or resuscitative efforts. Assessment and treatment procedures may be delayed in an effort to relocate the patient to a secure and safe location for response personnel.
2. **Relocation to ambulance.** When a patient is removed from their discovery location, firefighters should make every effort to move the patient to an area that is safe and where medical interventions can take place. If available and on scene, the patient compartment of an on-scene ambulance should be given primary consideration. The patient compartment of the ambulance will provide for maximum privacy, containment of trace evidence that could be on the victim, and rapid transportation from the scene if needed.
3. **Other relocation sites.** If an ambulance is not available or on-scene, firefighters should attempt to choose an area for the patient that will not interfere with other ongoing scene mitigation activities (i.e. other rescue efforts, fire suppression, hazmat mitigation, or ongoing law enforcement actions).
4. **Sight barriers.** If the rescue or resuscitative efforts are not successful, or the patient is pronounced, firefighters should consider using salvage covers or other like items to protect the privacy of those involved. As an example of actions that can be taken, salvage covers can be used along with rope,

pike poles, and/or other items available on scene to construct sight barriers to limit exposure of the victim to onlookers.

## **B. Movement of bodies for exigent circumstance.**

1. **First responder safety.** While it is always preferred that the victim remain in the location where the pronouncement is made or the determination of obvious signs of death, it is recognized that it may be necessary to remove the victim due to exigent circumstances. First responder safety shall always be the primary consideration when making this decision. When the decision to move a victim is made, firefighters should make a mental note about the position of the body and pass this information along to the appropriate law enforcement investigators.
2. **Highway incidents.** For incidents with a body on a highway, a memorandum of understanding (MOU) exists between the Austin Fire Department, area Public Safety agencies, and the Travis County Medical Examiner's Office. The MOU is maintained through the Austin Incident Management for Highways (AIM HIGH) Committee. The MOU specifically addresses the circumstances surrounding when a body may be moved in the interest of highway safety. The option for movement of a body under these circumstances should normally be at the direction of the onscene law enforcement agency. *As an auto aid partner, Manchaca Fire/Rescue will operate under this MOU during such incidents.*
3. **Removal of a body from the scene.** If necessary to remove the victim from the scene, Command should consult with the on-call EMS Medical Director to determine the most appropriate receiving facility for the victim's body.
4. **Trace evidence blankets.** When possible and appropriate, firefighters should attempt to utilize the Trace Evidence Blankets that are located in each ATCEMS Commander's vehicles, prior to movement of the victim. These blankets will aid law enforcement investigators by catching any trace evidence that may be upon the victim or their clothing.
5. **Use of trace evidence blankets.** When the Evidence Blankets are utilized, the following procedure shall be followed:
  - a. Two blankets will be used on each victim.
  - b. One blanket shall be placed beneath the victim
  - c. A second blanket will be placed on top of the victim
  - d. ATCEMS Commander vehicles will maintain a minimum stock of two (2) Trace Evidence Blankets at all times
  - e. The Austin Police Department will provide restocking of Trace Evidence Blankets following deployment.

6. **Statements to law enforcement.** Once the incident has been stabilized, all first responders who had contact with or took part in the movement of the victim will be interviewed by the appropriate law enforcement official(s). This may include providing a written statement detailing their observations and actions.