

GUIDANCE ON THE MANAGEMENT OF THE DEAD DURING THE 2026 NEPAL FLASH FLOOD RESPONSE

For recovery teams, health facilities, mortuaries and coordinating authorities

Medico Legal Society of Nepal



Purpose: This quick guidance document provides procedures for the Management of the Dead (MotD) during the current flash-flood emergency in Nepal. The priority is dignified recovery, documentation, identification, traceability, and refrigerated temporary storage of human remains pending identification, medico-legal procedures and release to families.

Operational note: This quick guidance should be used together with established medico-legal/forensic coordination mechanisms. It is intended for rapid operational use and does not replace a full disaster victim identification protocol. This document is based on the ICRC guideline “Management of Dead Bodies after Disasters: A Field Manual for First Responders” and modified to fit to the context.

KEY POINTS

- **The priority** is to record details from the body for **future identification**
- **DO NOT leave recovered bodies unattended or unrecorded.**
- **DO NOT cremate, bury or otherwise dispose of unidentified bodies before adequate documentation and authorization.**
- Refrigerate bodies as early as possible.
- Maintain the same unique code on the body, body bag, documentation, photographs and personal effects.

1. Timely Recovery

- Recover human remains as soon as it is safe to do so.
- Delays accelerate decomposition and may reduce the value of visual features, fingerprints and other identifying information.
- Search and recovery must not expose personnel to unstable riverbanks, landslides, damaged structures, electrical hazards or renewed flooding.

2. Personnel Safety

- Use standard precautions when handling human remains.
- Wear appropriate PPE such as heavy-duty or examination gloves, a water-impermeable apron and additional PPE as available and appropriate.
- Use a mask according to the task and local infection-prevention guidance.
- Cover cuts and abrasions. Perform hand hygiene after handling remains and after removing PPE.
- Floodwater and mud may be contaminated and may contain sharp objects. Personnel should avoid unnecessary manipulation of remains.

3. Recovery and Documentation

Recover the body or body parts to the nearest safe location. If possible, Steps 3.1–3.5 should be performed at the recovery site. If this is not possible, transport the body or body parts to the nearest designated health facility or documentation point and complete these steps there.

3.1 Allocate a Unique Code to Each Body or Set of Remains

Use a simple code that can be applied consistently across all affected districts and receiving facilities. It should include place of recovery, date, team identifier and serial number.

Example: RSW-270826-T1-009 (ninth recovery recorded by Team 1 in Rasuwa on 27 August 2026).

3.2 Prepare Labels

Prepare four identical durable labels. Use water-resistant body tags for Labels 1–3:

- Label 1: securely attached to the body/remains.
- Label 2: securely attached to the outside of the body bag.
- Label 3: attached to the separate bag containing personal effects/documents.
- Label 4: used as the visible identifier during photography.

3.3 Complete the Post-Mortem Documentation (PMD) Form

Complete the Post-Mortem Documentation (PMD) form (Annex 1), using exactly the same unique code for each body or body part.

Consider each body part as a separate body (unless separated during recovery or manipulation) and provide a unique code to each.

Maintain the register of the unique codes used.

3.4 Photograph the Body and Associated Items

- Wash the body with plain water, if available.
- Photograph the face where recognizable and appropriate.
- Gently retract the lips and photograph the teeth, capturing as much of the dentition as possible.
- Photograph the entire body and distinguishing features such as tattoos, scars, amputations, deformities or other unique features.
- Photograph clothing, jewellery, personal effects and identity documents.
- **Ensure the unique code is visible in all the photographs without obscuring relevant features.**

Note: Prefer a dedicated official camera/device. If an authorized phone must be used, restrict photography to designated personnel, transfer images promptly to secure official storage, verify the transfer, and delete local copies according to the responsible authority's data-protection procedure.

3.5 Pack and Tag the Body

- Use one body bag for one body.
- If body bags are unavailable, use a clean, strong, waterproof covering until a body bag becomes available.
- Do not place more than one body in a body bag.
- Do not mix loose body parts from different recovery locations or cases.
- When a body part is clearly separated from a body during recovery, keep it with that body and document this. If association is uncertain, assign and manage it separately until forensic assessment.

4. Transport and Refrigerated Temporary Storage

Following recovery and documentation, transport bodies to designated mortuaries or temporary refrigerated storage. Refrigeration preserves remains for identification and medico-legal examination and provides time for families to be traced.

- Aim for refrigerated storage at approximately 2–4°C where feasible.
- Maintain a body register at every storage site showing unique code, date/time received, recovery location, storage position, transfers, examination status and date/time of release.
- Keep personal effects separately packaged, sealed/secured and cross-referenced with the same unique code.

- Use existing hospital mortuaries first where capacity permits. If overwhelmed, establish additional refrigerated capacity such as refrigerated containers or other suitable temporary cold-storage systems under coordinated management.
- Ensure continuous electricity/fuel arrangements, temperature monitoring, access control, lighting, drainage, cleaning/disinfection arrangements and contingency planning for power failure.

5. Identification, Medico-Legal Examination and Release

- Make public announcements encouraging families to report missing loved ones, and establish designated centres to collect missing-person information using the form in Annex 2.
- A complete autopsy may not be performed unless the cause of death is suspicious. The examination should be focused on collection of identification data.
- Identification should be coordinated by the competent authorities and forensic/medico-legal services.
- Do not rely on visual recognition alone when decomposition, injury or uncertainty is present. Compare available ante-mortem and post-mortem information and use appropriate scientific identifiers when required.
- Record all transfers between recovery points, hospitals, mortuaries and other storage sites to preserve continuity and traceability.
- Release remains to the family only after the competent authority has completed the required identification and medico-legal procedures.
- Record the name and identification of the person receiving the body, date/time of release, authorizing official and final destination.

6. If Refrigerated Capacity Becomes Insufficient

- Escalate the need for additional cold-storage capacity early through the incident coordination structure. Prioritize expansion or redistribution of refrigerated storage rather than rapid burial or cremation of unidentified remains.
- Any exceptional temporary disposition measure should be decided by the competent authorities with forensic input and must preserve dignity, documentation, individual traceability and the possibility of future identification.
- Unidentified bodies should not be cremated.
- If existing refrigerated storage capacity is exhausted despite efforts to expand or redistribute capacity, temporary burial should be considered only as an exceptional measure authorized by the competent authorities with forensic input.

7. Data Management and Family Information

- Maintain one master list of recovered remains.
- Restrict access to personal data and photographs to authorized personnel.
- Back up records securely and preserve the link between the unique code, PMD form, photographs, personal effects and storage location.
- Coordinate information on missing persons and recovered bodies through designated official mechanisms to reduce duplication and misinformation.
- Communicate with families respectfully and avoid releasing unverified identities or photographs publicly.

Annex 1

DEAD BODY INFORMATION FORM

Unique code: (Use this same code on associated files, photographs or stored objects.)
Possible identity of body (Explain reasons for attributing a possible identity):
Person completing this form Name: _____ Official status: _____ Place & date: _____ Signature: _____
Recovery details (Include place, date, time, by whom found, and circumstances of finding. Give GPS coordinates if available. Indicate if other bodies were recovered in the same area, including name and possible relationship, if identified)

A. PHYSICAL DESCRIPTION

A.1	General condition (mark one):	a)	Complete body	Incomplete body (describe):		Body part (describe):	
		b)	Well preserved	Decomposed	Partially skeletonized	Fully skeletonized	Burnt
A.2	Apparent sex (mark one and describe evidence):	Male			Female		Undetermined
		Describe evidence (genitals, beard, etc):					
A.3	Age group (mark one):	Infant	Child	Adolescent	Adult	Elderly	
A.4	Physical description (measure or mark one):	Height (crown to heel with units):		Short	Average	Tall	
		Weight (specify units):		Slim	Average	Fat	
A.5	a) Head hair:	Colour:	Length:	Shape:	Baldness:	Other:	
	b) Facial hair:	None	Moustache	Beard	Colour:	Length:	
	c) Body hair	Describe:					

A.6 Distinguishing features: Physical (e.g. old amputations – limbs, fingers) Surgical prosthesis (e.g. artificial limb) Skin marks – (scars, tattoos, piercings, birthmarks, moles, etc.), specify location Apparent injuries: include location, side Dental condition: (crowns, gold teeth, adornments, false teeth). Describe any obvious features	Use additional sheets if needed. If possible, include a sketch of the main findings. Note if photographs taken (include unique code in all photographs)
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B. ASSOCIATED EVIDENCE

B.1	Clothing:	Type of clothes, colours, fabrics, brand names, repairs. Describe in as much detail as possible
B.2	Footwear:	Type (boot, shoes, sandals), colour, brand, size. Describe in as much detail as possible
B.3	Eyewear:	Glasses (colour, shape), contact lenses. Describe in as much detail as possible
B.4	Personal items:	Watch, jewellery, wallet, keys, photographs, mobile phone (include number), medication, cigarettes, etc. Describe in as much detail as possible
B.5	Identity Documents	Identity card, passport, driving licence, credit card, etc. Take photograph if possible (including the unique code in the photograph). Describe the information contained in them

C. RECORDED INFORMATION

C.1	Fingerprints:	Yes	No	Taken by whom? Stored where?
C.2	Photographs of body:	Yes	No	Taken by whom? Stored where?

C. STATUS OF BODY

Stored:	(mortuary, refrigerated container, temporary burial). Describe location
	Under whose responsibility:
Released:	To whom and date:
	Authorized by:
	Final destination:

Annex 2

MISSING PERSONS INFORMATION FORM

Interviewer name:
Interviewer contact details:
Interviewee(s) name(s):
Relationship(s) to missing person:
Contact details of interviewee: Address..... Telephone..... Email.....
Other contact person for missing person, if different from above: (who to contact in case of news). Give name and contact details

A. PERSONAL DETAILS

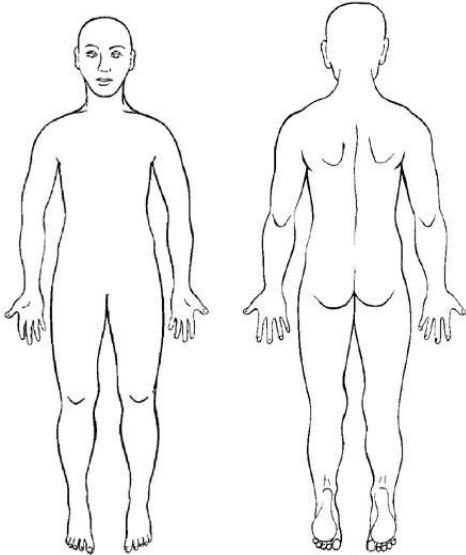
A.1	Missing person's name:	Include surname, father's and/or mother's name, nicknames, aliases				
A.2	Address/place of residence:	Last address, plus usual address if different from the former				
A.3	Marital status:	Single	Married	Divorced	Widowed	Partnership
A.4	Sex:	Male	Female	Other		
A.5	If female:	Unmarried name:				
		Pregnant	Children	How many?		
A.6	Age of missing person:	Date of birth:		Age:		
A.7	Place of birth, nationality, principal language					
A.8	Identity document: Main details (number, etc.)	If available, enclose photocopy or photograph of ID				
A.9	Fingerprints available?	Yes	No	Where:		
A.10	Occupation:					
A.11	Religion:					

B. EVENT

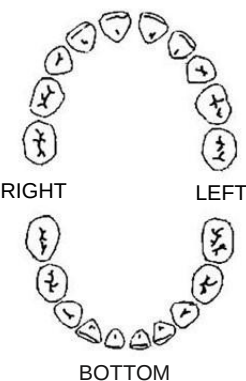
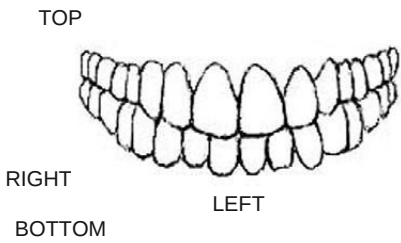
B.1	Circumstances leading to disappearance: (use additional sheet if necessary)	Place, date, time, events leading to disappearance, other victims and witnesses who last saw missing person alive (include name and address)			
	Has this case been registered elsewhere?	Yes	No	With whom/where:	
B.2	Are other family members missing; if so, have they been registered/identified?	List name, relationship, status:			

C. PHYSICAL DESCRIPTION

C.1	General description (indicate exact measure, or approximate AND circle the corresponding group):	Height (exact/estimated?):	Short	Average	Tall
		Weight:	Slim	Average	Obese
C.2	Ethnic group/skin colour:				

C.3	Eye colour:					
C.4	a) Head hair:	Colour:	Length:	Shape:	Baldness:	Other:
	b) Facial hair:	None	Moustache	Beard	Colour:	Length:
	c) Body hair	Describe				
C.5	Distinguishing features: Physical – e.g. shape of ears, eyebrows, nose, chin, hands, feet, nails, deformities	Continue on additional sheets if needed. Use drawings and/or mark the main findings on the body chart 				
	Skin marks – Scars, tattoos, piercings, birthmarks, moles, circumcision, etc.					
	Past injuries/ amputations – include location, side, fractured bone, joint (e.g. knee), and if person limped					
	Other major medical conditions – operations, diseases, etc.					
	Implants – pacemaker, artificial hip, IUD, metal plates or screws from operation, prosthesis, etc.					
	Types of medications –(used at time of disappearance)					

ANNEX 2

C.6	Dental condition: Please describe general characteristic, especially taking into account the following: • Missing teeth • Broken teeth • Decayed teeth • Discolorations, such as stains from disease, smoking or other • Gaps between teeth • Crowded or crooked (overlapping) teeth • Jaw inflammation (abscess) • adornments (inlays, filed teeth etc) • any other special feature Dental Treatment: Has the Missing Person received any dental treatment such as • Crowns, such as gold-capped teeth • Color: gold, silver, white • Fillings (incl. color if known) • False teeth (dentures)- upper, lower • Bridge or other special dental treatment • Extractions	If possible, use a drawing, and/or indicate the described features in the chart below If the missing person is a child, please indicate which baby teeth have erupted, which have fallen out and which permanent teeth have erupted and use the chart below BABY/PRIMARY TEETH  ADULT/PERMANENT TEETH 
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D. PERSONAL EFFECTS

D.1	Clothing: (worn when last seen/ at time of disaster)	Type of clothes, colours, fabrics, brand names, repairs. Describe in as much detail as possible
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D.2	Footwear: (worn when last seen/ at time of disaster)	Type (boot, shoes, sandals), colour, brand, size. Describe in as much detail as possible
D.3	Eyewear:	Glasses (colour, shape), contact lenses. Describe in as much detail as possible
D.4	Personal items:	Watch, jewellery, wallet, keys, photographs, mobile phone (include number), medication, cigarettes, etc. Describe in as much detail as possible
D.5	Identity documents: (which the person was/might have been carrying when last seen/at time of disaster)	Identity card, passport driving licence, credit card, etc. Take photocopy if possible. Describe the information contained in them
D.6	Habits:	Smoker (cigarettes, cigars, pipes), chewing tobacco, betel nut, alcohol, etc. Please describe, including quantity
D.7	Doctors, medical records, X-rays:	Give details of doctor, dentist, optometrist, or other
D.8	Photographs of missing person:	If available, enclose photographs or copies of photographs: as recent and as clear as possible, ideally smiling (with teeth visible), and also photographs of clothing worn when disappeared

Note: By signing this form, the interviewee understands that the information collected in this form will be used only for the search and identification of the missing person. Its content is confidential and any use other than for the search and identification of the missing person requires the explicit consent of the interviewee.

Place and date of interview:

Interviewer signature:

Interviewee signature:

If requested, a copy of this form with contact details of the interviewer should be made available to the interviewee.