SKELETAL REMAINS

Don'ts

- **Don't excavate the skeleton using heavy machinery or large shovels.**
- **Don't mix bones that can be identified as left or right.**

- Secure scene and immediately notify DCI SDFL of the discovery of human skeletal remains.
- Try to recover all bones present.
- Recover all trace evidence found with the body.
- It is impossible to determine when insect evidence may prove useful in a death investigation. Therefore, process an Entomology Kit at the scene, following the directions in the kit.
- Package clothing and other evidence items separately from skeletal remains.
- Photograph and map all bones prior to recovery.
- Label each package with the biohazard symbol and label.

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Each SD DCI crime scene unit is trained in the detection and proper recovery of surface and buried remains. SD DCI does not conduct examinations on skeletal remains. The medical examiner or designee or a trained forensic anthropologist should perform these examinations. Contact SDFL for information on available resources for Archeology and Anthropology examinations.

No two skeleton scenes are exactly alike. Variations, whether congenital or acquired, are used to identify or eliminate a missing person who could be the skeletonized victim. In many cases, if most of the skeleton can be located and properly collected, the following conclusions may be reached:

- estimations of race, stature, age, and sex
- determination of the possible cause of death through damage to skeleton
- evidence of possible ante mortem trauma or certain diseases through X-ray and microscopic examination
- estimation of time of death through examination of associated items such as coins, clothing, shoes, or other materials

Collection and Submission of Evidence

a. Careful examination and collection of skeletal remains are necessary to achieve accuracy and to facilitate reassembly. If possible, the medical examiner or designee should see the bones at the site while they are being excavated.

b. Take good general photographs with scale of the bones and associated evidence prior to collection.

c. Inventory the bones while they are being removed from the ground.

d. Some smaller bones are extremely fragile and decay rapidly. Even when present, they may be overlooked because their coloring can be similar to the soil.

e. Proper packaging, labeling, and transportation of skeletal remains is important. Packaging should be done in a manner that makes the examination more rapid and should be done at the scene to avoid loss of small bones and teeth. Use separate containers for each hand and foot and label right and left.

f. Package evidence items found with the skeletal remains separately using proper procedures outlined in this manual.