



Bundeskriminalamt



Identifying victims of major incidents in Germany and abroad

Information for individuals missing a person and individuals bereaved of a loved one

Introductory remarks

You are a relative or a person close to someone missing in connection with an incident. You hope that the person you are missing has not been harmed or has even died. But yet, this may be the case.

To give you peace of mind, the Disaster Victim Identification Team (DVI Germany) of the Bundeskriminalamt (BKA) has the task to positively identify persons who have died in an incident.

Dignity and respect are of utmost importance to the members of DVI Germany when dealing with the deceased.

This brochure gives answers to your questions, what to do and what you will be confronted with after you have filed a missing person report with the police.

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DVI GERMANY - WHO IS THAT?

DVI Germany is a specialised unit of the BKA tasked with the positive and reliable identification of victims of catastrophes, disasters and attacks.

It consists of criminal police officers and other specialists and experts who are to let you know with certainty and as soon as possible if the person missing has died as a result of the incident in question.

ON WHAT OCCASIONS IS DVI GERMANY SENT ON A MISSION?

In Germany, DVI Germany may be called in if a high number of casualties are to be expected as a result of a major incident.

Abroad, the German DVI team may be called in if it is to be expected that persons from Germany have lost their lives as a result of an incident.

HOW DOES DVI GERMANY WORK?

To identify deceased persons positively and reliably, DVI Germany applies internationally recognised identification methods. The BKA secures from the deceased all physical evidence required for positive identification, for instance:

- finger-, palm- and footprints (dactyloscopy),
- genetic material (DNA) and
- dental information.

Subsequently, this evidence is compared to evidence the missing persons left at home or evidence available from physicians or dentists, like

- finger, palm and foot prints secured at the missing persons' home,
- DNA traces on, for instance, toothbrushes, clothes worn, bedclothes,
- information on medical treatments,
- dental records.

These methods are used to identify a person positively. Since the finger palm and foot prints, the dental status and the DNA of each human being are highly distinctive individual features they can be reliably linked to a person.



**Comparison
of dental
data**

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Beyond that, it is very helpful if you can provide the police with photographs of the person you are missing which show as many prominent features as possible (like scars, tattoos, eye-catching jewellery, portraits with a good view of the teeth).

WHAT CAN YOU DO TO ENSURE THAT THE PERSON YOU ARE MISSING CAN BE IDENTIFIED AS SOON AS POSSIBLE?

If required, an exact description of the missing person is created with your help by means of a questionnaire. The questionnaire is very comprehensive in order to obtain as many details as possible of the missing person.

In most cases, the police also require access to the missing person's home or last address.



Securing latent prints

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At these places officers search for latent finger-, palm- and footprints as well as items possibly yielding DNA traces (for instance, toothbrushes, clothes worn, bedclothes). If you are genetically related to the missing person, you may also be asked to provide a saliva sample, on a voluntary basis, for DNA comparison. The trace material and the samples are used only for the identification of the missing person and are destroyed afterwards.

The trace material, the items found and the samples taken are secured by the police. Moreover, the items belonging to the missing person are taken away, for example for a DNA examination at a forensic laboratory. They will be returned to you after having been examined.

Even if you may find it hard to answer detailed questions, grant officers access to the missing person's home and allow them to take personal belongings with them you provide important assistance in the identification process.

WHY IS YOUR PRESENCE AT THE MISSING PERSON'S HOME OR IN THE MISSING PERSON'S ENVIRONMENT SO IMPORTANT?

The desire to travel to the place of the incident is understandable.

However, for a fast collection of data the local police need a contact from the missing person's personal environment who can easily be reached and is able to supply a maximum of information.

For this reason, you can most efficiently provide assistance in the identification process if you first stay near the missing person's home. With your help the police can then collect the data required for identification without delay.

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If you nevertheless wish to travel to the place of the incident, please make sure that another person has a key to the home of the missing person and is able to provide the police with as many relevant details as possible.

This person should inform the police of his/her availability as a contact, should be reachable and should enable the police to enter the missing person's home.

HOW LONG DOES IT TAKE TO IDENTIFY A DECEASED PERSON?

Depending on the kind of incident and the number of victims, the positive identification of the deceased may take several days or weeks.

The police will give you the details of a contact person whom you can ask for an update of the situation at any time.
(Please see page 12).

WHEN AND HOW DO YOU GET A CONFIRMATION OF SUCCESSFUL IDENTIFICATION?

As soon as a victim has been positively identified, the local police will - as quickly as possible - notify the person named in advance as the addressee of the identification report.

Thereafter, this person is in charge of sharing the information with relatives and acquaintances. We trust you will understand that the police cannot inform all relatives and acquaintances individually.

DOES DVI GERMANY ALSO PROVIDE INFORMATION ON THE CAUSE OF DEATH?

DVI Germany itself does not investigate the cause of death.

If - due to the nature of the incident - a public prosecutor's office initiated proceedings, a police authority would be entrusted with the investigation, including enquiries into the cause of death.

Relatives of a deceased person may file an application for the inspection of records with the appropriate public prosecutor's office and thus obtain information on the identified cause of death.

WHAT HAPPENS IF IT IS NOT POSSIBLE TO IDENTIFY A PERSON?

DVI Germany makes every effort to identify all victims beyond doubt.

However, very occasionally the incident may have been so massive, for instance due to extreme heat exposure, that mortal remains can no longer be recovered. In this case, no data can be obtained from the victim which, in consequence, precludes identification.

In the period preceding positive identification, the missing person is regarded by law as "missing and presumed dead". After expiry of the time limits set by law, i.e. the Act on persons missing and presumed dead (Verschollenheitsgesetz), missing persons may be declared dead.

HOW IS THE DECEASED PERSON REPATRIATED AFTER COMPLETION OF THE IDENTIFICATION PROCESS?

If the missing person has died abroad, our Federal Foreign Office (Auswärtiges Amt) is your point of contact for all questions arising about the transportation of the body back to Germany and can provide information on all steps to be taken. The central telephone number of our Federal Foreign Office is: +49 30/1817-0.

If the missing person has died in Germany, the body is transported back by the undertaker commissioned by the deceased person's relatives. Relatives should discuss and decide in advance on which undertaker to engage.

HOW ARE THE PERSONAL BELONGINGS OF THE DECEASED PERSON RETURNED TO YOU?

Personal belongings found to be linked to the deceased are seized and documented by DVI Germany when data are collected both for identification purposes and to secure the estate later on.

DVI Germany cleans the personal belongings, as far as possible, before handing them over. However, please be prepared that the items may have been damaged as a result of the incident and may no longer be in their original condition.

The undertaker commissioned to repatriate or transport the deceased back also returns his/her personal belongings to the family.

Personal belongings are regularly returned to relatives entitled to inherit. It is their charge to pass the items on within the family.

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If a public prosecutor's office has initiated proceedings in the aftermath of the incident, the deceased person's personal belongings may be attached by the judicial authority as means of evidence.

In this case, the personal belongings cannot be returned until they have been released by the public prosecutor's office in charge. Through your appropriate contact, you may actively apply for return or you may choose to waive your claim to these items.

Responsibility for returning the deceased person's belongings lies with the police authority entrusted with the investigation.

WHERE DO YOU GET FURTHER INFORMATION ABOUT YOUR RIGHTS AND REMEDIES AS A BEREAVED PERSON?

Bereaved persons may be entitled to public compensation, for instance as a result of a deliberate act of violence pursuant to our German Victims Compensation Act (Opferentschädigungsgesetz). This includes, inter alia, maintenance for dependants, funeral allowance and death grant. These benefits must be applied for. Further information can be obtained from your police contact (see page 12) or on the Internet at:

<https://www.bmas.de>

(Search term: legal provisions concerning victims compensation [Opferentschädigungsrecht])

and

<https://www.polizei-beratung.de/opferinformationen/>

Persons responsible

This brochure was produced by DVI Gemany, supported by expert advice from our Federal Office of Civil Protection and Disaster Assistance (Bundesamt für Bevölkerungsschutz und Katastrophenhilfe) and with the involvement of our Federal and Land police forces. Further information (only in German language) may be obtained on the Internet at www.bka.de/idko

Contact

The following person is available to you as a central point of contact for issues concerning the identification of the person you are missing:

Contact

Authority:

Name:

Telephone no.:

Mobile phone no.:

Fax no.:

E-Mail:

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