



# NATIONAL COMMISSION ON FORENSIC SCIENCE

**NIST**  
National Institute of  
Standards and Technology  
U.S. Department of Commerce

## Recommendation to the Attorney General National Disaster Call Center

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<b>Subcommittee</b>
Medicolegal Death Investigation
<b>Status</b>
Approved by the Commission

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<b>Action by Attorney General</b>	[dd/mm/yy]

### Commission Action

On June 21, 2016, the Commission voted to adopt this Recommendation by a more than two-thirds majority affirmative vote (93% yes, 7% no)

### Overview

There is a critical need for a National Disaster Call Center (NDCC) capability to more effectively and efficiently assist in the development of a victim manifest following a large-scale mass-casualty event. This center should be distinguished from 911 systems, as the goal is to reduce the impact that these unexpected events place on these local systems following a large-scale mass-casualty event. Based on previous disaster data, a call center could receive as many as 100 calls per missing person. The NDCC would be available for families and significant others to call when their loved ones go missing after a significant disaster event. Mass-casualty incidents may span jurisdictions and cross state lines, hence necessitating a national solution. It is neither realistic nor practical for local jurisdictions to manage, maintain, or financially sustain these centers individually.

### Recommendation

The National Commission on Forensic Science recommends that the Attorney General take the following action:

- **Recommendation: The Attorney General should direct the Department of Justice to develop, establish, and maintain a National Disaster Call Center to support the victim-accounting process.**

The critical need to centralize a call center became apparent as far back as the London Blitz of World War II, during which families needed a place to call to report missing persons or to inquire

into the whereabouts of their loved ones. Consequently, England became the first country to develop a national call center for disaster victim identification, known today as the U.K. National Casualty Call System. Similarly, New York City also established such a system in response to the need realized in the wake of the attack on the World Trade Center on September 11, 2001. NYC received more than 30,000 reports from families and others about missing persons associated with the 2,753 known victims from the attack, and this number is likely a dramatic underestimation, because the call center did not exist during the immediate aftermath of the attack. Each call represents potentially valuable information toward the identification of a victim. Additionally, jurisdictions are generally unprepared to receive the immense number of calls that may be involved with any given event. For example, the U.K. National Casualty Call Center handled 121,000 calls in the 7 days following the London bombing incident in 2005.

One of the primary considerations to be addressed is the considerable cost to any individual jurisdiction associated with maintaining a comprehensive call center that stands at the ready in case of an incident. This is an impossible burden for a small county, and it is unrealistic for the larger jurisdictions to assume the entirety of the burden, which is more than just cost, on behalf of the smaller jurisdictions in their regions. It is both critical and logical that a well-trained and well-prepared national call center capability be developed to respond to any disaster within the United States, or possibly abroad, if significant numbers of American victims are impacted. NDCC should receive financial and personnel support from the Department of Homeland Security and the National Disaster Medical System of the Department of Health and Human Services, which also maintains the Disaster Mortuary Operations teams (DMORT) that provide response services and assistance to medicolegal death investigation authorities.

The Department of Justice (DOJ) should consider leveraging the National Missing and Unidentified Persons System (NamUs), a centralized repository and resource center, wholly owned by DOJ, created primarily to support law enforcement, medical examiners, and coroners with long-term missing and unidentified persons case management and identification within the United States. The NamUs system is currently developing a new tool that will provide software support for critical incident events. Law enforcement officers are wholly responsible for the collection, investigation, and resolution of missing persons reports. Medical examiners and coroner's offices are responsible for the identification of all unidentified remains cases within their jurisdictions. It is critical that an effective system have both a well-equipped call center component and a technology-management component that can be used in collaboration with federal, state, local, and nongovernmental humanitarian organizations that prepare and respond to incidents, accidents, and disasters. The responsibility to account for all victims involved in a mass-casualty incident lies firmly within the law enforcement and medicolegal investigative communities, and we believe the Department of Justice has ultimate responsibility to assist these stakeholder communities in meeting their missions.