



**Armed Forces Medical Examiner System**  
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## **ARMED FORCES MEDICAL EXAMINER SYSTEM**

**Current as of: February 2025**

**Mission: Investigate Deaths · Identify the Fallen · Improve Readiness and Warfighter Survivability**

The Armed Forces Medical Examiner System (AFMES) is committed to being the Department of Defense's leader in providing medicolegal services and emerging technologies essential for the readiness, sustainability and survivability of our military service members. As the only medicolegal death investigation system of the U.S. federal government, AFMES is the only medical examiner system authorized to support the DoD and other federal agencies with comprehensive forensic investigative services, to include forensic pathology, DNA forensics, forensic toxicology and medical mortality surveillance.

The AFMES also works closely with the criminal investigative arms of all military service branches, to conduct independent forensic investigations of crime scenes. Equipment is on hand and available for recovery efforts in any environmental conditions. Operations occur worldwide in less than 48 hours of notice.

### *Forensic Pathology Investigations*

The Forensic Pathology Investigations (FPI) division is the center of medicolegal investigations for the AFMES and is responsible for determining the cause and manner of death and positive identification for all active-duty members who die within federal jurisdiction. The AFMES also has memorandums of understanding/agreement to support a variety of additional federal agencies. Operational deployment can be accomplished worldwide when required, Board certified forensic pathologists, forensic anthropologists, medicolegal death investigators, photographers, and histo-technicians all support this key function.

In addition to performing these investigations FPI conducts mortality surveillance on all U.S. service members, providing information to improve readiness and warfighter survivability. They also present and publish relevant findings related to service member mortality. FPI supports educational training programs for pathology residents, medical students, military lawyers and investigative agents, flight surgeons, and mortuary affairs personnel.

## *DoD DNA Operations*

The DoD DNA Operations provides the DoD and other federal agencies with DNA mission support in the areas of personnel accounting; defense, national security and intelligence; law enforcement; and humanitarian missions. It's comprised of two subdivisions: The Armed Forces DNA Identification Laboratory (AFDIL) and the Armed Forces Repository of Specimen Samples for the Identification of Remains (AFRSSIR).

The AFDIL is the sole DoD DNA laboratory tasked with current and past conflicts human remains identification efforts. The team also provides scientific consultation, emerging technologies and educational services in the field of forensic DNA analysis to other federal and international agencies.

The Current Day Operations section is responsible for supporting AFMES with current medicolegal death investigation identification requirements, the Past Accounting Operations section provides DNA testing and reporting services to the Defense POW/MIA Accounting Agency (DPAA) for use in the scientific identification of service members missing from previous American armed conflicts and the Family Reference-Laboratory Automation section is responsible for processing all mitochondrial DNA and nuclear DNA family references for use in the DPAA accounting process.

The AFRSSIR is responsible for managing, coordinating, protecting privacy, and maintaining the collection of DNA reference specimens for all active duty, reserve, and National Guard service members, deployable DoD civilians, Coast Guard and select Department of State and contractor personnel. Collection from all services members is mandatory under procedures established by the military services in 1992. Currently, AFRSSIR stores more than eight and half million reference specimens.

## *Forensic Toxicology*

The Division of Forensic Toxicology (FORTOX) is the DoD's centralized laboratory which performs routine toxicological examinations. The division has four subdivisions: Post-Mortem & Human Performance Laboratory; Special Forensic Toxicology Drug Testing Laboratory; Joint Military Working Dog Laboratory; and the DoD Drug Testing Quality Assurance Laboratory.

The division's Post-Mortem and Human Performance Testing Laboratory performs testing in support of autopsies, all military aircraft, ground and ship mishaps, biological specimens from the investigative arms of all military branches, legal alcohol determinations, fitness-for-duty inquiries and selected forensic cases of national interest.

The Special Forensic Toxicology Drug Testing Laboratory provides specialized forensic analysis for drugs of emerging abuse and the quality assurance laboratory perform quality oversight for the DoD DTP through certification, proficiency testing and inspections.

The Joint Military Working Dog (MWD) Laboratory is responsible for securing, creating, distributing and inspecting the narcotics used in training aids for all Department of Defense MWD kennels around the world.

The DoD Drug Testing Quality Assurance Laboratory performs quality oversight of the DoD Drug Testing Program through certification, proficiency testing and inspections and performs commercial product testing in support of military legal proceedings.