



INTERPOL

## FACT SHEET

# *Disaster victim identification*

Disaster Victim Identification, or DVI, is the method used to identify victims of mass casualty incidents, either manmade or natural.

### ► INTERPOL PROTOCOLS

A major disaster – such as an earthquake or terrorist attack – may result in the death of nationals from many different countries and damage or destroy a country's emergency-response infrastructure.

A coordinated international effort can speed up the recovery and identification of victims, enabling families to begin the healing process and societies to rebuild. In the event of a terrorist incident, DVI can also help to identify possible attackers.

Member countries can call on INTERPOL's DVI services in the aftermath of a disaster:

- Assistance from the Command and Coordination Centre;
- Coordination with other international or intergovernmental organizations, such as the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), International Commission on Missing Persons (ICMP) and International Organization for Migration (IOM);
- An Incident Response Team (IRT) to provide further assistance, such as on-site DVI support or connection to INTERPOL's databases;
- Downloadable DVI guide and forms;
- DVI software.

It is rarely possible to identify a victim of a major disaster by visual recognition; fingerprints, dental records or DNA samples are often required for a conclusive identification.

### ► SETTING THE STANDARD

INTERPOL's DVI activities are supported by a Working Group, made up of forensic and police experts who meet twice a year to discuss improvements to DVI procedures and standards.

The Working Group publishes the Guide to Disaster Victim Identification which is the unique globally accepted standard for DVI protocols. First produced in 1984, it is updated every five years.

Policies, guidelines and training programmes have been produced in the following areas:

- Victim care and family support;
- Occupational care for DVI teams;
- Compliance with international standards and forensic quality assurance controls;
- Information-sharing and exchange;
- Operational assistance to countries which lack DVI capacity.



## Disaster victim identification

### ► FOUR STEPS TO IDENTIFICATION

It can take a long time to accurately identify victims, especially if a large number of people were killed. The four stages are:

- 1. Scene examination:** Depending on the incident, and where it happened, it can take days or even weeks for all the victims and their property to be recovered.
- 2. Post-mortem (PM) data:** The human remains are examined by specialists to detect forensic evidence. This can include:
  - Fingerprints;
  - Odontology , or dental examination;
  - DNA profiling
  - Physical indications – tattoos, scars or surgical implants which may be unique to the victim.

Visual identification is not considered to be accurate.

- 3. Ante-mortem or AM data:** Dental and medical records, fingerprints and DNA are recovered from the victims' homes or provided by family members.
- 4. Reconciliation:** Once the PM and AM data is collected, a team of specialists compares and reconciles the two sets of information to identify the victims.

### ► DEPLOYMENTS OF INTERPOL INCIDENT RESPONSE TEAMS

At the request of member countries, we can deploy a specialized team to assist national law enforcement agencies with DVI efforts following different types of disaster.

#### Manmade disasters

##### Port explosion in Beirut, Lebanon (2020)

Our crisis response continued, despite the COVID-19 pandemic, as we deployed DVI experts to provide on-site assistance following the explosion that killed more than 200 people and destroyed part of the city.

#### Terrorist attacks

##### Easter bombings, Sri Lanka (2019)

In the aftermath of coordinated suicide bombings, an IRT supported local officers with the collection of post- and ante-mortem data of foreign victims. At the end of the operation, all the human remains had been identified.

#### Natural disasters

##### Asian tsunami (2004)

More than 2,000 specialists from 31 countries were involved in the identification process in Thailand alone, where 5,000 victims were identified. This remains the largest single-incident DVI operation conducted to date.



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#### ► CONTACT INFORMATION:

Contact us via our web site. For matters relating to specific crime cases, please contact your local police or the INTERPOL National Central Bureau in your country.

► **Twitter:** @INTERPOL\_HQ

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See our recent DVI IRT deployments  
on our public webpage

