

*This article was written to help guide property managers on what to do should there be an event on their property.*

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## **The proper response to a homicide, suicide, and human decomposition on your property.**

By: John V. DiGulio, CEO, USA Decon

What are the appropriate steps to take should a homicide, suicide, incident involving blood and body fluids, or unattended death (human decomposition) occur on your property? Of course, the first step is to immediately contact the local law enforcement. Once you have contacted the local police or sheriff's department, lock and secure the unit. Inform your employees and maintenance staff to ensure that the unit is not disturbed.

The investigation of the incident will be handled by law enforcement once they're on site. During this investigation, they will evaluate the scene and they may interview your employees and/or residents to document the circumstances related to the event. You and your staff should be available to answer any questions and provide access to the property.

In addition to coordinating access to the property and your staff, your management of the incident may include:

- 1) Support of normal business and maintenance operations during the incident and its investigation
- 2) Counseling any employee or resident impacted by the event
- 3) Property owner and/or corporate office communication
- 4) Fielding media questions or managing their presence on the property
- 5) Contracting containment and disposal of the waste generated from the event

The property owner is responsible for cleaning the contaminated environment once the body has been removed and the police release the scene. This type of cleaning is not for your maintenance staff. Not only is biohazard remediation potentially upsetting, it also puts your staff and residents at risk for HIV, hepatitis, other bloodborne diseases, and bacterial hazards. And it could subject your company to OSHA fines, unnecessary scrutiny, medical expenses, and employee/resident/community liability.

For these types of biohazard remediation services, you need to use a company that specializes in these cleaning processes. In addition to this technical specialty, be sure to confirm that the company is bonded and insured and that it is OSHA, EPA, and Centers for Disease Control compliant.

The waste produced from these environments is federally regulated by the Resource Conservation and Recovery Act of 1976 (RCRA). Under this act, a cradle-to-grave tracking system (waste manifest) is in place to ensure that biological waste recovered from these contaminated environments is contained, transported, and disposed of properly to protect public health. In addition to this federal coverage, individual state regulation may add additional requirements to the containment and disposal of the waste.

The company contracted to contain and remove the biological waste will have a waste manifest if they are compliant. This waste manifest is provided for your records to protect you from liability that may arise from any portion of the waste chain of custody.

In house cleaning and disposing of the waste in the municipal waste stream (garbage collection) exposes your company to liability from your staff, the local community due to the standby disposal on the street and/or garbage bin, garbage collectors, and the staff of the permanent disposal facility.

If followed, the steps provided above will minimize the traumatic aspects associated with a contaminated environment, protect your health, as well as, your staff, residents and the community, and properly shield your company from any potential liability associated with the remediation of the scene.