

## **The mortuary at Alconbury Information for family and friends**

When someone dies in a disaster their body is taken into the care of the coroner, who will be responsible for it until he or she is satisfied with the identification of the person and the police have finished their first investigations. Only once the coroner and police have completed these investigations will the body be released to the family.

Following the recent incident a dedicated mortuary facility has been opened to deal with the bodies of those who have died.

As a member of family or a friend you can see the body, so long as the next of kin agrees. However you will need to decide when you want to do this. You may prefer to wait until the body is released to the family so that the viewing can take place at a funeral home, in an environment that is specifically designed for this to take place.

However you may wish to view the body at the mortuary site, especially if the police investigation or other factors mean that there is a delay in its release to the family. This leaflet is designed to explain what to expect if you decide to visit the mortuary.

### **Where is the mortuary and what is it?**

The mortuary has been set up specifically to deal with this incident, so it is not a permanent facility. It has been opened on a former airbase at Alconbury, about five miles north-west of Huntingdon, and is based around a former military bunker. The bunker is surrounded by a series of temporary structures that house workspace for some of the people and facilities needed. The airbase is a very large site and there are also commercial companies based there.

### **Why has it been set up at Alconbury?**

The needs of a temporary mortuary are very specific and there aren't that many sites that fit all the requirements. Vivaly the site at Alconbury benefits from good security, a large amount of space and very good access. The bunker also provides the electricity, drainage and water facilities that are needed for mortuary processes.

### **What do the site and mortuary look like?**

You will notice that the airbase is a very large site, and you may notice a large number of shipping containers as one of the companies that operates from there stores these containers.

At the mortuary itself you might see the outside of the bunker. However the areas that you will be visiting will be contained in the temporary structures outside the bunker – often described as a 'tented village'. As the mortuary is

very much a working environment you may come across some of the many people who are involved in the work going on there, such as administration teams, volunteers, or even catering staff.

You might also notice members of the press as you approach the airbase, but they will not be allowed access within the site and you will not have to speak to them.

### **Can I just decide to visit myself?**

Unfortunately not. The mortuary is a working environment so staff there need to know beforehand that you are coming so that they have time to make sure there are staff to help you when you arrive. It is also very important that the security of the site is maintained as the work taking place there may be part of a police investigation, so a close control has to be kept of who visits the site.

### **What will happen at the mortuary?**

Before you visit the mortuary you will meet up with staff or volunteers from various organisations who will be accompanying you on your visit. These may include Police Family Liaison Officers, members of your local council's social care staff, volunteers or faith representatives. You will gather somewhere away from the mortuary - possibly at an assistance centre that has been set up either near where the incident happened or near the mortuary site. Before you travel on together to the mortuary you will have a chance to ask any questions you may have and find out what support is available to you.

You will then travel together to the mortuary where staff will have prepared the body for you to view. When you first arrive you will be taken to an area in the tented village where you can gather your thoughts and speak to any faith representatives or voluntary agencies who will be able to support you if you wish. You will then be taken through to the viewing area. If there are any religious symbols that you would like in this area this can be arranged. You can take your time over the viewing. Once you have finished viewing the body you can once again take the time to gather your thoughts before you leave the site.

### **Where can I find out more?**

You can talk to any of the people who are providing you with support following the incident – depending on the incident these may be from the police, the local council or voluntary agencies.

There are leaflets produced by an organisation called Disaster Action that explain more about what happens when somebody dies in a disaster. You may have already been given these, but you can also find them on their website: [www.disasteraction.org.uk](http://www.disasteraction.org.uk)

There is also a leaflet called When Sudden Death Occurs which is available through your Coroner Service.