



Personal Effects (PE) Management Guidance

Personal effects (PE) are items worn or carried with a person at the time of travel, including carry-on luggage or checked baggage, but not items shipped as cargo.

Below is guidance for the response community to effectively manage PE following air carrier and rail passenger accidents that meet the criteria established under **49 U.S.C. § 1136 (a)** and **49 U.S.C. § 1139**. Each event presents unique circumstances that will influence how this guidance is applied. The typical approach flows as follows:

1. Identify key stakeholders and primary points of contact.

- The presiding medicolegal jurisdiction** (i.e., medical examiner/coroner) will typically take custody of PE physically associated with fatally injured passengers.
- The NTSB or law enforcement** may take custody of PE that hold potential evidentiary significance.
- The air or rail passenger carrier** is responsible for all other PE, per their legislated obligations. Carriers may collaborate with their insurance and contracted service providers to recover, clean, and return PE.
- Hospitals** may have custody of PE transported with survivors.

2. Define the scope of the PE management operation.

- Participating organizations should plan for, monitor, and provide updates on the status of the PE management operation at the **Joint Family Support Operations Center (JFSOC)**.
- Determine where PE are located (e.g., scene, medical examiner's office, hospitals), and define the recovery, chain of custody, claims, and final disposition processes.
- Develop a communications strategy with survivors and family members** that addresses key organizations involved in PE management, recovery of items from

the scene, cleaning and cataloging, the claims process, and final disposition of unclaimed items.

- Ensure there is a long-term (i.e., post-scene) process for key stakeholders to communicate regarding ongoing PE management operations.

3. Recovery of PE from the scene.

- Conduct an initial scene survey to:
 - Assess the condition and distribution of PE, the influence of terrain and other environmental factors.
 - Develop a search, documentation, and recovery strategy.
 - Ideally, search an area twice the distance and depth from the location of the farthest and deepest PE item located using standard crime scene search methods.
- Conduct a final scene survey to ensure all reasonable recovery actions have been completed.
- The PE Survey Team should be comprised of:
 - NTSB staff
 - Law enforcement
 - Medical Examiner/Coroner
 - Property owner/representative
 - Air/rail passenger carrier, insurance, and contracted service provider (if applicable)

4. Long-term monitoring of scene.

- Stakeholders should encourage the property owner to notify law enforcement if any PE are located after the on-scene phase has concluded.
 - Significant weather events, remediation activities, and other activities may result in additional PE becoming visible.
- Stakeholders should, in consultation with the property owner, develop a plan to survey the scene approximately 30-60 days before any anniversary or memorial events.
- The NTSB should be made aware of any PE or other items identified during these activities. The NTSB will coordinate with the appropriate stakeholders regarding disposition of these items.

For additional information, refer to the **Federal Family Assistance Framework for Aviation Disasters** and the **Federal Family Assistance Plan for Rail Passenger Disasters**.

This guidance only applies if the NTSB is the lead federal investigative agency. Law enforcement will direct the PE management process if the crash is determined to have occurred because of an intentional act.



CONTACT NTSB TDA

Transportation Disaster Assistance staff can be reached at
(202) 314-6185
assistance@ntsb.gov