**The Three Foundation Aquatic Death Investigation Questions**

Copyrighted 2002, 2012, 2014, 2015 Andrea Zaferes, [www.teamlgs.com](http://www.teamlgs.com) (845) 657-5544

There are three basic questions we ask during every water-related death investigation. The list below is not all inclusive. Each case is different.

1. **Does it make sense that the victim was in the water?**
   1. Is it logical that the victim would have been :
      1. in the water at all by purpose or by accident – or by the hands of another?
      2. in the water at that time?
      3. in that particular water?
2. **Does the location, position, posture and physical state of the victim and reporting parties make sense?**
   1. Location includes such detail as surface v. bottom, which end of a bathtub, distance from shore, etc
      1. Water environment variables (i.e. temperature, depth, contaminates in the water, current, wind, shore slope angle, pier/bridge height)
      2. Land environment (anything that could cause injury prior to water entry, any evidence of entry into the water by the victim voluntarily or involuntarily, etc.
   2. State includes:
      1. Body posture
      2. Post mortem condition (i..e. rigor, livor, temperature, skin wrinkling, Tardieu spots, decomposition changes – the taphonomy)
      3. Eye condition – any signs of drying effects (i.e. cloudiness, tache noir)? Petechial hemorrhages?
      4. Injuries or lack of? – external and internal – as compared to the environment and antemortem activity
      5. Clothing and its state
      6. Degree of wetness
      7. Regarding witness(es): anything that would impair memory?
3. **Does it make sense that the victim did not survive the immersion or submersion?**
   1. Toxicology
   2. Medical history
   3. History with water – swim skills
   4. Trauma?
   5. Suicide, Homicide
   6. Water environment variables (depth, current, temperature, water action)
   7. What was victim wearing
   8. Victim entry into water