

When Death Occurs: Coroner Procedures

NOTE: How local jurisdictions handle death differs somewhat from jurisdiction to jurisdiction. However, the following information will give you an accurate picture of how most jurisdictions operate.

What is the role of the coroner and why is the coroner's office involved in my loved one's death?

The Coroner is required by state law (G.C. 27491) to investigate all un-natural deaths, or deaths where the attending Medical Doctor is unable to state a cause of death as well as cases where the deceased has not been seen by a doctor for 20 days prior to death. Our responsibility is to establish positive identity of the deceased; determine the place, date, and time; and the cause and classification of death.

The Coroner's investigation is not limited to the examination of the deceased, but may include interviews with family members and other witnesses, the collection of physical evidence and the safeguarding of personal property found at the death scene.

Is an autopsy necessary?

Autopsies are performed only on those cases where it is required by law or where it is necessary to determine the cause of death.

What is an autopsy?

An autopsy is an examination of the deceased performed by a Medical Doctor. This examination is a surgical procedure that is carried out with the utmost professionalism and within the standards of competent medical practice.

What do I do now?

Contact the funeral home of your choice. They are prepared to assist you in making your selections and decisions. They will work closely with the Coroner to arrange the release of your loved one's remains from the Coroner's facility.

When can I have the funeral?

The Coroner's examination should not delay your funeral plans. The Coroner will complete his investigation as soon as possible (typically with 24 hours).

What is required for the Coroner to release the remains & personal property?

The mortuary must provide the Coroner with a release form signed by the "legal next of kin".

Will we know the "cause of death" soon after the autopsy?

Yes, in most cases.

If the case is "pending investigation", will it delay the funeral of my loved one?

No. The death certificate is issued "pending investigation", but will not prevent disposition of your loved one. However, some financial, estate, probate or business matters may be dependent upon the final death certificate.

Can I purchase a “pending investigation” death certificate?

Yes. However, upon request, we will issue free of charge a “Verification of Death Letter”. This is not a substitute for a death certificate, but it may assist you in settling some matters. Please call the Coroner’s office and request them if they will help.

How can I obtain a certified copy of the death certificate?

They can be purchased from the local Health Department.

How do I obtain a copy of the Coroner’s report?

A copy of the autopsy report can be purchased at a cost of \$.15 per page (the average report is 6-10 pages) and may be ordered by mail or in person.