

**Information from the Humboldt County Coroner & Public  
Administrator**

3012 I Street, Eureka, CA 95501-4412

**Phone (707) 445-7242**



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## Information about the Coroner's Office

We at the Humboldt County Coroner's Office extend our deepest sympathy to you in this difficult time. We hope the information contained in this pamphlet will assist you by providing answers to commonly asked questions.

### Q. WHY IS THE CORONER INVOLVED?

A. California State law empowers the Coroner to investigate the circumstances, manner, and cause of all sudden, violent or unexpected deaths. We also investigate when a decedent has not been seen by a physician within 20 days prior to death, or when a death occurs within 24 hours of the decedent entering the hospital.

### Q. WHERE WILL MY RELATIVE/FRIEND BE TAKEN?

A. Usually he or she will be taken to the Coroner's Office located in the Clark Complex, 3012 I Street, Eureka, California.

### Q. WHY IS HE/SHE BEING TAKEN THERE?

A. The investigation may require a physical examination of the decedent's body (autopsy).

### Q. WHAT IS AN AUTOPSY?

A. An autopsy is an examination of a body after death using surgical techniques. An autopsy may be only an external examination, or it may be comprehensive. Sometimes an autopsy is limited to one organ system and sometimes all organ systems are examined.

### Q. WILL AN AUTOPSY BE PERFORMED?

A. The Coroner or his representative will decide if an autopsy is necessary to establish the manner and cause of death. It may be possible to determine the cause of death without an autopsy. Sometimes an autopsy is required by law.

Often an autopsy is necessary because the decedent's physician has questions about the decedent's medical problems and how those problems caused death.

### Q. WHO WILL PERFORM THE AUTOPSY?

A. It is performed by a medical doctor, usually a Pathologist, who is specifically trained in this type of procedure.

### Q. WILL THE AUTOPSY AFFECT FUNERAL ARRANGEMENTS?

A. No. An autopsy should not in any way affect the final arrangements you choose. An autopsy does not change whether the decedent will be viewable for visitation. Your funeral director will guide you.

**Q. HOW WILL AN AUTOPSY BENEFIT ME OR MY FAMILY?**

A. An autopsy may find inheritable medical problems and help other family members through early diagnosis and treatment. It may help with regard to family planning.

An autopsy may discover an infectious disease, such as tuberculosis, which requires early treatment for the decedent's family and close contacts.

An autopsy may provide evidence necessary for the setting of insurance claims or death benefits.

Information learned through an autopsy of one decedent may help save the lives of others with similar conditions.

**Q. HOW LONG WILL IT TAKE BEFORE MY RELATIVE/FRIEND IS RELEASED FROM THE CORONER'S OFFICE?**

A. Generally, it should not take more than two to three days. Your funeral director will coordinate this on your behalf. We will do our best to accommodate any special need to release the decedent sooner.

**Q. COULD THERE BE A RELIGIOUS CONFLICT?**

A. Religious decisions are always very personal. You may wish to discuss the issues with relatives and your religious or spiritual advisor. Cultures are very diverse in their practices and beliefs.

Please inform the Coroner's Office immediately of any special needs or concerns.

**Q. WHAT ABOUT TISSUE/ORGAN DONATION?**

A. With the consent of next of kin, certain types of tissues may be donated, thereby helping others. The Coroner's Investigator who has contacted you can provide additional information about this process. Donation of tissues must be arranged as soon as possible after death.

**Q. WILL THE CORONER CHARGE ME?**

A. The Coroner is authorized to charge certain fees. These fees help defer the cost by providing services. The fees are minimal in nature and have been fixed by the County Board of Supervisors.

**Q. IS IT NECESSARY FOR ME TO COME TO THE CORONER'S OFFICE TO IDENTIFY THE BODY?**

A. No. In almost all cases visual identification is not required. Should it become necessary for you to come in or for you to provide records, such as dental x-rays, you will be contacted.

**Q. IS VIEWING OR VISITATION ALLOWED?**

A. No. The Coroner's Office is not designed to accommodate viewing. Arrangements can be made at the mortuary for viewing or visitation.

**Q. WHEN WILL A DEATH CERTIFICATE BE AVAILABLE?**

A. A death certificate is issued after the investigation is completed. Occasionally, extensive testing is required. An interim death certificate may be issued which allows interment. A final death certificate will be issued following completion of any special training.

**Q. WHERE CAN I OBTAIN A DEATH CERTIFICATE?**

A. Death Certificates are filed with the Health Department by the Funeral Director. Should you require certified copies, they can be ordered through the mortuary or directly from the Humboldt County Health Department, Department of Vital Statistics, 529 I Street, Eureka, CA 95501. Telephone number (707) 268-2185.

**Q. WILL A CORONER'S REPORT BE AVAILABLE?**

A. Yes. You may obtain a copy by calling our office at telephone (707) 445-7242, Monday through Friday from 9:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. There may be a fee. Homicide reports are not released.

**Q. HOW CAN PERSONAL POSSESSIONS BE CLAIMED?**

A. Personal possessions in the custody of the Coroner may be claimed by the legal next of kin. To avoid any inconvenience to you, call the Coroner's Office before coming in. You will be informed of any documents needed and of any other requirements. Property is available from 9:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m., Monday through Friday, except holidays.

**Q. WHAT ITEMS WILL NOT BE RELEASED?**

A. Contraband, such as illegal drugs or weapons. Contaminated clothing or other articles which may present a health hazard shall be destroyed for the safety of all persons involved. Some items may be retained as evidence of a crime.

**Q. I NEED TO ENTER MY RELATIVE/FRIENDS RESIDENCE, BUT IT IS SEALED. WHAT CAN I DO?**

A. If there is a seal on the residence, either verbal or physical, you need permission to break that seal. It is a misdemeanor to break a "CORONER'S SEAL" without permission of the Coroner. A Coroner's seal is placed to protect the decedent's property. It is not intended to deprive the legal heirs of their rights.

**Q. WHAT SHOULD I KNOW?**

A. Notify other kin and friends of the deceased. If the deceased has a Will, refer to it for potential instructions. Wills are often kept in Safe-Deposit Boxes, at home in a safe place, or at the office of the attorney who prepared the will.

**Q. WHAT DO I DO NEXT?**

A. Select a funeral home. Call and make an appointment to speak with a funeral director. Inform the funeral director that the death is being handled by the Coroner's Office.

**Q. WHO IS THE LEGAL NEXT OF KIN?**

A. A spouse is the closest next of kin. Second in line are the children of the deceased, who are equally related. Third in line are the parents of the deceased, equally. Siblings of the deceased are fourth in the order of kinship, all equally, without regard to the order of their birth. The next of kin are legally and financially responsible for the interment of the deceased. By law, the costs of interment take priority over all of the decedent's pending bills.

**Q. MY RELATIVE/FRIEND WAS IN THE MILITARY, WHO CAN I CONTACT FOR INFORMATION?**

A. Persons who have served in the Armed Forces, were honorably discharged, and are in receipt of monthly payments, are entitled to a Veteran's benefit. For information contact the Humboldt County Veterans Service Office, Humboldt County Courthouse, Room 310, 825 Fifth Street, Eureka, CA 95501. Phone number (707) 445-7341. For information on Military, Veterans, or Social Security Benefits, contact your funeral director.

**Q. WHAT CAN I DO IF THERE ARE NO FUNDS FOR BURIAL?**

A. If neither the decedent nor the next of kin have sufficient funds for interment, an application may be made for indigent disposition. In these circumstances proof of indigence is required. Next of kin should first discuss this with the funeral director at the mortuary they have chosen. The mortuary will provide information regarding application for Indigent Disposition.

We hope the information provided in the pamphlet and the advise and counseling provided by your Funeral Director will help you during this time of loss. However, should you need our assistance please call our office during regular business hours: 9:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. Monday through Friday.

## Information about the Public Administrator

The Sheriff-Coroner is also the Public Administrator in Humboldt County. This is a related but separate responsibility. The Public Administrator is an advocate of the decedent and his/her heirs. The Sheriff-Coroner will administer or probate an estate which is intestate (without a Will) at the request of the heirs, or when the heirs decline to act, or when there is a will and the executor/executrix request the public administrator, or when there are no known heirs, or when appointed to do so by the Superior Court.

### Q. HOW CAN THIS BENEFIT ME OR MY FAMILY?

A. It can, at your request, relieve the heirs of the stress and turmoil of administering the estate. It assures that the wishes of the decedent are carried out in a legal and expeditious manner. It protects the rights of the heirs, and often removes much of the emotional involvement by providing a neutral party.

The use of the Public Administrator often saves time and money. The Public Administrator is bonded. This is a public office, and as such, is not in the business to make money, but rather provide a service for those who need it.

### Q. WHAT WILL THE PUBLIC ADMINISTRATOR COST?

A. There are fees charged by the Public Administrator which are set by law. They vary depending on the value of the estate. Ordinarily, the minimum fee is \$1,000, and the maximum fee is equal to 4% of the value of the estate. In addition, a 1/4% bond fee is charges.

These fees and all other costs or bills against the estate are paid by the Public Administrator from estate assets. Neither you nor the family should have out of pocket expenses.

Questions are free. We at the Coroner's Office would be pleased to talk with you and your family about your special needs or circumstances. Please feel free to call during normal business hours.

**Sheriff-Coroner-Public Administrator of Humboldt County**

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