

SKAGIT COUNTY CORONER'S OFFICE

SKAGIT COUNTY CORONER'S OFFICE POLICIES AND PROCEDURES MANUAL

Updated 2025

Approved By: Hayley Thompson

Hayley Thompson, D-ABMDI

Skagit County Coroner

Introduction

The information in this manual is intended to provide relevant Skagit County Coroner employees with the appropriate guidance regarding policies, procedures, and practices of the Skagit County Coroner's Office. The current information in this manual supersedes and replaces all prior published and unpublished policies and procedures. None of the policies and procedures contained in this manual or any related policies, procedures, practices or guidelines constitute a contract of employment or any other type contract.

Periodically, state and local laws are amended. These changes may have a direct or indirect effect on this office. Amendments will be made to this manual as these law change, or as circumstances arise which warrant the alteration of any of the current policies or procedures of this office.

The Skagit County Coroner's Office reserves the right to rescind, modify, or deviate from these or any other policies as it considers necessary at its sole discretion, either in individual situations or otherwise.

Failure to comply

Failure to comply with any policy or procedure in this manual will be grounds for disciplinary action, not to exclude immediate termination.

Mission Statement

The mission of the Skagit County Coroner's Office is to serve the community by providing accurate and timely Medico-Legal death investigations in a professional manner, while ensuring the highest level of compassion, dignity, and respect for the deceased and their families.

The Skagit County Coroner's Office will investigate all deaths within its jurisdiction according to state law. Duly qualified personnel will conduct investigations in a timely manner using sound scientific methods. Trust and confidence in the ability of the Coroner's Office will be established through cooperation with related agencies and citizens of Skagit County.

Anti-Harassment Policy

The Skagit County Coroner's Office is committed to a work environment in which all individuals are treated with respect and dignity. Each individual has a right to work in a professional atmosphere that promotes equal employment opportunities and prohibits discriminatory practices, including harassment. Therefore, the Skagit County Coroner's Office expects that all relationships among persons in the office be business-like and free of bias, prejudice, and harassment.

Equal Employment Opportunity

It is the policy of the Skagit County Coroner's Office to ensure equal employment opportunity without discrimination or harassment on the basis of race, religion, sex, sexual orientation, age, disability, marital status, citizenship or any other characteristic protected by law. The Skagit County Coroner's Office prohibits any such discrimination.

Confidentiality

All personnel are required to sign the Skagit County Coroner's Office Confidentiality Agreement prohibiting the release of any information or material to anyone outside of the Coroner's Office other than authorities who have direct jurisdiction in an investigation. This includes: deaths, investigations, follow-ups, and photographs. All Skagit County Coroner's Office Personnel will adhere to this policy. Disregarding this policy for any reason will be grounds for disciplinary action, not excluding immediate termination.

Skagit County Coroner's Office Employee or Volunteer Confidentiality Agreement

As an employee or volunteer, I understand that I may have access to confidential information, which may include, but is not limited to conversations, financial information, statistical records, internal reports, memos, communications, and third-party information.

Accordingly, as a condition of and in consideration of my access to confidential information, I promise that:

1. I will use confidential information only as needed to perform my legitimate duties as an employee or volunteer of the Skagit County Coroner's Office.
2. I will only access confidential information for which I have a need to know.
3. I will not divulge, copy, release, alter, loan, review, or destroy any confidential information within the scope of my professional activities affiliated with the Skagit County Coroner's Office.
4. I will not misuse confidential information or carelessly care for confidential information.

I understand that my obligations under this Agreement will continue after termination of my employment or volunteer work.

I understand that I have no right or ownership interest in any confidential information acquired during my employment or volunteer work with the Skagit County Coroner's Office.

I understand that violation of this agreement is subject to immediate dismissal from employment or volunteer work and possible legal liability.

Employee/Volunteer Signature and Date: _____

Printed Name: _____

Code of Conduct

Reporting for Duty

Every employee of the Skagit County Coroner's Office shall report promptly for work, court, and all other appointments at their assigned time and with all necessary equipment. Unless an emergency prevents otherwise, an employee unable to work due to illness or other reason shall notify the Coroner or Lead Investigator no less than three hours prior to the expected time of their duty.

Responding to Calls

Every employee of the Skagit County Coroner's Office shall respond promptly to scene calls or other requests for service and will make themselves available for service as soon as possible once a call is completed.

Obedience to Orders

Employees shall diligently, completely, and without delay or question, carry out all lawful orders of a supervisor that pertain to the performance of their duty. No supervisor shall knowingly issue any order that is unlawful.

Insubordination and Disrespect/Slander

Employees will willingly submit to reasonable authority and will not disregard the expressed or implied directions of a supervisor.

Employees will not, through gestures, or defamatory statements, show disrespect to a supervisor or to another employee.

Employees shall not make false, vicious, slanderous, or malicious statements about employees of the department to anyone. Employees shall not make false statements to supervisors when questioned, interviewed, or in submitting statements or reports.

Death Scene Reports

Medicolegal Death Investigators will submit all necessary reports on time and in accordance with established departmental procedures. Employees shall not make a false report or knowingly enter or cause to be entered any inaccurate false, or misrepresented facts in any official record.

Ethical Standards

The effectiveness of the Skagit County Coroner's Office depends on community respect and confidence. Conduct which detracts from this respect and confidence is detrimental to the public interest and should be prohibited. The policy of this office is to investigate circumstances suggesting an employee has engaged in unbecoming conduct and impose disciplinary action when appropriate.

The term "Employee" refers to any Skagit County Coroner's Office employee, including Medicolegal Death Investigators, as well as any personnel working or volunteering with the Skagit County Coroner's Office. The Coroner is subject to the code of conduct issued by the state for elected officials.

Employees shall perform their duties impartially and without prejudice or discrimination.

Skagit County Coroner's Office Employees share not, whether on duty or off duty, exhibit any conduct which discredits themselves or their office or otherwise impairs their ability or that of other Skagit County Coroner's Office Employees or the office to provide Office services to the community.

Skagit County Coroner's Office Employees shall treat all members of the public courteously and with respect.

Skagit County Coroner's Office Employees shall not compromise their integrity, nor that of their office or profession, by accepting, giving, or soliciting any gratuity which could be reasonably interpreted as capable of influencing their official acts or judgements.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Administration

- I. Confidentiality and Release of Information
- II. Coroner Office Organization Chart
- III. Coroner Staff Duties and Responsibilities
- IV. County Laptop Use
- V. Cremation and Disposition Authorization
- VI. Employee Safety
- VII. Immunizations Policy
- VIII. New Employee Training
- IX. Participation in State Data Collection
- X. Scheduling and Timesheets
- XI. Vaccination for Employees Form
- XII. Vehicle Checklist
- XIII. Vehicle Maintenance

Evidence, Autopsies, and Examinations

- I. Autopsy Protocol
- II. Autopsy Suite and Refrigeration
- III. Autopsy
- IV. Evidence
- V. Forensic Specialist
- VI. Infant and Pediatric autopsy protocol
- VII. Post-Mortem Radiology
- VIII. Post-Mortem Examination

Investigations

- I. Body Examination
- II. Body Release Form
- III. Body Removal
- IV. Body Transport and Handling
- V. Case Numbering System
- VI. Case Placard
- VII. Chain of Custody
- VIII. Confirmation of ID
- IX. Contagious Disease Reporting
- X. Death Notification
- XI. Death Scene Protocol
- XII. Determining Case Jurisdiction
- XIII. Drug Handling
- XIV. Establishing Cause and Manner of Death
- XV. Handling and Disposition for Deceased
- XVI. Hazardous Chemicals

- XVII. Identification
- XVIII. Infant and Child Death Investigation
- XIX. Jurisdiction
- XX. Notification of Next of Kin and unclaimed cases
- XXI. Notification of Next of Kin
- XXII. Photography
- XXIII. Property
- XXIV. Scene Documentation
- XXV. Sudden Infant Deaths and Fetal Demise
- XXVI. Tissue and Organ Donation
- XXVII. Toxicology Requisition Form
- XXVIII. Toxicology
- XXIX. Unidentified Bodies
- XXX. Mass Fatality

Media, Records, and Requests

- I. Admonition Opposing Autopsy
- II. Media
- III. Medical Records Request Form
- IV. Quality Assurance
- V. Records Storage and Maintenance
- VI. Release of Disposition by NOK form
- VII. Request for Coroner Records Form
- VIII. Requests for Autopsy

Confidentiality & Release of Information

Confidentiality

Skagit County Coroner's Office will protect the privacy and security of confidential information through proper storage and handling procedures.

Employees must follow established procedures to ensure the appropriate handling of confidential information.

When not in use, all materials containing confidential information must be kept in a locked file cabinet or office.

Unauthorized individuals must not have any contact with or view confidential information.

Employees shall not release confidential information to unauthorized individuals, including unauthorized employees or the general public.

Release of Information

According to HIPAA compliance, covered entities may disclose protected health information to funeral directors as needed, and to coroners or medical examiners to identify a deceased person, determine the cause of death, and perform other functions authorized by law.

The Coroner's Office, upon receipt of written request, relationship affirmation, and copy of government issued identification, will release documents, photographs, and/or reports generated by the Skagit County Coroner's Office to authorized individuals only. Authorized individuals may include but are not limited to persons with durable power of attorneys, legal next of kin, immediate family members, investigating agencies, treating physicians, and legal representatives.

Employees must review RCW 68.50.105 and RCW 68.50.300. Language as of February 10, 2025 is excerpted below.

RCW 68.50.105 Autopsies, postmortems — Reports and records confidential — Exceptions.

- (1) Reports and records of autopsies or postmortems shall be confidential, except that the following persons may examine and obtain copies of any such report or record: The personal representative of the decedent as defined in RCW 11.02.005, any family member, the attending physician or *advanced registered nurse practitioner, the prosecuting attorney or law enforcement agencies having jurisdiction, public health officials, the department of labor and industries in cases in which it has an interest under RCW 68.50.103, the secretary of the department of children, youth, and families or his or her designee in cases being reviewed under RCW 74.13.640, or the secretary of the department of social and health services or his or her designee under chapter 74.34 RCW.

Confidentiality & Release of Information Cont.

(3) The coroner, the medical examiner, or the attending physician shall, upon request, meet with the family of the decedent to discuss the findings of the autopsy or postmortem. For the purposes of this section, the term "family" means the surviving spouse, state registered domestic partner, or any child, parent, grandparent, grandchild, brother, or sister of the decedent, or any person who was guardian of the decedent at the time of death.

RCW 68.50.300 Release of information concerning a death

(1) The county coroner, medical examiner, or prosecuting attorney having jurisdiction may in such official's discretion release information concerning a person's death to the media and general public, in order to aid in identifying the deceased, when the identity of the deceased is unknown to the official and when he or she does not know the information to be readily available through other sources.

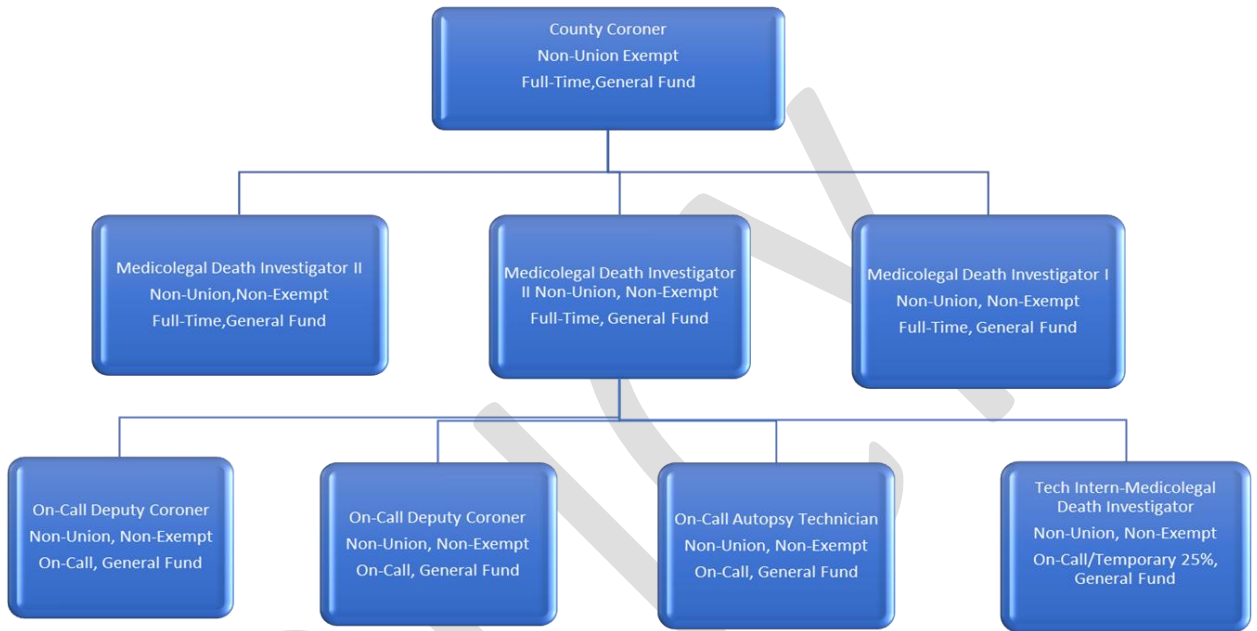
(2)(a) The county coroner, medical examiner, or prosecuting attorney may withhold any information which directly or indirectly identifies a decedent until either:

(i) A notification period of forty-eight hours has elapsed after identification of the decedent by such official; or

(ii) The next of kin of the decedent has been notified.

(b) During the forty-eight hour notification period, such official shall make a good faith attempt to locate and notify the next of kin of the decedent.

Skagit County Coroner's Office Organization Chart



Coroner Duties and Responsibilities

Supervisory

- Provide death investigation services or staff supervision services 24 hour per day, 7 days a week.
 - Respond to incoming calls or texts from staff in a timely manner.
- Maintain office hours each week.
- Meet with staff at start of day of shift to check in and follow up on daily work.
- Direct and supervise the staff's activities and ensure equitable distribution of offices workload.
- Work with medicolegal death investigators on any issues involving their cases or work.
- Direct and supervise the departmental staff activities, delegate duties, approve leave, evaluate performance, and conduct counseling and discipline.
- Assist with training staff and interns

Administrative

- Formally review cases to verify information and narrative are complete in MDI log.
- Verify cases are ready to close out
- Review and Email work schedule to all Coroner staff
- Monitor Budget and submit budget amendments when needed
- Prepare and submit yearly budget request
- Submit quarterly budget reports to County
- Maintain statistics for office
- Create and maintain yearly statistics for drug overdose deaths and suicides
- Create Annual report and post on Coroner website
- Maintain Coroner website including stats and confirmation of death list
- Handle case requests from the WA Violent Death Reporting System and/or SUDORS
- Keep track and submit autopsy reimbursement for the county in February and August each year
- Submit invoices for reimbursement of use of facility for donation cases
- Keep track and submit quarterly volunteer hours
- Creates and/or maintains contracts with funeral homes, pathologists, and any other entities
- Perform policy review and implementation yearly
- Prepare and submit credit card payments at end of each month to Auditors Office
- Prepare any invoices needing to be entered and submitted to Auditors Office
 - Verify and sign invoice entry before submitting to auditor's office
- Enter and submit payroll to auditor's office
- Maintain and submit autopsy reimbursements to the state (2 times per year)
- Maintain contracts
- Submit appropriate forms for new contracts
- Assist with creating work schedule for staff
- Manage staff meetings
- Keep in communication with staff on updates
- Completes performance reviews with each employee once a year as well as meet with each staff member quarterly regarding goals, strengths, and weaknesses, concerns, or successes.
- Work with law enforcement agencies and other agencies regarding a case or in providing information related to the office.

- Work with hospitals, nursing facilities, hospice, and primary care providers regarding the role of the Coroner as well as policies and procedures regarding deaths.
- Attend state Coroner/ME meetings quarterly
- Cooperate with and/or provide information and education to the medical community regarding death statistics and trends, consumer product problems, organ donation, etc.
- Represent the county and the department at local, state, and federal agencies and other organizations regarding matters of interest to Skagit County.
- Remain up to date on current medical and forensic developments

Daily tasks

- Certify death certificates on cases that require that action
- Create and submit affidavits for correction on required cases
- Perform a medical records review and summary on cases
- Write comprehensive statements of investigation and other reports to support establishment of cause, manner, and mechanism of death.
- Coordinate with forensic specialists (forensic pathologists, anthropologists, odontologists, DNA, crime lab) regarding services on a case.
- Review toxicology results on cases in question and determine if consultation or follow up is needed.
- Review cases in question before submitting for case closure

Tasks when needed

- Perform general administrative and clerical functions, including answering phones, making calls, preparing files, logs and records maintenance, department correspondence and reports, and transcribing reports.
- Assist with taking incoming death calls and respond to scenes
- Respond to suspicious, homicide, or infant death calls if medicolegal death investigator II is not available
- Assist with autopsies or external examinations
- Assist with obtaining toxicology samples
- Assist with obtaining fingerprints
- Assist with taking x-rays
- Assist with releasing of bodies to funeral homes
- Assist with collection and documenting property and evidence
- Assist with releasing of property and/or evidence
- Conduct and/or verify NOK searches on indigent or unclaimed cases
- Assist with locating and notifying NOK
- Assist with the completion of indigent cremation paperwork
- Testify in court when subpoena.

Medicolegal Death Investigator II

Supervisory

- Act as point of contact for the office in the absence of the Coroner.
- Serve as lead in office under Coroner.
- Oversee and train subordinate staff including Medicolegal Death Investigator I, on-call deputy coroners, and interns.
- Verify that casework is completed in MDI log including narrative, worksheets, and photos.
- Review case files ready for initial review and places in Coroner's box for formal review.

Administrative

- Enter and submit Accounts Payable
- Create staff work schedule
- Inventory and order supplies
- Track toxicology testing and reports
- Track property in-house. Dispose or release for auction purposes if unclaimed after designated time.
- Track Toxicology and Stock Tissue. Once retention period has ended, retain or destroy samples.
- Enter and monitor all unidentified cases in NamUs. Verify all required steps are completed for unidentified cases per state law.
- Oversee unclaimed/indigent cases.
 - Follow up with any leads for possible family
 - Contact interested party after 45 days to claim cremains
 - Obtain proper paperwork and reimbursement of cremation (if applicable)
- Assist Coroner with policy implantation and review.
- Assist Coroner with review of applicants for internships and job postings for the office.
- Assist Coroner with interview and selection of applicants.
- Help in development of new programs for the office.

Daily Tasks

- Answer in-coming calls.
- Respond to emails in the Coroner general email account.
- Take death investigation reports and responds to scenes.
- Respond or take lead on suspicious, homicide, or infant death calls.
- Responsible for a timely response to scenes.
- Conduct a thorough and efficient scene investigation (documentation, photographs, interviews, completion of forms).
- Make observations of the scene and perform a thorough examination of the body at the scene.
- Ensure positive identification of the decedent is made and the immediate next of kin is notified of the death in a timely compassionate and professional manner.

Medicolegal Death Investigator II Daily Tasks cont.

- Interact and communicate with family members and friends in a comforting compassionate manner.
- Document, inventory and collect any personal property accompanying the body.
- Prepare and transport decedent to Coroner's Office when requested by Coroner.
- Write narratives and complete cases in MDI log.
- Upload documents into MDI log.
- Perform a medical records review and summary on cases that require such.
- Call doctor offices to inform of death or obtain more information.
- Follow up with agencies (L&I, APS, CPS, NTSB, Law enforcement, Fire Marshall, ATF, FBI etc.) for more information or updates.
- Release bodies to funeral homes.
- Release property to designated party or funeral home.
- Release evidence to agency.
- Package and submit toxicology sample with completed requisition form.
- Submit lab samples for cases requiring specific lab testing.
- Submit histology.
- Submit fingerprints when needed for identification purposes.
- Request government photo identification or drivers licenses to support identification when needed.
- Request EMS reports, agency reports, medical records and uploads to MDI log.
- Follow up with families or designated agencies regarding cases.
- Close out cases.
- Process records requests.
- Assist pathologist with performing autopsies.
- Perform external examinations which include obtaining fingerprints, toxicology samples.
- Take x-rays on requested cases.
- Certify death certificates, when requested by Coroner
 - Consult with Coroner for assistance.
- Coordinate with forensic specialists (forensic pathologists, anthropologists, odontologists, DNA, crime lab) regarding services on a case.
- Perform NOK searches on indigent or unclaimed cases.
- Locate and notify NOK.
- Transport skeletal cases to King County Medical Examiners Office.
- Transport cases for autopsy services.
- Retrieve cremains from funeral home or Lake Washington Technical Institute Body Donation Program.
- When requested by Coroner, complete indigent cremation paperwork.
- Take required or assigned training courses.
- Work assigned on-call shifts and assigned holidays.

Medicolegal Death Investigator I

Works under the direction of the Coroner and Medicolegal Death Investigator II

Daily Tasks

- Answers in-coming calls.
- Responds to emails in the Coroner general email account.
- Takes death investigation reports and responds to scenes.
- Responsible for a timely response to scenes.
- Conducts a thorough and efficient scene investigation (documentation, photographs, interviews, completion of forms).
- Makes observations of the scene and performs a thorough examination of the body at the scene.
- Ensures positive identification of the decedent is made and the immediate next of kin is notified of the death in a timely compassionate and professional manner.
- Interacts and communicates with family members and friends in a comforting compassionate manner.
- Documents, inventories, and collects any personal property accompanying the body.
- Prepares and transports decedent to Coroner's Office when requested by Coroner.
- Writes narratives and completes cases in MDI log.
- Uploads documents to MDI log.
- Performs a medical records review and summary on cases that require such.
- Calls doctor offices to inform of death or obtain more information.
- Follows up with agencies (L&I, APS, CPS, NTSB etc.) for more information or updates.
- Releases bodies to funeral homes.
- Releases property to designated party or funeral home.
- Releases evidence to agency.
- Packages and submits toxicology sample with requisition form.
- Submits lab samples for cases requiring specific lab testing.
- Submits histology.
- Submits fingerprints when needed for identification purposes.
- Requests drivers licenses to support identification when needed.
- Requests EMS reports, agency reports, medical records and uploads to MDI log.
- Follows up with families or designated agencies regarding cases.
- Assists with closing out cases.
- Processes records requests.
- Assists pathologist with autopsies.
- Performs external examinations which include obtaining fingerprints, toxicology samples.
- Takes x-rays on requested cases.
- Locates and notifies NOK.
- Attends staff meetings.
- Transports skeletal cases to King County Medical Examiners Office.
- Transports cases for autopsy services.

Medicolegal Death Investigator I Daily Tasks cont.

- Retrieves remains from funeral home or Lake Washington Technical Institute Body Donation Program.
- Takes required or assigned training courses.
- Works assigned on-call shifts and assigned holidays.

POLICY

Duties of the On-Call Deputy Coroner

- The Deputy Coroner On-Call is directly accountable to the Medicolegal Death Investigator II and the Coroner for implementation of all duties and direction concerning the Coroner's Office.
- On-call shifts are created based on the times in which coverage is needed for the office. This is mainly evening hours into early morning hours but can extend to covering 24 hours for holidays or when availability of full-time staff is limited.
- Each on-call deputy coroner will be assigned designated days of the week to cover calls and scene responses. The hours for coverage will be determined on the needs of the office. The on-call deputy will be made aware of the days assigned prior to schedule being published and will be responsible for being available on those days.
- While on-call, must be available by phone, and answer any incoming calls or texts during designated shift.
- Responsible for making sure the issued cell phone is turned on, re-started if has not been used in a few days, so that he/she can receive calls and text messages.
- Responsible for communicating with the Coroner or Medicolegal Death Investigator II about any calls or messages received as well as scene updates.
- Responsible for a timely response to scenes.
- Conducts a thorough and efficient scene investigation (documentation, photographs, interviews, completion of forms).
- Makes observations of the scene and performs a thorough examination of the body at the scene.
- Ensures positive identification of the decedent is made and the immediate next of kin is notified of the death in a timely compassionate and professional manner.
- Interacts and communicates with family members and friends in a comforting compassionate manner.
- Documents, inventories, and collects any personal property accompanying the body.
- Prepares and transports decedent to Coroner's Office when requested by Coroner.
- Completes all required reports and documents before end of shift.
- Communicates any follow up needed for a case to the in-coming investigator as well as adds to the *follow up* document.
- Assists with autopsies or external body examinations when requested.

Intern

The Intern will be under the direct supervision of a Medicolegal Death Investigator I or II for the duration of the internship.

- Assists death investigators with the following:
 - Responds with investigator to death scenes.
 - Assists investigator with evaluation and documentation at the scene.
 - Assists the investigator with body examination at the scene.
 - Assists the investigator with the removal of the body from the scene and transporting the body to the Coroner's Office.
 - Assists the investigator with admitting the body at the Coroner's Office.
 - Assists the investigator with creating labels, case files, adding information to the white board.
 - Assists the investigator with scanning and uploading documents to MDI log.
 - Assists the investigator with sending and receiving faxes.
 - Assists the investigator with releasing bodies to funeral homes.
 - Assists the investigator with collecting, documenting, and releasing of evidence or property.
 - Assists the investigator with external body examinations.
 - Assists the investigator with labeling, packaging, and putting away of samples.
- Sets up autopsy suite for autopsy.
- Assists the forensic pathologist and investigator during an autopsy.
- Performs daily vehicle checks, restocks vehicle with supplies, and adds fuel to vehicles when required.
- Answers incoming calls to the office when other staff is unavailable to answer the phone.
- Cleans up the morgue.
- Takes care of laundry including folding and putting away.
- Assists the public, family, or agencies that come to the front desk.
- Requests death certificates on cases.
- Verifies information on death certificate to what is entered in MDI log.
- Assists the Coroner or death investigators with any projects.
- Provides written documentation of internship experience.

County Laptop Use

Policy:

The Skagit County Coroner's Office has a designated laptop specifically for medicolegal death investigators to use when the investigator is covering a shift remotely. This would include working on-call from home after business hours or during holidays in which the office is closed.

The medicolegal death investigator will notify the office when laptop will be used.

The medicolegal death investigator will return the laptop at the end of the shift or if unable, arrange with Coroner a date in which the laptop will be returned.

For any technical or logging in problems, the on-call deputy must reach out to the IS help desk at 360-416-1111.

Uses:

The on-call investigator will use the laptop for the following purposes:

1. Check county email (both individual and coroner email accounts)
2. Enter cases into MDI log
3. Search for medical information or emergency contacts using EPIC
4. Utilizing the death certificate system, WHALES, in order to complete or review a death certificate.
5. Upload pictures (scene or autopsy) to *coroner shared file* and into MDI log.
6. Use internet to search for information related to a death investigation.
7. Check incoming received faxes.
8. Access documents related to death investigation work.
9. Access EMS requested records.

Cremation and Disposition Authorization

Please read this entire document carefully before signing.

Name of Decedent:

Sex:

Date of Birth:

Date of Death:

SSN:

I the undersigned (the "Authorizing agent") hereby authorize and request Skagit County Coroner's Office to arrange and facilitate the cremation of the decedent with the next available Crematory on the Skagit County indigent/abandoned rotation established via competitive bid process.

Schedule and Container Requirement: The Crematory may perform the cremation upon receipt of the remains, at its discretion, and according to its time schedule, as work permits, without obtaining any further authorization or instructions from me/us. The Crematory requires that the remains be placed in a combustible, leak resistant rigid container for cremation. The crematory is authorized to dispose of any non-combustible residue, handles or other items attached to any cremation container.

Authorization

- I hereby state that I am the closest living next of kin of the Decedent or are otherwise empowered and authorized to execute this authorization according to all state and local laws.
- I am aware of no objection to this cremation by the spouse, child, parent or sibling of the decedent, or of provision of any contract or instructions made be the Decedent.
- All personal property, clothing or valuables have been removed from the remains or I hereby order them cremated with the remains. I understand that any personal property, clothing or valuables, including dental gold, on or with the body will be destroyed in the cremation process, and therefore will not be recoverable.
- I hereby agree to indemnify and hold harmless Skagit County Coroner's Office and the facility selected for cremation, its officers, directors, agent and employees, from any claim, liability, cost or expense resulting from their reliance on or performance consistent with the direction, declaration, representation, authorizations and agreements herein, including but not limited to, claims brought by any other persons claiming the right to control the disposition of the decedent or the decedent's cremains.
- By execution, including initials at appropriate spaces the undersigned warrant(s) that all representations and statements contained herein are true and correct. These statements are being relied upon by the Skagit County Coroner's Office and the Crematory and the undersigned has read and understood the provisions of this document.

Disposition of Cremated Remains

Next of Kin: _____

Witness: _____

Signature: _____

Signature: _____

Dated: _____

Dated: _____

Address: _____

Address: _____

Phone: _____

Phone: _____

Relationship: _____

Employee Safety

Policy:

The Skagit County Coroner's Office recognizes and adheres to Local, State and Federal guidelines regarding the employee's safety and precautions to prevent potential injury on the job.

Employees must use the following universal precautions:

1. Consider blood and body fluids as potentially infectious
2. Make full use of appropriate personal protective equipment (PPE)
3. Always use gloves when handling any foreign matter or material
4. Use approved masks, safety goggles or face shields for procedures that may involve splashing of blood or bodily fluids, creation of aerosols or exposure to mucus membranes such as eyes, nose or mouth.
5. Use gowns, aprons, or approved protective body clothing to prevent exposure of body parts to blood products or bodily fluids.
6. The PPE must be removed and disposed of before leaving the work area.

The purpose of the PPE is to protect the employees of the Skagit County Coroner's Office from exposure to workplace hazards and risk of injury. The PPE of appropriate sizes will be provided to all employees at no cost. Training in the use of appropriate PPE for specific tasks or procedures is provided by the Skagit County Coroner.

Employees must use the following universal precautions when handling sharps:

1. Be diligent when using or disposing of needles, scalpels or other sharp items.
2. Do not bend, break or recap needles.
3. Dispose contaminated needles or sharps in a biohazard puncture proof container (i.e. sharps container) immediately after use.
4. All containers that store blood or bodily fluids must be color coded or labeled to include a bio-hazard sign.
5. Sharps containers must be accessible to all employees.
6. It is the responsibility of any employee to remove and discard of full sharps containers and replace with a new and empty sharps container.
7. Eyewash stations are readily available to all employees where potential exposure to blood, bodily fluids and potentially infectious materials and hazardous chemicals.
8. Each employee will wash their hands after handling any material related to a case including but not limited to clothing, shoes, property, jewelry and bodily fluids.
9. It is the responsibility of the investigator to request and utilize resources to lift and move heavy bodies or carry bodies long distances, through rough terrain or in various elevations.

Employee Safety Cont.

General Safety

Employees are required to comply with all agency safety rules and are encouraged to actively participate in identifying ways to make the agency a safer place to work.

1. Employees must report unsafe conditions or actions to the Coroner
2. Employees must report all injuries to the Coroner and complete the required paperwork.
3. It is important that all employees that are required to do so, always use personal protective equipment (PPE) that is in good working condition.
4. Employees should not remove or disable any safety device or safeguard provided for employee protection.
5. Supervisors are responsible for the health and safety of their employees and as a part of their daily duties must check the workplace for unsafe conditions, watch employees for unsafe actions, and take prompt action to eliminate any hazards.
 - a. It is the duty of the Coroner or assigned staff member to ensure employees have received an initial orientation and training on safe operation of equipment or tasks before beginning work.
 - b. The Coroner must also ensure that all employees receive and wear PPE.
 - c. The Coroner must ensure that all incidents are fully investigated and corrective action is taken to prevent hazardous conditions or behaviors from happening again.

Biological Hazards and Safety

Biological hazards include bacteria, viruses, fungi, and other living organisms that can cause acute and chronic infections to enter the body either directly or through breaks in the skin. Coroner Office employees can be exposed to these biological hazards whether at a scene or in the autopsy suite. Where there is potential exposure to biological hazards, employees should practice proper personal hygiene, particularly hand washing. The employee should also wear personal protective equipment such as gloves and respirators.

Employees shall review the OSHA fact sheets related to blood borne pathogens and handling of contaminated sharps (attached to this policy)

Basic Safety Rules

The following basic safety rules have been established to help make the agency a safe and efficient place to work. Failure to comply with these rules will result in disciplinary action.

1. Never do anything that is unsafe in order to get the job done. If a job is unsafe, report it to your supervisor.
2. Do not remove or disable safety devices. Keep guard at all times in operating machinery.
3. Never operate machinery or use a piece of equipment unless you have been trained and are authorized.
4. Use PPE whenever it is required
5. Obey all safety warning signs
6. Working under the influence of alcohol or illegal drugs or using them at work is prohibited.
7. Do not bring firearms or explosives onto company property.
8. Smoking is not permitted.
9. Clean up spills immediately.
10. Replace all tools and supplies after use.

Employee Safety Cont.

Safety Policies During Medical Emergencies

The employee should immediately report work-related injuries to the Coroner.

The Employee must comply with the Skagit County Human Resources Accident Form at the time of the incident or as soon as possible thereafter and provide the form to the Coroner. If the employee is unable to complete the form due to the nature of the injury/medical emergency, then the Coroner or another assigned employee may complete the form on their behalf.

POLICY

Employee Immunization Policy

Policy :

The Skagit County Coroner's Office as part of the onboarding to the Coroner's Office will offer the employee approved vaccinations including COVID-19, Hepatitis A, Hepatitis B and Influenza.

The employee will sign a document stating:

1. They have their vaccinations
2. They decline the vaccinations

Washington State does not have a current law that requires employees to be vaccinated.

POLICY

Hazardous Chemicals

Policy:

The purpose of this document is to inform Skagit County Coroner's Office employees that the agency is complying with the OSHA Hazard Communication Standard by:

1. Observing all its requirements,
2. Compiling a hazardous chemicals list for each unit,
3. Using material safety data sheets (MSDS),
4. Ensuring that all containers are labeled, and
5. Providing appropriate training.

To ensure that information about the dangers of hazardous chemicals used by the Skagit County Coroner's Office is known by all affected employees

Each employees should be advised of , the hazardous properties of the chemicals with which they work; safe handling, storage and disposal procedures; the hazards associated with non-routine tasks (e.g., cleaning of chemical spills); the hazards associated with chemicals in unlabeled containers; and measures to take to protect them from chemical hazards.

A hazardous material identification book will be in the office located next to the MSDS sheets book.

New Employee Training

Policy:

Every new employee will undergo training with a senior medicolegal death investigator. The new employee will complete a training check list. Once the new employee is efficient and has satisfactorily become proficient in medicolegal death investigation, the new employee will move forward to working independently under the supervision of a Medicolegal Death Investigator II.

The new medicolegal death investigator will be required to attend the Washington State Core Investigation Course offered through the CJTC within the first year of employment and become state certified.

After 1 year of hire, the medicolegal death investigator will proceed with the certification process with the American Board of Medicolegal Death Investigators (ABMDI).

POLICY

Participation in State Data Collection

Policy:

Cases investigated by the Skagit County Coroner's office are available for review by the Washington State Violent Death Review Board (NVDRS); the Washington State Unintentional Drug Overdose Reporting System (SUDORS), the Child Fatality Review Board, Medical and Correctional Facilities review boards, and state drug reporting programs.

The Skagit County Coroner's Office will contact OSHA, L&I and/or other Consumer Product Safety Representatives when appropriate cases arise involving the Coroner's Office.

POLICY

Scheduling and Time Sheets

Policy

Leave Requests

- All staff members and interns are required to submit any requested time off using a *Leave Request* form. These requests must be submitted to the Coroner at least 1 month in advance.
 - The requestor will place the leave request form in the leave request folder outside the Coroner's Office.
 - The Coroner will review and sign the leave request either authorizing or denying the requested time off.
 - The Coroner will notify the staff member via email if the request has been accepted or denied.

Scheduling

- The Coroner and Medicolegal Death Investigator II staff will work together to devise a 2-month schedule for the office.
 - Any approved leave requests will be added to the schedule.
- The Coroner will email the final schedule to all Coroner staff and interns by the 15th of the month prior to the 2 month schedule ending.
- The schedule for the next 2 months will be posted on the wall at the Coroner's Office for reference.
- It is the responsibility of staff and interns to review the schedule and communicate any errors as soon as possible.
 - Last minute changes to the schedule will not be permitted unless it is an emergency situation, or the staff member is sick.
- Full-Time Medicolegal Death Investigators will be scheduled to work either (5) 8-hour shifts or (4) 10-hours shifts with coverage in the office 7 days per week, excluding county holidays.
 - Refer to Skagit County Human Resources Policy regarding Holiday pay.

County holidays

- County Holidays will be covered by an assigned investigator.
- Holidays will be rotated amongst the death investigator staff.
- The assigned investigator will be on-call from home and will not need to work in the office.
- The assigned investigator will be required to take a work lab top home in order to handle any office-related work that comes in.
- If the on-call investigator receives any phone calls or responds to a scene, the on-call investigator will be able to claim Holiday Premium Pay hours (code 701) for only the hours worked. In addition, the on-call investigator will claim \$30 duty pay.

Overtime

- To avoid overtime, flex time may be honored if hours exceed the 40-hour work week.
 - The medicolegal death investigator must contact the Coroner in advance for authorization to flex hours.
- Overtime must be approved by the Coroner beforehand.
 - For any claimed overtime hours, the staff member must provide additional information (such as case # and task) to support the requested hours.

Scheduling and Time Sheets Cont.

Duty Pay On-call hours

- In addition to the 40-hour work week schedule, all Medicolegal Death Investigators, including any on-call deputy coroners will be assigned to cover at least 1 night per week on-call.
 - The assigned on-call investigator will receive duty pay (\$15-\$30) for being on-call.
 - If the on-call investigator does not receive any phone calls or scene responses, then the on-call investigator can only claim half duty pay (\$15)
 - If the on-call investigator handles any phone calls or responds to a scene, the on-call investigator can claim full duty pay (\$30).

Time Sheets

- Time sheets are due on the 15th and the last day of each month. If the pay period ends on a weekend or prior to a holiday, then the time sheets will be due the Friday before the weekend or the day before the holiday.
- Time sheets are required to be completed and signed by each staff.
- Time sheets must be placed in the Coroner's box no later than 10am on the day pay roll is due, unless otherwise previously arranged.
- If the pay period ends after the time sheet is submitted and additional hours have been worked, these hours will need to be claimed on the next pay period time sheet.

Vaccination for Employees

I _____ have been offered the approved vaccinations including COVID-19, Hepatitis A, Hepatitis B and Influenza vaccinations.

() I already have the vaccinations. _____(initial)

() I decline the vaccinations offered _____(initial)

Employee (Print)

Date

Employee Signature

Coroner (Print)

Date

Coroner Signature

Vehicle Supply Check List

Vehicle Cab and Investigations:

☐ Fuel Level: _____

Blinkers ☐ Left ☐ Right

☐ Emergency Lights

☐ Headlights

☐ Wipers

☐ Trip set to zero

☐ **Working** pens and markers in cup holder.

☐ Cell phone charge cable

☐ Sharps container replaced if full

☐ Scene Light is charged

☐ Investigative forms in cab are stocked

☐ Trashes emptied

Gloves

☐ Small (nitrile/latex)

☐ Medium (nitrile/latex)

☐ Large (nitrile/latex)

*Economy gloves go in the center console of van, driver side compartment in front of metal toolbox in suburban. Heavy duty autopsy gloves are in the metal toolbox. We do not need more than 1 of each type in each vehicle.

Infection Control

☐ Cavi wipes (make sure it is not almost empty)

☐ Paper towels

☐ Blue towels

☐ Bio-hazard trash bags

Body bags

☐ Regular bag strapped into gurney(s)

☐ 2 Infant (blue) bags

☐ 2 Child (white) bags

☐ 5 Regular Bags (including in gurney(s))

☐ 3 White Shrouds

☐ 1 Blue Shroud (XL)

☐ 1 Mesh Water Recovery Bag (2 in Van)

☐ Mega-Mover

Vehicle Supply Check List

Gray Toxicology Kit

- ☐ Gray Top Tubes
- ☐ Red top Tubes
- ☐ 20 mL syringes
- ☐ 5 mL syringes
- ☐ Needles *include short and long (vit vs blood)
- ☐ Specimen bags

Integrity Tools

- ☐ 2 Fitted Cotton sheets (UNOPENED PACKAGES)
- ☐ ID Bands
- ☐ Integrity seals
- ☐ Property Bags
- ☐ Tape Measure
- ☐ Medical tape
- ☐ Large paper bags
- ☐ Small paper bags
- ☐ Shoe covers
- ☐ N 95 masks

The entire interior of vehicle and the cots need to be wiped down on EVERY CHECK

Reorganize vehicle, remove trash, put items back in their "home"

Signature: _____ Date: _____

Circle Vehicle:

2522 Suburban

198 Ford Van

Vehicle Maintenance

Policy:

It is the responsibility of the responding investigator to restock used items following scene investigation.

Vehicles are required to be properly stocked and cleaned.

The fuel level for each response vehicle needs to be at or above $\frac{3}{4}$ tank at all times.

The gurneys will be cleaned after every scene response.

A vehicle checklist needs to be completed for each vehicle at least once per week. The signed checklist will be scanned and uploaded to an electronic file folder.

POLICY

Autopsy Protocol

Set up for case:

- Formalin containers, 1 of each
 - -Clear container for stock tissue
 - -NW pathology container for histology (if doctor would like to have slides made)
- 2 cassettes (for histology)
- 2 grey top tubes (blood)
- 1 non-expired red top tube (vitreous humor)
- If needed, 1 red top tube for urine (cases with toxicology concerns)
- DNA envelope and filter paper
- (1) 20 mL syringe with needle for blood draw and urine
- (1) 3 or 5mL syringe with needle for vitreous
- Necessary tools including scalpel holder and blades, forceps, scissors, bone saw, dura strippers, T-bar, hemostats, rulers with case number labels, all necessary specimen labels.
- Bucket with red biohazard bag inside
- Specimen bag for coroner retained specimens
- 4 print tabs and ink pad for fingerprints

Prior to Autopsy (Body Prep)

- Take body out of cooler and place on table
- Verify the bag identification markers
- Take any requested x-rays (Coroner or Forensic Pathologist request)
- Take height of the decedent
 - Document in MDI log (*postmortem/autopsy section*)

Required photos:

- Case placard
- Bag with name on it
- Seal number (if used)
- Entire body as is (straight down view)
- Ankle band
- Unclothe the body and photograph all clothing separately using a grey board (both sides)
 - Take close ups of any defects in clothing
 - Document all clothing in MDI (property/evidence tab)
- Take unclean photos of important wounds prior to cleaning
- Clean the body
- Three photos unclothed (face/head, torso, and lower half) both anterior and posterior
- Right and left lateral sides of entire body
- Face (straight on) with blue towels
- Eyes open and palpebral conjunctivae. Document petechial hemorrhages or lack of
- Up the nares and in the mouth
- Hands (dorsal and ventral surfaces) using grey board

Autopsy Protocol cont.

- Areas of interest (refer to pathologist) with and without measuring device
 - Trauma
 - Blood staining/spatter
 - Purge or foam
 - Puncture marks
- Photograph all tattoos and identifying scars (use grey board or blue towel for background)
- Photograph and document any property left on the body
 - Enter property in the property tab in MDI log
 - Place property in property bag with case # and name.
 - Put property in secured caged locker
 - Affix green or yellow tag labeled "property in lock box" to body pouch.

Specimen collection:

- Obtain 2 grey top tubes of blood (femoral preferred)
- If requested by Coroner or Forensic Pathologist, obtain urine and run urine drug test using T-cup
 - Document T-cup results with photos and enter positive results or lack of in MDI log in pathology-autopsy tab under preliminary finding notes.
- DO NOT DRAW VITREOUS UNTIL PATHOLOGIST HAS SEEN THE EYES OR OTHERWISE INSTRUCTED

Autopsy

- Write case number, name, date, start time, names of attending the examination/assisting, and pathologist name on white board
- Take decedent from cooler and place on autopsy table
- Photograph when instructed by pathologist
- Document and collect any evidence provided by pathologist
 - Follow evidence policy
 - If Law enforcement is present, release to law enforcement following autopsy.
 - Enter evidence into MDI log and have law enforcement representative electronically sign to receive evidence.
 - Print off evidence release form and provide a copy to law enforcement.
- Collect samples and place in appropriate tubes/containers.
 - Make sure each sample is labeled correctly
- Write all organ weights and additional findings onto white board
- Suture and clean up decedent.
- Place in body shroud and into cooler for release
- Take picture of the white board after autopsy is finished
 - Make sure case number, name, start date/ time and finish date/time are written on the board along with the names of those attending the examination/assisting.

Autopsy Protocol

After Autopsy

- Update Coroner with examination findings and cause and manner of death
- Verify all samples are labeled and individually heat sealed. Select the samples needed to be sent out for testing and place in designated bin.
- Put remaining samples into clear specimen bag (labeled) into freezer
- Complete the *Samples Collected Inventory List* in toxicology prep area
- Clean up autopsy station including floor and any other equipment used
- Set up autopsy station for standard autopsy
- Download all photos from autopsy to the Coroner Shared folder (label: case#_autopsy).
- Transfer photos into MDI log (under *autopsy*)
- Add weights, samples collected, UDS results, findings, and cause and manner of death in the *Autopsy* section in MDI log
- Complete date and time ready for release in *Case Administration* section
- Contact family and inform them of findings, cause and manner of death, and confirm funeral home selection
 - Make note in case notes of phone call
- Contact funeral home for release
 - Make note in case notes
- If needed- prepare and complete requisition forms for Avero (histology cassettes), UW (vitreous testing), PHL or UW (respiratory swabs) and Metabolic Screening Card. **All samples should go out same day when possible.**
- Verify case number is on toxicology tracking white board with asterisk
- Scan in any documents including prints, toxicology requisition form, various laboratory requisition forms, body diagram, etc.
- Make sure all forms and case report are printed off and in case file.
- Place case file in follow-up bin

Autopsy Suite

Policy:

All work surfaces contaminated by body fluids or tissue shall be decontaminated using accepted techniques, which can be modified depending on the known facts of the case.

All work surfaces in the morgue will be decontaminated by the end of every workday using an accepted decontamination solution.

POLICY

Autopsy

Policy:

Autopsies will be performed by a Board-certified Forensic Pathologist for the Skagit County Coroner's Office when it is necessary to determine or confirm the cause of death, document injury, or when required by state law. If a Board-certified Forensic Pathologist is unavailable to perform an autopsy at the facility, the Skagit County Coroner's Office will transport the case to a NAME. or IACME accredited facility for autopsy services.

The Board-certified Forensic Pathologist shall be licensed to practice medicine in Washington State and this shall be verified annually by Skagit County. The Board-certified Forensic Pathologist will sign a contract with Skagit County regarding services and fees. The Coroner's Office shall have at least 2 contracted Board-certified Forensic Pathologists.

The Board-Certified Forensic Pathologist shall be responsible to perform each postmortem examination, the diagnosis made, the opinions formed, and any subsequent opinion testimony.

Washington state law gives the Coroner authority to decide if an autopsy is necessary to determine the most likely cause of death. **Not every death will require an autopsy**, however, each case requiring coroner involvement will undergo a comprehensive investigation. It is important to realize that autopsies do not always provide a definitive cause of death.

An autopsy can assist in the following:

- Confirm or determine the identity of the deceased.
- Identify injuries and diseases that may have contributed to the death.
- Determine the effect of medical treatment on the deceased.
- Assist in the evaluation of the manner of the death.
- Re-assure care takers that their action or inaction did not contribute to the death.
- Maintain public confidence in relation to deaths that occur in custody.

An autopsy should be considered in the following cases:

- Sudden death of an apparent healthy person with no known or significant medical history
- Violent or suspicious circumstances
- Potential drug overdose or drug-related deaths
- Accidental deaths including Traffic or recreational-related deaths
- Suicides
- Deaths in which there are abuse or neglect concerns by another (includes past history with APS or CPS)
- Infant or child deaths
- Work-related injury deaths
- In-custody deaths
- The cause and manner of death cannot be established without an autopsy

The investigator will make sure all photographs, demographic information, and a detailed report or summary involving the circumstances of death be made available to the Forensic Pathologist prior to autopsy.

Autopsy cont.

Complete Autopsy: is defined to include a detailed external examination of the entire body, and an internal examination to include the removal and dissection of all thoraco-abdominal and neck organs, opening the head with the removal and examination of the brain. These are performed by a board-certified forensic pathologist. The forensic pathologist will examine all external aspects of the body prior to dissection. All autopsy ex-situ dissections shall be performed by the forensic pathologist.

All pathology assistants, autopsy technicians, dieners, or others without medical training, shall work in the presence of and under the direct supervision of a board-certified forensic pathologist.

Autopsy reports are to be completed on every autopsy case.

Autopsy reports should be clear, concise, and easily interpretable by other medical professionals.

Autopsy reports shall provide a cause and manner of death.

Digital photographs shall be used to further document significant injuries.

Specimens should be retained for toxicological and histological examination during autopsies.

Histological examination is at the discretion of the board-certified forensic pathologist performing the autopsy. Not every case will have histology or slides prepared for further examination.

Autopsies are completed in accordance with the National Association of Medical Examiners (NAME) Autopsy Standards.

External examination: is defined as a detailed description of the decedent's remains including scars, surgical incisions, medical devices, tattoos, etc. No internal cuts are made on the body and no organs are examined.

External examination forms are to be completed on every external examination case (see form)

Both body diagrams and photographs (digital) shall be used to further document significant injuries

Partial autopsy: is defined as an examination that forgoes any part of the defined complete autopsy, e.g. not opening any of the body cavities or not examining organs or examining in situ.

Example:

- a. A decedent with a significant medical history who sustained a significant fall and did not undergo diagnostic imaging to establish the presence or absence of suspected intracranial trauma.
- b. A decedent with an apparent self-inflicted gunshot wound of head in which the projectile would need to be recovered from within the cranium.

Evidence

Policy:

Every effort should be made to comply with the collection of specific items requested by law enforcement personnel investigating the case.

Law enforcement representatives may request that specific items be collected as evidence during examination.

Evidence includes but is not limited to:

- Tissue and Fluid Specimens
- Ligature
- Clothing
- Fibers
- Swabs
- Fingernail Clippings
- Hair Samples
- Projectiles
- Drug paraphernalia
- Fingerprints
- DNA

All collection methods should be practiced with minimal cross contamination and by using pre-packaged sterile instruments and equipment or sterilizing instruments using a bleach and water solution, or alcohol burner.

The proper personal protective equipment (PPE) shall be worn by the Forensic Pathologist, Coroner staff assisting, and any law enforcement attending while performing procedures in the autopsy room during evidence collection.

The following PPE shall be worn:

- N95 Respirator
- Hair bonnet
- Face shields/safety goggles
- Aprons/gowns
- Gloves
- Shoe covers
- Sleeves

Evidence cont.

Documentation of Evidence

A photograph should be taken of the deceased as is before collection of specimens or evidence.

All evidence will be collected by the Forensic Pathologist or coroner staff assisting with the autopsy and placed in "properly labeled" paper envelopes or paper bags provided by law enforcement present or supplied by the Coroner's Office.

To document chain of custody, all evidence collected by the Forensic Pathologist or coroner staff assisting is packaged and labeled with a case number, is released, and a form bearing signatures of the Coroner's Office and receiving law enforcement representative is generated specifying the date and time of release in MDI log under evidence/property. A copy of this document will be printed and be retained in the paper case file.

Evidence items retained after the examination shall be transferred to evidence storage lockers by the Coroner staff attending the examination

Specimens and tissue evidence retained following examination shall be transferred to the Specimen Freezer in the Autopsy Suite. A list and quantity of the retained samples shall be added to the logbook with the Coroner staff's initials and date.

Forensic Specialists

Policy:

RCW: 68.50.330 allows the Skagit County Coroner to have a qualified specialist to assist with the identification of remains under the jurisdiction of Skagit County Coroner.

Odontologist:

A Board Certified Forensic Odontologist will perform an examination of the body or human remains when identification cannot be established by any other means. The Coroner's Office will obtain and provide the Forensic Odontologist with ante-mortem dental records as well as include the Forensic Odontologist as consultant on the case in MDI log. The Odontologist is required to provide a written report to the Coroner after the examination is complete.

Anthropologist:

When skeletal, mummified or burned remains are discovered, a Board-Certified Forensic Anthropologist will be contacted as required by RCW. The Coroner's Office will coordinate with the Forensic Anthropologist to examine the remains which may require the remains to be transported to the facility in which the Forensic Anthropology examination will take place. The Forensic Anthropologist is required to provide a written report to the Coroner after the examination is complete.

Other Forensic Specialists:

Additional forensic specialists are available to assist the Coroner in cases where additional analysis is needed such as Fingerprinting, DNA, Entomology and Anthropology.

Forensic specialists are required to provide a report of examination for each Coroner case.

Infant or Child Autopsy Protocol

Station Preparation for Autopsy

- Formalin containers, 1 of each
 - -Clear container for stock tissue
 - -NW pathology container for histology
- 6 cassettes labeled with case number A-F (case number_ A)
- 2 grey top tubes (blood)
- 1 non-expired red top tube (vitreous humor)
- If needed, 1 red top tube for urine (cases with toxicology concerns)
- DNA envelope and filter paper
- Metabolic screening card (fill in necessary blanks)
 - Add blood spots to designated area on card (at examination)
- (2) 5 mL syringes with needles for specimen draws
- Necessary tools including scalpel holder and blades, forceps, scissors, bone saw, dura strippers, T-bar, hemostats, rulers with case number labels, all necessary specimen labels.
- Small bucket with red biohazard bag inside
- Specimen bag for coroner retained specimens
- Large Inkpad with 2 large index cards for footprints and handprints

Prior to Autopsy

- Get x-rays of child
 - -full body (includes arms/hands and legs/feet) all in one shot
 - -head only
 - -verify with on-call supervisor if need any additional x-rays
- Required Photos
 - Case placard
 - Body Bag with name
 - Seal number (if used)
 - Entire body as is (straight down view)
 - Anterior and posterior
 - Hands (dorsal and ventral surfaces) using grey board
 - Bottoms of feet
 - Ankle band
- Remove medical therapy and clothing
 - Photograph all clothing separately using a grey board (both sides)
 - Take close ups of any defects in clothing
 - Document all clothing in MDI (property/evidence tab)
- Take unclear photos of important marks or wounds prior to cleaning
- Clean up infant and photograph cleaned up face straight on with blue towels.
- Required Photos
 - Entire body (supine) straight down
 - Torso
- Lower half
- Right and left lateral sides of entire body
- Eyes open and palpebral conjunctivae. Document petechial hemorrhages or lack of
- Up the nares and in the mouth

Infant or Child Autopsy Protocol cont.

- Areas of interest (refer to pathologist) with and without measuring device
 - Trauma
 - Blood staining/spatter
 - Purge or foam
 - Puncture marks
- Photograph all marks and identifying scars (use grey board or blue towel for background)
- Photograph and document any property left on the body
 - Enter property in the property tab in MDI log
 - Place property in property bag with case # and name.
 - Put property in secured caged locker
 - Affix green or yellow tag labeled "property in lock box" to body pouch.
- **Refer to pathologist for additional photographs before starting internal examination**
- Take handprints and footprints (x2)
 - 1 for parents
 - 1 for case file
- Take Measurements, **infants only** (use inches and centimeters)
 - Crown to Rump
 - Crown to Heal
 - Head circumference (occipital-frontal circumference)
 - Chest circumference (at level of nipples)
 - Abdominal circumference (level of umbilicus)
 - Foot length
- Obtain weight of infant using the appropriate scale. If not an infant, then use floor scale to obtain weight.

Autopsy

- Take child out from cooler and place on autopsy table
- Photos
 - Photograph the chest reflected with chest plate intact
 - Photograph chest with chest plate removed
 - Photograph scalp reflected before opening the head
 - Photograph brain before removal
 - Photograph any other findings of interest per the pathologist
- Collect samples and place in appropriate tubes/containers. Make sure each sample is labeled correctly
- Write all organ weights and additional findings onto white board
- Clean up and suture infant. Place in body bag and into cooler for release
- Take picture of the white board after autopsy is finished
 - Make sure case number, infant name, start date/ time and finish date/time are written on the board along with the names of those attending the examination/assisting.
- If there are any requested memorial keepsakes for the family (hair, hand or foot prints), make sure that they are packaged in a separate clear bag for the family and released to the funeral home after autopsy.
 - Refer to designated infant keepsake supplies

Infant or Child Autopsy Protocol cont.

After Autopsy

- Update Coroner with examination findings and cause and manner of death
- Verify all samples are labeled and individually heat sealed. Select the samples needed to be sent out for testing and place in designated bin.
- Put remaining samples into clear specimen bag (labeled) into freezer
- Complete the *Samples Collected Inventory List* in toxicology prep area
- Clean up autopsy station including floor and any other equipment used
- Set up autopsy station for standard autopsy
- Download all photos from autopsy to the Coroner Shared folder (label: case#_autopsy).
- Transfer photos into MDI log (under *autopsy*)
- Add weights, samples collected, UDS results, findings, and cause and manner of death in the *Autopsy* section in MDI log
- Complete date and time ready for release in *Case Administration* section
- Contact family and inform them of findings, cause and manner of death, and confirm funeral home selection
 - Make note in case notes of phone call
- Contact funeral home for release
 - Make note in case notes
- If needed- prepare and complete requisition forms for Avero (histology cassettes), UW (vitreous testing), PHL or UW (respiratory swabs) and Metabolic Screening Card. **All samples should go out same day when possible.**
- Verify case number is on toxicology tracking white board with asterisk
- Scan in any documents including prints, toxicology requisition form, various laboratory requisition forms, body diagram, etc.
- Make sure all forms and case report are printed off and in case file.
- Place case file in follow-up bin

Post-Mortem Radiology

Policy:

An integral aspect of certain autopsy examinations is the performance of postmortem radiology. The decision for obtaining X-rays is the responsibility of the Coroner or Board-Certified Forensic Pathologist. Prior to release of the decedent, the Coroner's Office should ensure that the X-rays are obtained at a proper exposure level to allow for valid interpretation and are labeled with unique case number and are properly oriented to the viewer using a left or right designation on each radiograph.

Cases that require postmortem x-rays include:

- Penetrating and perforating trauma
- Gunshot wounds
- Blunt force trauma, such as traffic-related accidents
- Sharp force injury
- Decomposed remains
- Skeletonized remains
- Homicides
- Pediatric
- Cases in which death is caused by an explosive device
- Charred remains
- Unidentified remains
- Traffic Fatalities

Postmortem x-rays should be taken after completing the intake of remains.

If there are multiple projectiles involved, the body is charred, or the case is an infant or pediatric case, full body x-rays including all extremities, must be taken.

Postmortem x-rays will be taken prior to autopsy and if the body bag is sealed, the x-rays will be taken through the body bag without breaking the seal.

The attending forensic pathologist or the Coroner may request additional postmortem x-rays during or after the postmortem examination.

Lateral views should be obtained when foreign objects such as projectiles are present in the anterior/posterior images.

Lateral view in addition to anterior view x-ray of the head shall be taken when foreign objects are present.

The Coroner staff shall export all x-ray images immediately after completion into the electronic case file and MDI log.

Post-Mortem Radiology cont.

Radiology Safety

It is the responsibility of the Skagit County Coroner's Office and the staff using radiation sources to utilize proper radiation safety practices, minimizing exposure and risk of injury.

All staff utilizing X-ray equipment and assisting with obtaining X-rays shall wear radiation dosimeter badges/rings.

Radiation dosimeter badges and rings are tested and reported by a vendor that specializes in monitoring services for radiation detection and protection.

Any personnel in the room during imaging must wear protective equipment, such as a lead apron. Additional personnel cannot remain in the room during imaging without protective equipment.

POLICY

Post-Mortem Examination

Policy:

Examination Preparation

- The attending Board Certified Forensic Pathologist will be briefed prior to autopsy regarding the circumstances surrounding the case including photographs and records.
- Unless otherwise requested by the board-certified forensic pathologist, the body will be prepped by Coroner Staff prior to the Forensic Pathologist arriving for autopsy. This includes:
 - Photographs of the body as received
 - Removal of clothing
 - Clothing should be removed carefully and without necessary cutting or tearing.
 - All pockets will be thoroughly examined and any found objects will be documented photographically.
 - Photographs of clothing individually
 - Place clothing in a red biohazard bag. The clothing will remain with the body following autopsy
 - Clean the body followed by photographs of the body (front and back side)
 - Photographs with and without scale of trauma, scars, marks
 - Photographs of each tattoo
 - X-rays of body (if required or requested by pathologist)
 - Infants, homicides, suspicious deaths, multiple gunshot wounds require full body x-rays
 - Upload x-rays to MDI-log and have x-rays available for pathologist to review
 - Collect toxicology samples except vitreous: blood, urine, DNA sample
 - Obtain fingerprints
 - Measure body length and document
 - Photograph and document property on body
 - Drugs that are illicit or prescription found on body will be released to the local law enforcement for destruction.
- For photographs of the body, grey boards will be used to omit any background artifact from the photos.
- The attending Board Certified Forensic Pathologist must personally examine all external aspects of the body in advance of the dissection.

Post-Mortem Examination cont.

Internal Examination

- During the internal examination, the Coroner staff will work at the direction of the board certified forensic pathologist.
- Required photos at autopsy include:
 - The chest reflected
 - After the chest plate is removed
 - Scalp reflected
 - Brain in situ
 - Brain removed

Specimen Collection

- For all cases that undergo a postmortem examination, a DNA card will be retained indefinitely.
- Specimen collection may include peripheral blood, central blood or spleen squeeze for toxicological testing. In addition vitreous humor and urine may be collected in specific cases or at the direction of the forensic board certified forensic pathologist.
- The container will be labeled with the case number, date of collection, and decedent's name.
- Specimens retained will be labeled with the case number, date of examination, and decedent's name.
- The specimens will be stored at the Coroner's Office as required by RCW.

Evidence Collection

- Any and all evidence collection will be at the direction of the forensic board certified forensic pathologist.
- Evidence collected will be released to the law enforcement of jurisdiction following the autopsy.
- Sexual assault kits will be provided by the law enforcement agency of jurisdiction attending the autopsy.

Fingerprinting

- A print of the decedent's index finger and thumb from both hands if applicable, will be obtained on all cases.
- Cases that are homicides or suspicious in nature will require ten prints to be obtained if possible.
 - The prints will be submitted to Washington State Patrol ID Unit or the FBI for identification purposes.
- All prints obtained will remain in the case file as well as be scanned and uploaded to the case management system under the documents section.

Post-Mortem Examination Cont.

Toxicology Laboratory Services

- As per RCW 68.50.107, the Skagit County Coroner's Office is required to submit all necessary toxicology testing to the Washington State Toxicology Laboratory, an accredited and certified laboratory.
- The Washington State Toxicology Laboratory will supply the necessary shipping containers.
- The Laboratory will perform testing on the specimens and provide a final report when testing is complete.
- The report will be provided to the forensic board-certified forensic pathologist for review and opinion.
- The Washington State Toxicology Laboratory will contact the Coroner's Office regarding any retention or destruction of already processed specimens.
- All specimens will be obtained during an internal or external examination and will be stored in a freezer within the Coroner's Office.

Histology

- Histology services are provided by Northwest Pathology Services, a certified laboratory.
- The laboratory will receive cassettes from the Coroner and perform histological services on specimens collected by the board certified forensic pathologist and will provide slides and paraffin blocks for each cassette submitted.
- Histology slides/paraffin blocks will be stored indefinitely within the Coroner's Office.

Body Examination

Policy:

The scene investigator will perform a general, superficial external body examination with minimal disruption of the condition of the body.

The body will be photographed before it is disturbed from its found position.

The investigator will describe general appearance of the body (presence of injuries, scars, petechial hemorrhages, contusions, and discolorations) as well as deformities, masses and/or crepitus.

The investigator will also describe hygiene and grooming, as well as, clothing and its condition.

The investigator will assess the presence and degree of postmortem changes including but not limited to the following:

1. Rigor mortis, physically check the jaw, arms and trunk;
2. Livor mortis, check for the settling of blood in the most dependent areas of the body. Document (in report and photograph) presence or absence of livor mortis and if livor mortis blanches.
3. Obtain the body temperature by touching the body to determine if it is warm or cold to the touch. If there is inclement weather during the scene investigation, then the investigator will obtain a body temperature using an infrared laser thermometer.
4. Discoloration, marbling, bloating, blistering, skin slippage, mummification and desiccation of the toes and fingertips.
5. Artifacts of animal predation and insect activity.
6. Palpation of the head, neck, trunk, abdomen, pelvis, extremities, and backbone.
7. Lift up clothing to view body.
8. Check all pockets.
9. Photograph and document property found in the pockets, specifying which pockets property was found in.

Body Release Form/Tracking

Policy:

A Body Release Form will be completed in MDI log whenever the body is in the custody of the Coroner's Office.

The Body Release Form can be created in MDI log under *Case Information* and *Body Tracking*.

The investigator will enter a tracking event (received from or released to).

When jurisdiction is accepted on a case and the body will be transported to the Coroner's Office, the investigator will complete a *received from* tracking event.

When the body is released from the scene or from the Coroner's Office, a tracking event for *released to* will be created.

The following fields will be completed for each tracking event:

- Released to
- Location type
 - Scene
 - OPO
 - Funeral home
 - Hospital
 - Autopsy Facility
 - Morgue
 - ME/C Office
 - Secured Cooler
 - Mobile Cooler
 - Other
- Received Name
 - Person receiving the body and agency
- Released by
 - Person releasing the body
- Date and Time of release

When releasing the body at the scene or at the Coroner's Office, the person receiving the body will be required to electronically sign the release form. MDI log will create a body release form under documents that will retain the signature. A copy of this form will need to be printed and placed in the paper case file. The person receiving the body can also receive a copy of this form if requested.

*If the investigator is unable to complete the body release information in MDI log at the scene, a paper *scene body release form* can be used.

Body Removal

Policy:

All body removals will be done in a dignified manner.

The deceased will be placed in a protected area away from public view while in the custody of the Coroner's Office.

Every decedent or remains that come under the control of the Coroner's Office will be treated with respect and confidentiality.

POLICY

Body Transport and Handling

Policy:

The coroner should be consulted with any questions regarding body disposition.

Decedents who are not identifiable visually at the scene must be transported to the Skagit County Coroner's Office for proper identification. An exception would be if there are specific scars, marks or tattoos and/or medical hardware externally present that could be used to confirm ID at the scene.

- The coroner must be notified upon this circumstance.

The body may be released from the scene directly to the selected funeral home by the investigator. These instances may include cases deemed to be due to natural causes, cases with significant documented medical history, cases where the death appears natural but there are possible concerns about toxicology, cases in which next of kin cannot be reached but there are pre-arrangements with a funeral home.

Cases in which a postmortem examination is needed will require transport by the investigator to the county morgue.

Postmortem examinations should be performed on all deaths due to accident, suicide, undetermined manner, apparent drug toxicity, apparent homicides, suspicious circumstances, and infant deaths. Hospitalization may obviate the need for an autopsy in certain cases.

Preparation for Transport

For cases being transported to the County Morgue, the investigator will place the body into a clean zippered body pouch or plastic shroud, in a supine position.

For any apparent homicide, suspicious death, deaths in custody or gunshot wound (s), the decedent's hands should be placed in clean paper bags and secured at the wrist with tape to retain possible trace evidence and blood spatter pattern.

For any apparent homicide or suspicious death, the investigator will use a new fitted sheet to preserve any trace evidence as well as a new zippered body pouch. The body bag will be sealed with an integrity seal to ensure the integrity of all evidence on or around the body.

For cases that are directly released from the scene to a funeral home, the funeral home will prepare the body for transport including using their own body shroud. body can be placed in a plastic shroud. A body tracking event in MDI log shall be completed and signed by the designee of the funeral home. In the event that the funeral home will be delayed, the investigator will request that law enforcement sign for the release of the body back to the scene with the funeral home enroute.

Medications and Illicit Substances

The Skagit County Coroner's Office **will not** accept or take custody of any medication, drug (illicit or prescription), or drug paraphernalia from the scene of a death or from any agency that has collected said medication or drug in association to a death investigation. The investigator will photograph the medication, drug, and/or paraphernalia and request that the law enforcement official attending the scene collect it as evidence or for destruction.

If medications, drugs, or drug paraphernalia are found after the body has arrived at the morgue, the coroner must be notified so release to law enforcement or disposal can be arranged.

Body Transport and Handling

Personal Property

Personal effects found on the body will be photographed, documented in MDI log under *property/evidence* tab and released to the legal next of kin present at the scene or transported with the body to the morgue to be later released to the funeral home or family. If released to the legal next-of-kin on scene, a release form shall be created in MDI log and signed by the legal next of kin with photo ID verification.

If the property does not belong to the decedent, then it will be released to law enforcement at the scene or following discovery.

If personal property is removed from the body at the scene, but cannot be released to family or law enforcement, then the investigator will place that property in a property bag and placed in the body bag with the body.

All property transported back to the Coroner's Office will be photographed and documented prior to release. All property will be photographed all together in one picture prior to being placed into a property bag.

Property will be placed into a property bag and sealed. The property bag will be placed in the secured evidence locker in the morgue.

Affix a green/yellow property tag to the body bag to alert the releasing party to the presence of the property. Add case to the white board under *property in house*.

Case Numbering System

Policy:

The Skagit County Coroner's Office uses MDI Log for its case management system. When a death is reported to the Skagit County Coroner's Office, a unique case file number is assigned to the case and the information regarding the death is entered into a relational database under the assigned case file number. This numbering system will include all Coroner and Non-Jurisdiction Assumed (NJA) Cases.

POLICY



SKAGIT COUNTY CORONER

Case Number:

Date:

--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--

Each square represents one inch.

Chain of Custody

Policy:

Every item obtained from the scene, whether it is property or evidence will be documented in MDI log under *property/evidence*. Property and evidence will be sealed in an integrity bag, and the investigator/autopsy technician who collected the items will then initial and date the sealed bag.

- All property and evidence will be placed into a designated storage locker in the autopsy suite until released to the designated agency or representative.
- When released, the designated agency or representative will sign for the Property or Evidence in MDI log to document the chain of custody.

Specimens and Toxicology

Specimens collected at the scene or during postmortem examination, will be placed into appropriate containers and labeled with the case number, decedent's name, and date of collection. For toxicology testing, the investigator will refer to the most current policy and procedure provided by the Washington State Patrol (WSP) Toxicology Laboratory.

DNA

After collection of blood specimen, the investigator will place several drops of blood on a filter paper for DNA sample. The filter paper and the paper envelope for the sample will be labeled with the decedents name and case number. These DNA samples will be kept indefinitely and will be made available for future additional testing.

Histology

If requested by the Forensic Pathologist, the investigator will prepare cassettes labeled with the case number and identifying letter (i.e. MDI case #_A and MDI case #_B). A formalin container labeled with the case number, decedents name, and date of collection will be prepared for the pathologist. During autopsy, the pathologist will collect specimens for histological purposes when needed. After specimen collection, the cassettes will be placed in the clean formalin container. A requisition form will be completed by Coroner staff and the histology courier will be notified for pick up (Avero Diagnostics). This must be done the day of specimen collection. Scan in the original copy of the requisition form prior to placing both the original and yellow copies in the specimen bag's outer pouch. The pink copy will be retained in the file for records. Do not scan the pink copy, it is too faint. Histology blocks and slides will be retained indefinitely.

Stock Tissue

A formalin container labeled with the case number, decedents name, and date of collection will be prepared for the pathologist. During autopsy, the pathologist will collect tissue samples and place them in the container. This tissue will be stored for three years and one day. If case is certified as a homicide or undetermined death the tissue will be kept indefinitely.

Chain of Custody cont.

Evidence

All evidence will be collected by the Forensic Pathologist and/or coroner staff assisting with the autopsy. Evidence will be placed in “properly labeled” paper envelopes or paper bags provided by law enforcement present or supplied by the Coroner’s Office.

To document chain of custody, all evidence collected by the Forensic Pathologist/coroner staff will be released with a form bearing signatures of the Coroner’s Office and receiving law enforcement representative specifying the date and time of release. This *evidence release form* will be automatically generated in MDI log as a document. A copy of the form will need to be retained in the paper case file.

Evidence items retained after the examination shall be transferred to evidence storage lockers by the coroner staff attending the examination. A note will be entered in the *communications log* in MDI log as well as the *Pathology/autopsy* section stating that there is evidence being held and what the steps are to release that evidence.

Body Release

Coroner staff will enter body release date and time, recipient receiving body, and name of the coroner staff member releasing body. The coroner staff member will have the representative receiving the body electronically sign the body release form. This form will be autogenerated in MDI log under documents. A copy of this form will be printed out and placed in the case file to document the release of the body.

Confirmation of Identification

I have viewed the individual at the Skagit County Coroner's Office and I have identified this person to be as follows:

DATE: _____

CASE NUMBER: _____

DECEDENT'S NAME: _____

DATE OF BIRTH: ____/____/____

ADDRESS: _____ CITY _____ STATE _____ ZIP _____

RELATIONSHIP TO THE DECEDENT: _____

NAME: (Print) _____

SIGNATURE: _____

☐ Copy of Government Issued Photo Identification

Contagious Disease Reporting

Policy:

The Skagit County Coroner's Office will report all contagious diseases to the Skagit County Public Health Office immediately after being made aware of the death. Unless they are previously diagnosed or come from a medical facility in which contagion was known. Contagious diseases include but are not limited to Asiatic cholera, yellow fever, smallpox, scarlet fever, diphtheria, typhus, typhoid fever, bubonic plague or leprosy.

RCW 70.05.110

Local health officials and physicians to report contagious diseases.

It shall be the duty of the local board of health, health authorities or officials, and of physicians in localities where there are no local health authorities or officials, to report to the state board of health, promptly upon discovery thereof, the existence of any one of the following diseases which may come under their observation, to wit: Asiatic cholera, yellow fever, smallpox, scarlet fever, diphtheria, typhus, typhoid fever, bubonic plague or leprosy, and of such other contagious or infectious diseases as the state board may from time to time specify.

Initial Death Notification

Policy:

Deaths should be reported to the Skagit County Coroner's Office immediately in order to determine jurisdiction.

In general, all deaths occurring outside of admission to medical health care facilities (i.e, hospitals, nursing homes, and hospice) and certain cases of admitted deaths (falls with injury, delayed deaths during hospitalization) are reported.

Deaths are reported to the Skagit County Coroner's Office by police, medical personnel at hospitals, nursing homes, and by members of the funeral industry. These calls go to the main telephone number for the Skagit County Coroner's Office or are delivered by text message from the Skagit County Dispatch to all Coroner-issued cell phones.

The investigator will obtain demographic information about the decedent and the information regarding the circumstances of death, date and time of formal pronouncement, assign a case number, and determine whether or not the death falls under the jurisdiction of the Skagit County Coroner's Office.

During the initial report, the investigator will obtain circumstances and chain of events that led to the death.

The following will be obtained from the initial call:

- Date and time of call;
- Informant's name, title and contact information and agency case number if any;
- Location of death;
- Last, first and middle name of the decedent;
- Decedent's date of birth;
- Formal date and time of pronouncement;
- Gender, race and marital status;
- Social Security Number if available;
- Decedent's home address (NO PO BOXES);
- Approximate height and weight;
- Date and time of death (if was pronounced at a facility or by EMS);
- Date and time found and by whom;
- Last known alive, date and time;
- Next of kin, relationship and phone number;
- Was next of kin notified?
- Summarize the medical history and medications present;
- Primary care provider and hospitals and clinics visited;
- Briefly summarize the circumstances surrounding the death and why this is or is not a Coroner's case.

Death Scene Protocol

Policy:

All deaths reported to the Skagit County Coroner's Office shall be thoroughly investigated to determine jurisdiction, and, for those deaths that fall under the Coroner's jurisdiction, to aid in the certification of the cause and manner of death. Cases that are deemed Coroner cases and require investigations are defined in accordance with RCW 68.50.010.

The Skagit County Coroner's Office conducts an independent investigation separate from law enforcement or other investigative entities.

The investigator will routinely obtain copies of law enforcement reports and first responder reports as well as medical records. These records will not be retained after the case is closed.

High priority cases are those that are outdoor, in public view, homicide (or potential) scenes, and high-profile scenes. The investigator shall prioritize these cases over all other cases.

Investigators are responsible for being fully prepared at all times, i.e., keeping investigative kits fully stocked, vehicles fueled and ready, cameras, phones charged, carrying appropriate identification, and being properly attired for all weather conditions.

Scene Safety

Scene hazards include unstable structures, body fluids, hostile family/bystanders, traffic, animals, environmental extremes, and chemical exposures.

Use personal protective equipment.

Obtain clearance to enter the scene from appropriate officials (fire, lead detective, hazmat).

Always have law enforcement escort when interviewing family bystanders or entering a private residence.

The following are intended to assist the investigative staff in performing death investigations in a complete manner and in a safe and secure environment.

- Scene investigations are not only limited to the area where the body is located when a death is reported. The scene may extend to the location where the injury and/or incident occurred (e.g. body transported to the hospital but the original incident location occurred at home).
- Each investigator on-call is responsible for being fully prepared at all times (i.e. keeping investigative equipment stocked in scene bag, fuel in the county vehicle, cameras and phones charged, carrying appropriate identification, and being properly attired for all weather conditions).
- The investigator will contact the Coroner regarding all death reports and any follow-up needed.
- The on-call investigator will report to the scene promptly without compromising personal or public safety.
- Identify any cultural or religious considerations
 - Contact on-call supervisor with any concerns
- The responding investigator will request that the law enforcement agency of jurisdiction remain on scene until the scene investigation is complete.
- At minimum following return from the scene, all required fields in MDI log need to be completed along with a detailed narrative describing the circumstances of the death and any important details.

Determining Case Jurisdiction

Policy:

All deaths reported to the Skagit Coroner's Office shall be thoroughly investigated to determine jurisdiction and, for those deaths that fall under the jurisdiction of the Coroner, to aid in the certification of the cause and manner of death, pursuant with RCW 68.50.010, (Coroner's jurisdiction over remains).

The jurisdiction of bodies of all deceased persons who come to their death suddenly when in apparent good health without medical attendance within the thirty-six hours preceding death; or where the circumstances of death indicate death was caused by unnatural or unlawful means; or where death occurs under suspicious circumstances; or where a coroner's autopsy or postmortem or coroner's inquest is to be held; or where death results from unknown or obscure causes, or where death occurs within one year following an accident; or where the death is caused by any violence whatsoever, or where death results from a known or suspected abortion; whether self-induced or otherwise; where death apparently results from drowning, hanging, burns, electrocution, gunshot wounds, stabs or cuts, lightning, starvation, radiation, exposure, alcoholism, narcotics or other addictions, tetanus, strangulations, suffocation or smothering; or where death is due to premature birth or still birth; or where death is due to a violent contagious disease or suspected contagious disease which may be a public health hazard; or where death results from alleged rape, carnal knowledge or sodomy, where death occurs in a jail or prison; where a body is found dead or is not claimed by relatives or friends, is hereby vested in the county coroner, which bodies may be removed and placed in the morgue under such rules as are adopted by the coroner with the approval of the county commissioners, having jurisdiction, providing therein how the bodies shall be brought to and cared for at the morgue and held for the proper identification where necessary.

Deaths should be reported to the Skagit County Coroner's Office immediately in order to determine jurisdiction.

In general all deaths occurring outside of admission to medical health care facilities (i.e, hospitals, nursing homes, and hospice) and certain cases of admitted deaths (falls with injury, delayed deaths during hospitalization) are reported.

Deaths are reported to the Skagit County Coroner's Office by police, medical personnel at hospitals, nursing homes, and by members of the funeral industry. These calls go to the main telephone number for the Skagit County Coroner's Office or are delivered by text message from the Skagit County Dispatch to all Coroner-issued cell phones.

The investigator will obtain demographic information about the decedent and the information regarding the circumstances of death, assign a case number, and after consultation with the Coroner, determine whether or not the death falls under the jurisdiction of the Skagit County Coroner's Office.

The Coroner's office will assist with completing death certificates consistent with Center for Disease Control (CDC) guidelines.

Documentation will be in the Skagit County Coroner's automated Case Management System (MDI log).

Drug Handling (Prescription and Illicit)

Policy:

The Skagit County Coroner's Office will not accept or take custody of any medication or drug (illicit or prescription) from the scene of a death or from any agency that has collected said medication or drug in association to a death investigation. Refer to RCW 69.41.030

When at a scene and there are prescription or illicit drugs present, the investigator must use the appropriate PPE to handle these items. Any prescriptions or illicit drugs must be well photographed and written documentation of the medications or substances present included in the investigator narrative. The investigator will photograph the medication or drug and request that the law enforcement official attending the scene collect it as evidence for destruction.

If medications are found after the body has arrived at the morgue, the Coroner must be notified so disposal can be arranged

Establishing Cause and Manner of Death

Policy:

The *cause* of death is the specific disease or injury that leads to the death.

The *manner* of death is the determination of how the disease or injury leads to the death.

Medicolegal classification of the manner of death is mainly for statistical purposes.

The manner of death stated on the death certificate is to clarify circumstances of death and how an injury was sustained. The manner of death has no direct bearing on criminal prosecution or insurance settlements.

The determination as to the Manner of Death by the Skagit County Coroner's Office is based on *the National Association of Medical Examiners: A Guide for Manner of Death Guidelines, First Edition, 2002*.
<https://name.memberclicks.net/assets/docs/MANNEROFDEATH.pdf>.

The classifications for Manner of Death are:

- **Natural**
 - Is defined as a death caused solely by disease and/or the aging process.
- **Accident**
 - Applies when an injury or poisoning causes death and there is little or no evidence that the injury or poisoning occurred with intent to harm or cause death. The fatal outcome was unintentional.
 - Per the National Association of Medical Examiners: A Guide for Manner of Death Guidelines, First Edition, 2002:
 - ***“Unintentional deaths from drug toxicity/poisoning in which the drug is administered by someone with the consent of the decedent may be classified as Accident, as long as there is no evidence by reasonable investigative inference that the drug was given with the intent to kill the victim. Prosecution may still occur, if appropriate. This approach may seem inconsistent with some other scenarios, but it is reasonable on the basis that severe injury or death is not near as likely as, for example, when a loaded gun is placed to the head and the trigger is pulled.”***
- **Suicide**
 - Results from an injury or poisoning as a result of an intentional, self-inflicted act committed to do self-harm or cause the death of one's self.
- **Homicide**
 - When death results from a volitional act committed by another person to cause fear, harm, or death. This may also include willful neglect. Intent to cause death is a common element, but not required for classification of homicide. Homicide for the purposes of the death certificate is a “neutral” term and neither indicates nor implies *criminal* intent, which remains a determination within the province of legal processes.
- **Undetermined**
 - This is a classification used when the information pointing to one manner of death is no more compelling than one or more other competing manners of death in thorough consideration of all available information. If new credible information regarding the case is provided at a later time, then the manner of death can be changed.

Establishing Cause and Manner of Death cont.

- **Pending**
 - May be listed temporarily when there is additional investigation, information and/or test results required for certification. The death certificate is amended with a cause and manner of death as soon as additional information becomes available.

Per the National Association of Medical Examiners:

Manner of death certifications should be objective and based on simple, established criteria.

Manner of death SHOULD NOT BE formulated to facilitate prosecution, avoid challenging publicity, build a political base, or promote a personal philosophy or agenda.

Handling and Disposition for Deceased Animals at Scenes

Policy:

Sadly, there are death scenes in which a pet is found deceased with the decedent. If there is a deceased animal present on scene (inside a residence or outdoors), the following should take place if law enforcement has elected to not make arrangements to have the deceased animal removed from the scene by an agency.

- Contact the decedent's family to determine if they would like to make arrangements for the deceased pet.
- If there is no family to contact at the time of the initial investigation/scene response, place the animal in a large bio bag and transport the animal with the decedent back to the morgue.
- Once returned to the morgue, place the decedent and the animal into the morgue cooler.
- Notify the Coroner of the deceased animal.
- If family do not wish to claim the animal, Coroner staff can drop the animal off for property disposal at the Humane Society.
 - There will be a fee, but this charge will be to the associated animal control agency (city versus county) for approximately \$25 per animal.
 - The Coroner's office will need to contact Emily Diaz with the Skagit County Animal Control (360-661-4015) to notify her of any and all animals dropped off at the Humane Society.

Skagit County Humane Society business hours are as follows:

Sunday	11 AM–1:30 PM, 2–4 PM
Monday	11 AM–5 PM
Tuesday	11 AM–5 PM
Wednesday	11 AM–1:30 PM, 2–5 PM
Thursday	11 AM–5 PM
Friday	11 AM–5 PM
Saturday	11 AM–1:30 PM, 2–4 PM

Hazardous Chemicals

Policy:

The purpose of this document is to inform Skagit County Coroner's Office employees that the agency is complying with the OSHA Hazard Communication Standard by:

1. Observing all its requirements,
2. Compiling a hazardous chemicals list for each unit,
3. Using material safety data sheets (MSDS),
4. Ensuring that all containers are labeled, and
5. Providing appropriate training.

To ensure that information about the dangers of hazardous chemicals used by the Skagit County Coroner's Office is known by all affected employees

Each employees should be advised of , the hazardous properties of the chemicals with which they work; safe handling, storage and disposal procedures; the hazards associated with non-routine tasks (e.g., cleaning of chemical spills); the hazards associated with chemicals in unlabeled containers; and measures to take to protect them from chemical hazards.

A hazardous material identification book will be in the office located next to the MSDS sheets book.

Identification

Policy:

Prior to removal of the body, the investigator will securely place an identification band on the decedent's right lower extremity (ankle).

- If unable to use a right extremity, a left extremity can be used.

The identification band will contain the case number and decedent's identity.

- If the identity of the person is unknown, the investigator will write "unidentified male" or "unidentified female" on the band.
- If the identity is presumed to be a certain name, then the investigator will write "tentative" next to the name.

The Skagit County Coroner's Office will use the following methods to identify a decedent:

- visual means (i.e. legal next of kin, driver license or government issued ID, tattoos, scars or marks)
- fingerprints
- medical or dental imaging
- devices such as implants or other identifying data

All homicides require scientific identification prior to release from the Skagit County Coroner's Office.

Positive identification of a decedent will be recorded in the official Coroner's Report of Death and retained in the case file.

RCW: 68.50.330 allows the Skagit County Coroner to have a qualified specialist to assist with the identification of remains under the jurisdiction of Skagit County Coroner. If a scientific form of identification is used, a signed report will be provided to the Coroner's Office and kept in the electronic case file.

If identification is unsuccessful within 30 days, the Skagit County Coroner will forward any and all dental information and imaging to the Washington State Patrol for identification purposes. Potential matches will be forwarded to the Skagit County Coroner's Office.

The Skagit County Coroner's Office will allow families and next of kin to identify decedents at the home or place of death if appropriate. If the decedent has been transported to the Coroner's Office, the family will not be able to view the body at the Coroner's Office. The family can request a cleaned-up face photo of the decedent to verify identity. If a viewing is requested, the family will need to make arrangements with the funeral home selected.

Refer to RCW 68.50.330

Infant and Child Death Investigations

Policy:

When an infant dies suddenly and unexpectedly, a complete death investigation is required to determine the cause and manner of death.

The Coroner will be notified of these deaths and depending on the circumstances, respond with the assigned investigator.

Deaths of infants require scene investigation. This includes:

- Examination of infant at the place of death
- Response to the incident location where the infant was initially found if not the place of death (i.e. hospital).

The investigation shall be documented using the SUIDI (Sudden Unexplained Infant Death Investigation) form.

A doll re-enactment of the infant's *placed* and *found* position will be done by the responding investigator.

- The goal of the doll re-enactment is to establish the chain of events that led to the discovery of the infant, as it was placed and then found.
- The responding investigator will explain to the participating family member or caregiver how the re-enactment process works and its importance.
 - Interviewing of the placed and finder of the infant is to be done separately if more than one individual is involved.

The responding investigator will

- Always explain the investigation process to the family prior to leaving the scene.
- Photographically document the infant at the hospital and/or the incident location.
- Photographically document the *placed* position using the *placed* placards.
- Photographically document the *found* position using the *found* placards.
- Photograph and take measurements of the layers of the bedding without the doll in the image.
- Photograph and collect the last bottle used to feed the infant. Do not empty the contents.
- If diaper or clothing was removed by EMS or hospital staff, photograph these items and collect them for the pathologist to examine at autopsy.
- Handle the infant and family in a gentle and respectful manner.
- If the family would like to hold the infant prior to transport, the investigator will allow the family to touch and hold the infant (unless otherwise advised)
- The investigator will not rush the family to turn the infant's body over to the investigator. A chaplain will be requested to assist with this.

The investigator will contact Child Protective Services to report the death and verify there is no CPS history for the family.

Child/Infant deaths are investigated in accordance with Centers for Disease Control and Prevention Sudden Unexplained Infant Death Investigation Guidelines.

Jurisdiction

Policy:

All deaths reported to the Skagit County Coroner's Office shall be thoroughly investigated to determine jurisdiction, and for those that fall under the jurisdiction of the Skagit County Coroner, to aid in the certification of the cause and manner of death. Death investigation in the Skagit County Coroner's Office is modeled on the National Institute of Justice Guidelines for Death Investigators.

Every report of death completed will demonstrate the involvement of the Coroner's Office.

- This will be noted in the case brief in MDI log.

The case brief will include the reporting agency, age of decedent, reported medical and social history, date and time last known alive, date and time found or pronounced, and by whom. Other information required will include, if any, falls, fractures, trauma, toxicological concerns, abuse, or neglect. In brief, explain why the coroner's office has accepted or declined the case.

- This initial information may not be completely accurate but it needs to be reported in the summary. Any new information will be added to the investigators narrative as an addendum to the report.

Cases that require investigation:

1. Violent or traumatic deaths, whether apparently homicidal, suicidal, or accidental regardless of the time elapsing between the time of injury and death. This includes but is not limited to motor vehicle collisions, firearm injuries, smoke inhalation and burns, sharp and blunt trauma, industrial accidents, falls, choking, drowning, climate-related, deaths due to criminal abortion whether self-induced or not, and sports injuries;
2. Sudden, unexpected or unexplained deaths, when the deceased has been in apparent good health, not caused by readily recognizable disease or where the cause of death cannot be properly certified by a physician on the basis of his/her prior contact with the decedent. Sudden, unexplained deaths for infants one year of age and younger require investigation by the Skagit County Coroner's Office.
3. Deaths under suspicious circumstances including but not limited to those where alcohol, drugs, or other toxic substances may have a direct bearing on the death.
4. Deaths of persons who die outside of a medical facility, i.e., private residence, group home, retirement home
5. All cases of decomposed bodies

Refer to RCW 68.50.010; Coroner's Jurisdiction over Remains.

Next of Kin and Claiming of Human Remains

Policy:

Notification:

The Skagit County Coroner's Office is responsible for identifying the next of kin in the order of priority for the purposes of release in cases where jurisdiction is assumed.

Within the first 48 hours preceding the Coroner's involvement, the Coroner's Office will attempt in good faith to locate and notify the legal next of kin of the decedent per RCW 68.50.300

- The case investigator will be certain of the victim's identity and provide notification as soon as possible.
- The case investigator will make a death notification in person if possible.
- The case investigator will always try to have two people present to make the notification
 - This may include a law enforcement officer or Support Officer
- If an investigator is unavailable to perform the in-person notification then a Chaplain, Support Officer or Law Enforcement Officer will be requested to assist in making the in person notification.
 - This might be necessary when attempting to deliver notification outside the county or in another state.
- When making a notification the investigator or messenger should:
 - Clearly identify his or her self
 - Relay the message directly and in plain language using victim's name.
 - Provide Coroner's contact information.
- The Coroner's Office will follow up with the next of kin within 24 hours.

Identifying Legal Next of Kin:

When making contact with the relative that was notified by law enforcement or other party, the Coroner's Office shall work to identify the legal next of kin by inquiring about the existence of other survivors in the order of priority.

If a decedent has left no written authorization for the cremation and/or disposition of the decedent's body as permitted by law, the following competent persons, in the order of priority listed below, may authorize the type, method, place, cremation and/or other disposition of the decedent's body:

- (1) Executor of the Estate or Durable Power of Attorney (must provide documentation)
- (2) The surviving spouse or state registered domestic partner;
- (3) Any child of the decedent who is eighteen years of age or older;
- (4) One of the parents of the decedent;
- (5) Any adult brother or sister of the decedent;
- (6) A person who was guardian of the decedent at the time of death;

Next of Kin and Claiming of Human Remains cont.

(6) Any other person or agency authorized or under an obligation to dispose of the remains of the decedent. The chief official of any such agency shall designate one or more persons to execute authorizations pursuant to the provisions of this section.

Deviations from Order of Priority:

Survivor wishes to relinquish control of disposition. The legal next of kin may relinquish his or her control over disposition of the decedent to another family member or friend. The Skagit County Coroner's Office requires written and signed authorization from the legal next of kin accompanied by a copy of government issued identification. This written authorization can be scanned and emailed to the Coroner's Office, mailed, or faxed to the office.

Legal Next of Kin cannot be located. If the survivor cannot be located, the next survivor in the order of priority may take over disposition. This is after all efforts have been exhausted to locate the legal next of kin.

Unclaimed remains. If no next of kin can be located or the legal next of kin has declined to take care of disposition, the Skagit County Coroner's Office shall take over the disposition (RCW 68.50.010). All documentation to locate next of kin will need to be entered in the case file under case notes. If family has declined disposition, then a *cremation authorization form* must be completed along with a government issued id prior to the Coroner's Office pursuing cremation. The Skagit County Coroner's Office will contact a contracted funeral home to take care of the cremation. After 45 days, a family member or friend can claim the decedent's cremains and will have to reimburse Skagit County for the cost of the cremation (\$600-\$850). A release of cremains form will be completed and signed and retained in the case file and MDI log.

THE SKAGIT COUNTY CORONER'S OFFICE WILL DOCUMENT THE NOTIFICATION OF NEXT OF KIN IN THE INVESTIGATIVE REPORT.

Notification of Next of Kin

Policy:

Within the first 48 hours preceding the Coroner's involvement, the case investigator will attempt in good faith to locate and notify the legal next of kin of the decedent per RCW 68.50.300

- The case investigator will be sure of the victim's identity and provide notification as soon as possible.
- If possible, the case investigator will attempt to make an in-person death notification.
- The case investigator will always try to have two people present to make the notification
 - This may include a law enforcement officer or Support Officer
- If an investigator is unable to perform the in-person notification, then a Chaplain, Support Officer, or Law Enforcement Officer will be requested to assist in making the in person notification.
 - This might be necessary when attempting to deliver notification outside the county or in another state.
- When making a notification the investigator or messenger should:
 - Clearly identify his or herself
 - Relay the message directly and in plain language using victim's name.
 - Provide Coroner's contact information.
- The Coroner's Office will follow up with the next of kin within 24 hours.

THE SKAGIT COUNTY CORONER'S OFFICE WILL DOCUMENT THE NOTIFICATION OF NEXT OF KIN IN THE INVESTIGATIVE REPORT AS WELL AS CASE NOTES IN MDI LOG.

Photography

Policy:

All photographs taken by the Coroner's Office will be electronically backed up off site by the Skagit County Central Services Department.

Upon return to the Coroner's Office, the photographs will be uploaded by the scene investigator into the electronic case file and MDI log and retained indefinitely.

All scene photographs will be made available to the board-certified forensic pathologist assigned to the case as well as to the investigating law enforcement agency of jurisdiction.

The photographs shall not be shared or copied by any investigator unless a formal written request is received by the Coroner's Office and approved by the Coroner.

SCENE

The case investigator will

- Remove all non-essential personnel from the scene (family, bystanders, law enforcement officials) if possible.
- Obtain an overall photograph of the scene upon arrival.
 - If the scene is a house or apartment, the investigator will photograph the house or apartment number
- Photograph the scene from different angles
- Photograph intersections, street signs, landmarks and business signs
- Photograph posted speed limit and road caution signs.
- Photograph specific areas of the scene when appropriate, including but not limited to;
 1. Entryways such as doors and windows, to demonstrate the state of security or non-security
 2. Sleeping quarters and progressive photos documenting the quality of living space.
 3. Living and Eating areas
 - a. Contents of the refrigerator, freezer and cabinets to establish the decedent's eating or drinking habits.
 4. Toilets and medicine cabinets.
 5. Prescription medication bottles (entire label), counts of pills to justify the remaining quantity. (pour out the medication and group into groups of 5 or 10, then place the pill bottle displaying the medication next to the pills and take a photograph)
 6. Weapons (gun cabinets, safes, storage or lack thereof)
 7. Newspaper and mail with dates clearly visible.
 8. Apparent suicide notes, notes of intent, calendars, diaries, journals, email, text messages, books (Final Exit, Hemlock Society), DVDs and videos that aid in the certification of the cause and manner of death.
 9. Evidence of drugs or drug paraphernalia as well as areas containing evidence of acute and chronic alcohol use.
 10. Vehicles and license plates (from all angles including the undercarriage of the vehicle if possible).

Photography cont.

BODY

The case investigator will

- Photograph the body from different angles in the position found and when the body is turned over.
- A close-up photograph of the decedent's face as it is first observed.
- Photograph evidence of resuscitative efforts.
- Photograph the hands (dorsal and ventral) and photograph the feet including the soles of the feet.
- Use scales in photographs to document relative size of specific evidence such as injuries, scars, etc.
- Photograph identifying information such as government issued ID to aid in the identification of the decedent.
- Photograph personal effects on the body and where those items came from (i.e. front right pocket of pants).
- Photograph with all pant and jacket pockets turned inside out (if applicable)
- Photograph ID bands already on body and ID bands placed on the body by the scene investigator.
- Photograph any integrity seal used.
- Photograph the area after the body has been removed from the scene.

After all pertinent photographs have been taken of the body and the body will be transported to the Coroner's Office,; the investigator may wipe all secretions from the face and take a second photograph of the face for identification purposes. This cleaned up photo will be taken after external examination by autopsy staff at the Skagit County Coroner's Office.

WEAPONS

Weapons found at the scene must be photographed and documented.

The scene investigator will photograph:

- the original location of the weapon
 - if moved, this should be noted in the investigator's report.
- the condition of the weapon as well as photographically document all aspects of the weapon including make, model, serial number.
- the location of any expended and unexpended rounds.

Firearms must be unloaded by a qualified firearms handler "law enforcement", at the scene.

FIREARMS ARE NOT TRANSPORTED TO THE OFFICE AND SHOULD BE LEFT IN THE CUSTODY OF LAW ENFORCEMENT.

Property

Policy:

The Coroner's Office is responsible for property found on the decedent. In accordance with RCW 68.50.040, property may be collected from a decedent on scene and transported to the Coroner's Office.

Property may include, but is not limited to jewelry, keys, pocket knives, money (foreign and domestic), wallets, ID cards, credit/debit cards, miscellaneous cards, and dentures.

If there is property that does not belong to the decedent (example: driver's license, credit cards, keys, wallet), arrangements can be made to release these items to the appropriate party or be destroyed.

Unless released on scene to the designated next-of-kin, the property will be transported to the Coroner's Office where it will be properly documented and secured in the property/evidence locker located at the Coroner's Office.

- All property must be captured in one photograph and then photographed individually if needed.
- Property will be packaged in a waterproof evidence/property bag.
- A list of property collected will be documented in MDI log under *property/evidence*.

Property will be released to the authorized legal next-of-kin as required by RCW 68.50160 or the designee selected (i.e. funeral home) by the legal next-of-kin.

If property includes cash over \$50, the authorized legal next-of-kin or designee will be required to claim the property at the Coroner's Office. Arrangements can be made to release the property to the authorized funeral home if the legal next-of-kin is unable to claim the property at the Coroner's Office.

The recipient will electronically sign the property document in MDI log which will be automatically saved in MDI log in the documents section. A copy of the property release document will be printed for the case file as well as for the recipient receiving the property.

Per RCW 36.24.130 all unclaimed money must be handed over to the treasurer within 30 days. Property outside of cash must be claimed within 180 days otherwise it will be released to county auction or destroyed. Proceeds will be handed over to the Treasurer's Office and cannot be claimed.

- A note will be entered into MDI log (under the documentation section, notes tab) including the date and time and the name of individuals involved in the transaction. A receipt from the Treasurers' Office will be scanned into the electronic case file.

If property is obtained from a decedent of a homicide, all property obtained from the body will be released to the investigating law enforcement agency of jurisdiction as evidence if they so desire.

Scene Documentation

Policy:

Photographing the scene and the decedent creates a permanent historical record and provides corroborating evidence that constructs a system of redundancy should questions arise.

The responding investigator will document the following times in their report:

- initial office contact time
- scene arrival time
- departure time
- return to morgue time
- time of death
- time found
- time of 911 call
- time last known alive

Scene Safety

Scene hazards include unstable structures, body fluids, hostile family/bystanders, traffic, animals, environmental extremes, and chemical exposures.

Use personal protective equipment.

Obtain clearance to enter the scene from appropriate officials (fire, lead detective, hazmat).

Always have law enforcement escort when interviewing family bystanders or entering a private residence.

SCENE

- Upon arrival to the scene, the responding investigator will meet with the primary law enforcement officer on scene and establish a path of entry and exit if necessary to prevent scene disturbance.
- Identify and document transient/fragile evidence on and around the body (foam cone, blood spatter pattern, any other that may be lost, contaminated, or alerted with movement of the body).

The responding investigator will

- Prepare and photograph a placard with the case number and date;
 - Take progressive photographs as he/she approaches the scene;
 - Observe and photograph the general geographic location;
 - Observe and photograph the specific scene;
 - Observe and photograph the immediate location of the body;
 - Observe and photograph the condition of the area involved;
 - Photograph the relationship of the body to the scene;
 - Include close range photographs and pay attention to details;
 - Note and record the condition of the area adjacent to the body including signs of struggle or violence as well as any evidence of bodily fluids such as blood, vomit, urine or feces.
-

Scene Documentation cont.

INDOOR SCENES

The scene investigator will document and photograph the following:

- Temperature, cleanliness;
- Presence of drugs, alcohol or tobacco;
- Medications;
- Presence of pets;
- Presence of adequate food or necessities of living (electricity, heat, plumbing, toilet, shower, kitchen, food and water)

OUTDOOR SCENES

The scene investigator will document and photograph the following:

- Temperature, moisture, air movement, wind chill;
 - Weather conditions (i.e. snowing or raining);
 - Insect or animal activity;
 - Presence of drugs, paraphernalia and alcohol;
 - Orientation from where the scene is in relation to nearest public access;
 - Unattended vehicles, campsites or belongings;
 - Trails, pathways;
 - Elevation, terrain and accessibility;
 - Apparent dump sites
-

The Scene Investigator will observe and photograph “association evidence” to help estimate date of death. This includes noting:

- Presence of newspapers or mail
- Television, radio or lights on
- State of any food or dishes; whether eaten or not
- Phone documenting last made or received call or last message left, last text message sent, social media and email activity.
- Video footage in the area

Sudden Unexplained Infant Death Investigations (SUIDI) and Fetal demise

Policy

Infant deaths without an immediately obvious cause of death are investigated following the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's Sudden Unexplained Infant Death Investigation guidelines. A SUIDI may be conducted on a child with developmental disabilities up to two (2) years of age.

The Coroner must be contacted following initial report of the death.

The Medicolegal Death Investigator shall conduct the following:

1. If the death occurred at a hospital, contact law enforcement agency with jurisdiction to coordinate response to the hospital and incident scene.
2. Respond to the location of death and complete the following:
 - a. Examine, document, and photograph the infant.
 - b. Note lividity patterns and impressions on the body and photograph. These are especially important to photograph as they are subject to change prior to autopsy.
 - c. Collect clothing and diaper (if removed) and place with body.
 - d. Interview the individual who placed the infant to sleep ("place") and the individual who found the infant unresponsive ("finder") separately.
 - e. Document information on the SUIDI Reporting Form (see attached) and explain the SUIDI process to the family emphasizing the importance of the doll reenactment in determination of the cause and manner of death.
 - i. Inform them that an autopsy will be performed and that several tests will be run following the examination. Determination on the cause and manner of death can take 5 or more months to determine.
 - f. If hospital death, collect all admission samples from the hospital lab.
 - g. Use the infant carrier to remove the infant from the scene.
3. Respond to the incident scene and complete the following:
 - a. Document the location of the scene, e.g., home, daycare, or vehicle.
 - b. If the scene is a residence, document the general appearance and state of repair of the exterior and interior.
 - c. Document the presence of cigarettes, alcohol, illegal drugs, and drug paraphernalia.
 - d. Document the presence of prescriptions (take note of patient name and relation) and over-the-counter medications.
 - e. Document the presence/absence of infant formula, bottles, baby food, and care items such as diapers wipes, ointments.
 - f. Photograph and measure the sleep environment (s)
 - i. Bassinet, crib, or potential play pen
 - ii. Adult bed
 1. Size and arrangement
 2. Layers of bedding
 3. Items on the bed
 4. Areas of discoloration on bedding
 - iii. Measure stains in relationship to the head and edge of the bed.

Sudden Unexplained Infant Death Investigations (SUIDI) and Fetal demise cont.

- g. Conduct a doll reenactment
 - i. Ask the "Placer" to place the doll in the position the infant was last placed (last know alive). Ensure the "placed" placard is in each photograph.
 - ii. Obtain detailed photos of the position of the head, neck, nose, and mouth.
 - iii. When co-sleeping has occurred, ask the appropriate individual to take the original position on the sleep surface with the doll.
 - iv. Have the "Finder" place the infant in the found position. Place the "found" placard next to the doll and photograph the sleeping area.
- 4. Upon returning from the scene
 - a. Contact Child Protective Services (CPS) and inform them of the death. Document any involvement with the family.
 - b. Request the following reports/records:
 - i. EMS run sheet
 - ii. Police report
 - iii. Hospital records and clinic records
 - 1. Labor and Delivery records (birth)
 - 2. Any hospitalizations
 - 3. If death occurred in the hospital, request the records for that admission.
 - 4. Pediatrician visits/immunizations
 - 5. Mother's prenatal records
 - c. Complete the SUIDI Reporting Form (typed).
 - i. Scan and upload to MDI log.
 - ii. Place the completed form in hard case file.
 - d. Complete all required fields in MDI log as well as detailed summary of the circumstances and any important findings. Final report shall be completed in 48 hours.
 - e. Update the on-call supervisor regarding the case.

Sudden Unexplained Infant Death Investigations (SUIDI) and Fetal demise cont.

Fetal Demise

According to RCW 70.58A.010:

"Fetal death" means any product of conception that shows no evidence of life, such as breathing, beating of the heart, pulsation of the umbilical cord, or definite movement of voluntary muscles after complete expulsion or extraction from the individual who gave birth that is not an induced termination of pregnancy and:

(a) Has completed twenty or more weeks of gestation as calculated from the date the last menstrual period of the individual who gave birth began, to the date of expulsion or extraction; or

(b) Weighs three hundred fifty grams or more, if weeks of gestation are not known.

The Coroner's Office is required to document the fetal demise in MDI log using the *Fetal Demise* worksheet. If the fetal demise was caused by non-natural means (drugs, trauma), then the investigator needs to contact the assigned supervisor for further involvement and instructions.

If Jurisdiction is accepted:

1. Request placenta be placed in a bucket of formalin and be left associated with the fetus but not in the body bag.
 - a. If the placenta had already been sent to pathology, request a copy of the surgical pathology report on the placenta.
2. Send the umbilical cord and/or meconium for toxicology testing
3. Acquire measurements of the fetus including length of the right foot.
 - a. Make sure this is recorded in the report and in MDI log pathology notes section.
4. Consult with contracted board-certified forensic pathologist regarding scheduling of an autopsy.

Tissue and Organ Donation

Policy:

The Skagit County Coroner's Office is fully aware of the need for organs and tissues for transplantation; therefore, the general policy of the Coroner's Office is to cooperate with the Organ Procurement Organization (OPO) to the fullest degree and to grant permission for requesting permission to procure tissue in as many cases as possible. Any issues requiring immediate attention should be brought to the Coroner.

It is the responsibility of the investigator to ascertain as many facts as possible regarding the decedent and circumstances of death. When the investigator receives a request for tissue donation, that request along with the circumstances of the case shall be discussed with the Coroner so that a decision can be made.

The decision is based on the nature of the death and the information available at the time the request is made. Depending on the nature of the case, the Coroner may release any and/or all requested tissues based on the medicolegal requirements of the death investigation. The investigator must request all documentation, photos and specimens collected during donation to be forwarded to the Coroner's Office to add to the case file.

All reported non-hospital deaths that fall within the following guidelines shall be referred to the tissue and organ donation agencies using the automated referral system in MDI Log. The investigator must complete all designated fields in MDI Log for the case to be auto referred to the Organ Procurement Organization (OPO). This is to be entered immediately following the report of death.

- Deaths presumed to have occurred less than 20 hours prior have potential for donation.

The Skagit County Coroner has a signed Memorandum of Agreement with Lions World Vision Institute and LifeNet Health. This agreement also includes utilizing the Skagit County Coroner's Autopsy suite for procurement of tissue and/or corneas on authorized cases. The Organ Procurement Organization is required to coordinate with the Coroner's Office regarding access to the autopsy suite.

Toxicology

Policy:

Toxicology specimens must be taken on all case types when requested to conduct an examination of the body.

This includes cases in which an external examination is done at the scene, the body is transported to the morgue for further examination, or information later reveals a concern for toxicology involvement.

Cases requiring a complete toxicological analysis include:

- Homicides
- Child and elder abuse
- Suspected drug-related death
- Infant and child deaths
- Deaths in custody
- Motor vehicle/traffic-related deaths
- Drownings
- Suspected suicides
- Fire Deaths
- Persons with natural disease in which ethanol and/or drugs of abuse may have contributed to the death.
- Unattended deaths of those under the age of 70

Toxicology specimens include blood and vitreous humor. On certain cases urine, stomach contents, bile, spleen, or liver may be submitted for toxicological analysis.

Sample collection:

The assigned investigator will obtain (2) grey top tubes of blood (peripheral preferred) as well as (1) red top tube of urine upon return to the morgue, unless otherwise directed by the on-call supervisor.

- If the examination is done at the scene, the investigator will also collect (2) vials of vitreous humor from the eyes.

The assigned investigator will perform a preliminary drug screen using the collected urine and the provided T-cups. The assigned investigator will record the results (photograph and documentation in *pathology/autopsy section*).

To perform a T-cup Urinalysis:

1. Obtain urine (at minimum 7 mL)
2. Pour 10mL of urine into the T-cup
3. Wait 2-4 minutes before documenting results (photograph)
4. All positives need to be reported in MDI log in the *pathology/autopsy section* as well as on the toxicology request form.
5. Retain remaining urine with additional samples.
6. Discard T-cup in biohazard trash bin.

Toxicology Cont.

The assigned investigator will make sure all toxicology samples are labeled with the case number, name of decedent, date of birth, date collected, and sample type.

The assigned investigator will heat seal each specimen individually to prevent leakage or contamination.

The assigned investigator will place (1) grey top tube of blood aside to later be sent to the toxicology lab for analysis. This will be placed in a designated bin in the freezer.

The remaining specimens will be placed in a clear biohazard bag with the identifying labels and put into the freezer. The bag should be placed in sequential order by case number.

The assigned investigator will add the case number, specimens and their quantities to the toxicology logbook in the morgue along with date and initials.

The investigator will document in MDI log (*pathology/autopsy section*) the specimens collected and how many were collected. If there are any additional samples needed or if samples could not be obtained, this needs to be noted in the *pathology/autopsy section* as well as relayed to the on-call supervisor.

Toxicology Lab

The Skagit County Coroner's Office submits samples for toxicological testing to the Washington State Toxicology Lab. The Washington State Toxicology Lab will send specimens with toxicology concerns to NMS.

If the case requires toxicology results to be expedited due to suspicion of controlled substance homicide, then the Coroner's Office will submit the samples directly to NMS for testing.

If additional lab testing is needed, the Coroner's Office will send samples to the University of Washington or another lab that can handle those specific tests.

Mass Fatality

Policy:

A Mass Fatality Disaster is defined as an occurrence of multiple deaths that overwhelms the usual routine capabilities of the community.

The Skagit County Coroner's Office will not access the scene until authorized by the investigating agency and search and rescue has performed their duties in recovering all survivors.

Every mass fatality site shall be treated as a crime scene until the Coroner and local law enforcement state differently.

In the event of a Mass Fatality within Skagit County, the Skagit County Coroner shall be immediately notified and a Coroner Response Team will be activated.

- The team will consist of the Coroner, all Medicolegal Death Investigator staff, and possible assistance from another Coroner or Medical Examiner's Office adjacent to Skagit County.

The Coroner Response Team will assist in

- Determining the safety of the mass fatality scene
- Estimating the number of fatalities
- Determining accessibility of the scene and necessary equipment for the recovery of fatalities
- Assisting in arranging for delivery of supplies and equipment to mass fatality scene
- Assisting in setting up staging area, the Family Assistance Center and incident morgue
- Evaluating the need for available resource utilization

Definable Mass Fatality Events may include but are not limited to:

- Natural disasters: Floods, Landslides, Earthquakes, Snowstorms, Communicable Infectious Diseases, Epidemic, Pandemic, Dam failure
- Man Made disasters: Biological Warfare, Chemical Warfare, Conventional Warfare, Nuclear, School Related Incidents, Mass Suicide, Mass Murder.
- Accident related disasters: Aircraft, Train, Bus, Boat, Motor Vehicle Accidents, Drowning, Building Collapse, Fire, Explosion, Chemical and Dam failure.

Responsibilities of the Coroner's Office with regards to a Mass Casualty Event:

- Victim Identification:
 - The Skagit County Coroner's Office is responsible for establishing the cause and manner of death for the purposes of identifying the deceased.
 - The Skagit County Coroner's Office will provide oversight and coordination of resources to accomplish the recovery and identification of the deceased.
- Notification:
 - The Skagit County Coroner's Office with the assistance from local law enforcement and/or outside agencies, will notify next of kin.

Mass Fatality Cont.

- Forensics:
 - The Skagit County Coroner's Office will determine the need for expert forensic assistance in a mass casualty event (forensic pathologist, forensic odontologist, and forensic anthropologist etc.).
- Security:
 - The Skagit County Coroner's Office will rely upon local law enforcement for mass casualty scene security, incident morgue security, and family assistance center security.
- Staging Area:
 - The Skagit County Coroner's Office will assist in the coordination of a staging area with the local law enforcement agency (agencies) and Department of Emergency Management (DEM).
- Transportation:
 - In the event of a remote mass casualty event, the Skagit County Coroner's Office will request assistance from the Department of Emergency Management and local law enforcement for transport to the scene.
 - If there exist the need for a refrigeration trailer for cold body storage at the designated mass casualty staging area, then the Skagit County Coroner's Office will work with the Department of Emergency Management for assistance with transportation of a refrigerated trailer.

The Skagit County Coroner Response Team will systematically search and mark where bodies, body parts, and personal effects are located with pin flags and document findings. Each finding will be photographed and logged. Pin flags shall be color coordinated for bodies, body parts, and personal effects. Each pin flag will be assigned a number and each pin flag will remain in place after recovery is made.

Bodies and body parts will be treated with dignity and respect.

Each finding will be tagged with a number assigned by the Coroner Response Team. Bodies and body parts will be placed into a body bag. The same identifying number as the contents contained within the bag will be written on the outside of the bag. The bag will be sealed using an integrity seal.

Personal effects found on the body should not be removed from the body. Personal effects not found on the body shall be numbered and placed in appropriate sized plastic property sealed bags.

If transporting to staging area, transport all bodies, body parts and personal effects together and place together at staging area.

Mass Fatality cont.

Incident Morgue Operations

The Incident Morgue Site will be determined based upon the size and nature of the mass fatality event.

The main purposes of the Incident Morgue are to:

- Determine cause and manner of death.
- Identify victims.
- Secure and identify personal effects.

Postmortem records will be completed for all remains as they are processed. These records include: personal effects, photography, radiographs, anthropology, fingerprints, DNA, dental, and pathology reports.

Postmortem records will be compared to ante mortem records obtained from the victim's family and other sources such as fingerprint repositories and hospital records.

Personal effects such as driver's licenses found on the victim or statements of recognition should not be used as positive identification, but rather as tentative identification.

Positive Identification will be the responsibility of the Coroner.

After identification is established and coroner investigation is completed, the coroner will release the body, and or body parts based on the desires of the legal next of kin.

Victim identification will be established using the following methods:

Presumptive Identification:

- If visually recognizable, direct visual or photographic identification of the deceased will be made. Also personal effects, circumstances, physical characteristics, and tattoos will be used in the identification process.

Confirmatory Identification:

- Fingerprints, Forensic Odontology, Radiology, DNA analysis, and Forensic Anthropology

Clothing and Personal Effects Description and Removal

1. Photographs should be made of the clothing and personal effects on the body.
2. A complete description of each article of clothing should be made to include the following:
 - a. Type of Clothing
 - b. Color
 - c. Size
 - d. Labels
 - e. Monograms
 - f. Any other identifying characteristics
3. Mild soap and water may be used to wash clothing to reveal identification information.
4. Any identifying characteristics of clothing should be photographed.

Mass Fatality Cont.

5. Removal all items found in the pockets of the clothing. Document the following:
 - a. What pocket the item(s) was found in.
 - b. A description of the item(s)
6. Photographs should be made of any personal effect that will be used in assisting with the identification of the body.
7. All items in wallets and purses should be documented to include:
 - a. A complete list of money.
 - b. A list of all credit cards and the card numbers (last 4 numbers and card type)
 - c. List of any other items that may be useful in establishing identity.
8. Mild soap and water may be used to wash the personal effects to assist with the documentation process.
9. All personal effects should be placed in property bags and tagged with the appropriate body number.

Documenting the body

1. After the clothing and personal effects have been removed, the body should be carefully examined, and all characteristics deemed important to assist with the identification listed to include:
 - a. Race
 - b. Sex
 - c. Height
 - d. Weight
 - e. Hair color and length
 - f. Eye color
 - g. Glasses or contacts
 - h. Birth marks
 - i. Operation scars
 - j. Tattoos
 - k. Any other identifying characteristics
2. Photographs of birth marks, operation scars, tattoos, or any other identifying characteristics should incorporate the use of a grey board to assist with the background.
3. If possible, the face should be washed with soap and water and photographs of the face taken with blue towel under the head. These photographs may be used for family members for possible recognition of the decedent.

Processing the body

1. **Radiology**
 - a. Head-to-toe x-rays should be taken of all the deceased. These x-rays will be useful to assist with the identification process and with determining the extent of the injuries that may have occurred.
 - b. Upload all images into MDI log and Coroner Shared folder
 - i. See Postmortem Radiology Policy regarding use of x-ray machine.

Mass Fatality Cont.

2. Dental Charting and Examination

- a. Contact a board certified Forensic Odontologist to perform dental charting and examination on the decedent.
- b. All ante-mortem dental records will be provided to the Forensic Odontologist for comparison and potential identification confirmation.

3. Fingerprinting

- a. All bodies should be fingerprinted unless unobtainable.
- b. Fingerprints will be submitted to the FBI latent print office for possible identification.

4. Toxicology

- a. If possible, blood, urine, vitreous fluid and tissue samples (spleen or liver) should be obtained from all bodies and submitted for toxicological analysis.
 - i. Only trained and qualified personnel should procure toxicology samples.
- b. All toxicology samples should be placed in proper containers, properly labeled and documented, and submitted for toxicology analysis.

Victim Information and Identification Center

The Victim Information and Identification Center (VIC) is where information on the missing and deceased will be obtained and managed to assist in the identification of decedents and in family reunification. It is an operation that connects the Family Assistance Center (FAC) and morgue. It includes the gathering of antemortem data, the tracking of missing persons and creation of an unaccounted for person list, and the management of all the components that are necessary for identification, including the missing person data entry. It will coordinate all information gathering and reconciliation concerning unaccounted for persons, potential victims, and unidentified patients.

Family Assistance Center (FAC)

A Family Assistance Center will be established with the assistance of the Skagit County Coroner's Office. The FAC will be located away from the site of the mass fatality event and staging area.

The FAC provides the following purposes:

- Provides the relatives of victims with information, counseling and access to services they may need in the days following the incident
- Protects families from the media and curiosity seekers
- Allows the Coroner's Office to access families so that they can obtain ante mortem information more efficiently.

ADMONITION OPPOSING AUTOPSY

DATE:

DECEDENT:

CASE NUMBER:

THE SURVIVING NEXT-OF-KIN:

NAME:

RELATIONSHIP:

Of the named decedent whose death has come under the investigation by the Skagit County Coroner, opposes and admonishes the County Coroner from the performance of an autopsy. This admonition is rendered to avoid irreparable harm to the surviving next-of-kin as listed above. Since no criminality is at issue in this death, it is hereby agreed that the undersigned next-of-kin shall save and hold harmless and indemnify Skagit County and its employees and agents against any and all claims and causes of action arising from this admonition.

 Printed Name of Next-of-Kin Signature of Next-of-Kin

Date:

 Coroner Office Representative Signature

Date:

Media Release

Policy:

According to the Revised Code of Washington ([RCW 68.50.300](#)), the Coroner may release information about a person's death to the media and general public when such information is necessary to identify the deceased, or when such information is related to an incident that is of public interest. Only the decedent's name, age, cause and manner of death will be released. All other information is considered confidential and will not be released.

The Coroner will make every effort to first notify the family of the deceased before information is released to the public.

POLICY

Request for Medical Information

URGENT

FAX COVER MEMO

Request for Medical Information

Date: This message consists of 1 pages, including this cover sheet.

To:

Fax No: Phone No:

Please fax the requested information to: Blank Fax No: 360-848-1173

Your immediate attention to this matter is greatly appreciated

Our office is investigation the death of the person listed below and pursuant to RCW 70.02.210 2(a) Disclosure without Patient's Authorization; A health care provider shall disclose health care information about a patient without the patient's authorization if the disclosure is to County Coroners and Medical Examiners for the investigation of deaths. We are requesting you to please provide us with the following information so we can complete our investigation.

Decedent Name: Date of Birth:

Date of Death: Patient of Doctor(s): Coroner Case #:

Information requested, most recent/current:

- ☐ History and Physical
 ☐ Problem List
 ☐ Medication List
 ☐ Last Office visits
- ☐ Demographic/ face sheet
 ☐ Admit H & P
 ☐ Discharge Summary
- ☐ Other:

Thank You: Blank

Confidentiality Notice:

This facsimile transmission and any accompanying documents may contain confidential information, which is protected by Disclosure Laws. This information is intended only for the use of the named individual or entity.

If you are not the intended recipient, you are hereby notified that any disclosure, reproduction, distribution, or action taken regarding the contents of this facsimile is strictly prohibited. If you have received this transmission in error, please notify the Skagit County Coroner's Office immediately to arrange for the return of the document(s).

Quality Assurance

Policy:

In general, the completion of each case report shall be within 48 hours.

The completed case file will be peer reviewed by another investigator and then handed over to the Coroner for formal review. The assigned investigator to the case will be responsible for correcting any errors.

The case file will be filed in the appropriate section of the case file cabinet (pending, open, closed).

When all further studies are complete and the cause and manner of death has been established (i.e., toxicology report, consultation report(s), outside lab results, finalized autopsy report), the case will have a final review for completion.

All pertinent documents for the case should be in both the hard case file as well as in MDI log.

After final review of the report, the designated next of kin will be contacted with any updates on the case as well as to inform him/her that the case will be closed.

All field notes and transitory documents will be removed from the case files and destroyed. This includes all medical records.

All authorized records requests for the case will be processed following the closure of the case.

The completed case file will be electronically archived by the county.

Records Storage and Maintenance

Policy:

All official records generated by the Skagit County Coroner's Office will be kept indefinitely and stored as archives in an electronic database.

- Transitory documents are not retained and only kept in the file until the case is officially closed.

Immediate family may have access to the official reports including the investigative report, toxicology report and autopsy/consultation report.

- Prior to distribution of any record by the Coroner's Office, a *Request for Release of Report Form* must be completed along with a copy of the requestor's government issued photo identification.
- If there is question or concerns involving the relationship of the family member requesting reports, then proof of relationship will be required to obtain these records.

Coroner records will not be released until the case is officially closed.

Skagit County Coroner's Office records are maintained electronically and by hard copy also known as a physical case file. After 1 year, the physical case file is released to the Skagit County Records Department to be uploaded into the Laserfiche database.

Electronic data file

When a death is reported to the Skagit County Coroner's Office, a unique case file number is assigned to the case and the information regarding the death is entered into a relational database under the assigned case file number.

The Skagit County Coroner's Office uses MDI Log for its case management system. The database maintains all decedent information, including any information that is related to the death, which includes, but is not limited to the following: decedent demographics, investigation information, jurisdictional decision, examination type, the cause and manner of death, investigative reports, property and or evidence release forms, body release forms and information, court-related activities (when applicable), toxicology and laboratory forms, photographs, funeral home release forms, and records requests forms.

- All historical and current decedent-related photos-ID, scene, body exam or autopsy, and x-rays are stored in an electronic format on the county secured server.

Records Storage and Maintenance Cont.

The RCW pertaining to Record Retention and Release is as follows:

An agency is not required to retain every record it ever created or used. The state and local records committees approve a general retention schedule for state and local agency records that applies to records that are common to most agencies.¹ Individual agencies seek approval from the state or local records committee for retention schedules that are specific to their agency, or that, because of particular needs of the agency, must be kept longer than provided in the general records retention schedule. The retention schedules for state and local agencies are available at www.secstate.wa.gov/archives/gs.aspx.

Retention schedules vary based on the content of the record. For example, documents with no value such as internal meeting scheduling e-mails can be destroyed when no longer needed, but documents such as periodic accounting reports must be kept for a period of years (are archived at the County Auditors Office). Because different kinds of records must be retained for different periods of time, an agency is prohibited from automatically deleting all e-mails after a short period of time (such as thirty days). While many of the e-mails could be destroyed when no longer needed, many others must be retained for several years. Indiscriminate automatic deletion of all e-mails after a short period may prevent an agency from complying with its retention duties and could complicate performance of its duties under the Public Records Act. An agency should have a retention policy in which employees save retainable documents and delete non-retainable ones. An agency is strongly encouraged to train employees on retention schedules.

The lawful destruction of public records is governed by retention schedules. The unlawful destruction of public records can be a crime. RCW [40.16.010](#) and [40.16.020](#).

An agency is prohibited from destroying a public record, even if it is about to be lawfully destroyed under a retention schedule, if a public records request has been made for that record. RCW [42.17.290](#)/42.56.100. Additional retention requirements might apply if the records may be relevant to actual or anticipated litigation. The agency is required to retain the record until the record request has been resolved. An exception exists for certain portions of a state employee's personnel file. RCW [42.17.295](#)/42.56.110.

Note: ¹An agency can be found to violate the act and be subject to the attorneys' fees and penalty provision if it prematurely destroys a requested record. See *Yacobellis v. City of Bellingham*, 55 Wn. App. 706, 780 P.2d 272 (1989).

Release of Disposition

Name of Decedent: _____

Case Number: _____

I _____, am the legal next of kin of the decedent,
(Name)

_____.
(Name)

I am relinquishing my rights as legal next of kin to provide disposition and authorize
_____ to proceed with disposition of the decedent.

(Name of authorized person)

☐ The authorized person listed above has authorization to receive additional information on this case.

☐ The authorized person listed above has authorization to request reports generated by this office.

Name of legal next of kin (Print): _____

Relationship: _____

Signature of legal next of kin _____

Date: _____

Address: _____ City: _____ State: _____

_____ Zip: _____

Government issued ID attached: ☐

Witness name (print): _____

Witness signature: _____ Date: _____

Coroner's Records Request

RCW 68.50.105(1) states:

Reports and records of autopsies or postmortems shall be confidential, except that the following persons may examine and obtain copies of any such report or record: The personal representative of the decedent as defined in RCW 11.02.005, any family member, the attending physician or advanced registered nurse practitioner, the prosecuting attorney or law enforcement agencies having jurisdiction, public health officials, the department of labor and industries in cases in which it has an interest under RCW 68.50.103, the secretary of the department of children, youth, and families or his or her designee in cases being reviewed under RCW 74.13.640, or the secretary of the department of social and health services or his or her designee under chapter 74.34 RCW.

Date:

Case Number:

To the Coroner of Skagit County;

I _____ am the _____ of _____.

(Name)

(State relation to deceased)

(Deceased Name)

I am requesting a copy of the following report(s):

☐ Investigators Report

☐ Autopsy Report

☐ Toxicology Report

☐ Other: _____

Address to mail report(s) to: _____

Phone: _____ Fax: _____

I declare under penalty of perjury under the laws of the State of Washington that the foregoing is true and correct, and executed at Mount Vernon, Washington.

Signature

Date

Signature verified by: ☐ Driver's license ☐ Military ID card ☐ State issued ID card (What State) _____

☐ Other: _____

Report(s) released by:

Skagit County Coroner Representative

Signature

Date

Requests for Autopsy

Policy:

There must be a sound **forensic** reason for an autopsy to be performed by the Skagit County Coroner's Office with expenditure of county funds. A request by a family member, physician, other individual, or other special interest group for an autopsy examination is not a proper reason, in and of itself, for the Coroner's Office to assume jurisdiction and perform an autopsy. A proper reason for jurisdiction must be established before consideration of what type of postmortem examination, if any, is warranted. This decision is based on what is known about the individual case (comes from the reporting party, family, physician, and medical records), Washington State law defining jurisdiction, and the formal death investigation training and professional judgment of the Coroner staff as well as the contracted Board-certified Forensic Pathologist (when asked). The Coroner's Office may give consideration to the *reason* that an autopsy is being requested when making the decision to perform an autopsy or not.

When a body is released from a scene directly to a funeral home, the investigator should make sure that the family is aware that there will be no further examination made by the Skagit County Coroner's Office.

When a family member, physician, or other individual or group requests that an autopsy be done, the requesting person should be asked the specific reason(s) for the request. The request and reason(s) shall be brought to the attention of the Coroner as soon as feasible/reasonable. Contact information for the requesting party and the request being made need to be documented in *case notes* of MDI log. A message should also be added to the *communications log* and include the incoming investigator as well as the Coroner.

The person requesting the autopsy should be contacted soon after the decision to autopsy or not autopsy is made and informed of the decision and reasoning for the decision. If the requesting party still intends to move forward with a private autopsy, this office will not provide any recommendations of private pathologists. The requestor can contact the funeral home or search on-line for a private autopsy.

Refer to RW 68.50.010; Coroner's Jurisdiction over Remains.