

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

Q. WHERE WILL MY RELATIVE/FRIEND BE TAKEN?

- A.** If no autopsy or examination is needed, he/she will be taken to the funeral home. If further examination by our office is needed, he/she will be taken to the local hospital (Wheaton Franciscan/St. Mary's Medical Center or Memorial Hospital of Burlington). If an autopsy is deemed necessary, he/she will be taken to the Waukesha County Medical Examiner's Office.

PLEASE DO NOT CALL the hospital or Waukesha County. Contact us for any information needed at 262-636-3303

Q. IS IT NECESSARY FOR ME TO COME TO IDENTIFY THE BODY?

- A.** Probably not. In a majority of cases, visual identification is not required. Should it become necessary for you to come in or bring other records or x-rays, you will be contacted.

Q. IS VIEWING ALLOWED?

- A.** The Medical Examiner's facility is not designed to hold the remains or to accommodate viewing. Arrangements can be made at the funeral home for viewing.

Q. HOW LONG WILL IT TAKE BEFORE MY RELATIVE/FRIEND IS RELEASED FROM YOUR CUSTODY?

- A.** Generally it takes no more than two to three days. Your Funeral Director will coordinate the release on your behalf.

Q. WILL I BE CHARGED FOR OTHER CORONER SERVICES?

- A.** Transportation, body bags and autopsy services (if necessary) are provided at no charge to the family. If there are any special circumstances that require extra charges (clean-up, etc), you may be billed by the county or directly by the service provider.

Q. WHERE CAN I OBTAIN A DEATH CERTIFICATE?

- A.** Death certificates are filed with the County Register of Deeds by the Funeral Director. Should you require certified copies, they can be ordered through the funeral home or they may be purchased from the Racine County Register of Deeds Office, telephone number 262-636-3208, 730 Wisconsin Ave, Racine WI 53403 OR via the internet at www.racineco.com/registerofdeeds.

Q. WHY IS THE MEDICAL EXAMINER INVOLVED?

- A.** State law requires the Medical Examiner (M.E.) to inquire into and determine the circumstances, manner, and cause of all sudden, violent, or unusual deaths and those deaths where the decedent has not been seen by a physician within 20 days prior to death. The deceased will be taken to one of three places as needed: 1) The funeral home chosen by the family or, if the body is unclaimed, the one chosen by the M.E.; 2) Either Wheaton Franciscan/St. Mary's Medical Center or Memorial Hospital of Burlington if necessary to complete our examination, or 3) The Waukesha County Medical Examiner's Office if a forensic autopsy is needed. A death certificate is issued after the examination is completed. Occasionally, more extensive testing is required, in which case an interim death certificate is issued which will allow the family to make funeral

arrangements. A final death certificate will be issued following completion of special testing.

Q. WILL AN AUTOPSY BE PERFORMED?

A. The M.E. or Deputy Medical Examiner (D.M.E.) will decide if an autopsy is necessary to establish the cause and circumstances of death. We may not perform an autopsy if the cause of death can be determined to be from “natural causes” and the deceased has been under the care of a physician who knows the medical history and will furnish the M.E. with information relative to the probable cause of death.

Q. WHAT ABOUT TISSUE/ORGAN DONATION?

A. In conjunction with the Wisconsin Eye Bank and American Tissue Services Foundation, we will make an effort to provide information to you about tissue donation. With your consent, many types of tissues may be donated and thereby help others. If you are unable to be contacted within a reasonable time, or there is objection to donation known, the M.E. will not proceed with any donation.

Q. WILL AUTOPSY REPORTS BE AVAILABLE?

A. Yes. You may obtain a copy by calling the Medical Examiner’s office, Monday through Friday, from 8 a.m. to noon and 1 p.m. to 5 p.m. At that time, you will be informed of the costs of this service and how this document or any other M.E. records can be obtained.

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

A. Persons who served in the Armed Forces, were honorably discharged, and meet other service requirements are entitled to a Veteran’s burial. For information about this or other military or veterans’ benefits, contact the Racine County Veterans Service Office, 262-638-6702, 1717 Taylor Avenue, Racine WI 53403. Your funeral director also has information about these benefits and Social Security benefits.

Q. WHAT SHOULD I DO NOW?

A. As soon as possible, select a funeral home and inform the funeral director that the death is being handled by the M.E.’s office. Ask them to please notify us.

Our office does not select funeral homes nor does it make funeral arrangements. In the event someone is making the arrangements for the family, the M.E. must be provided with written authorization to release the deceased, signed by the legal next of kin. Should the next of kin reside at a distant location, he/she may send a FAX directly to our office. The following format should be used.

MEDICAL EXAMINER, RACINE COUNTY, WISCONSIN, RELEASE THE REMAINS OF MY (relationship and name of decedent) CASE #-- , TO (name of funeral director selected).

SIGNED: (name)
RELATIONSHIP:
M.E. FAX NUMBER: 262-636-3728

If a body is to be shipped to a mortuary outside the County, the local mortuary, as well as the distant mortuary, must be identified in the FAX.

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

- A.** If the deceased or the legal next of kin do not have sufficient funds for burial, the alternative may be County disposition. In that case, the next of kin should contact the M.E. If County disposition is authorized, there may be substantial delays in receiving death certificates and, as a consequence, certain benefits.

Q. HOW AND WHEN CAN PERSONAL POSSESSIONS BE CLAIMED?

- A.** Any personal possessions in the custody of the M.E. may be claimed by the legal next of kin. Governmental documents (driver's licenses, passports, and military identification cards) will not be released to the next of kin. These documents will be returned to the issuing agency for disposition. To avoid any inconvenience to you, call the M.E.'s office before coming into the office. The Personal Property Clerk will advise you if any documents will be needed and of any other requirements.

Sometimes personal possessions are taken into custody by other law enforcement agencies at their request. You will need to deal with those agencies to recover personal possession in their custody.

Clothing is not usually considered property. Unless there is a need to hold clothing as evidence, it is released to the mortuary recovering the deceased. Clothing that presents a health hazard may be disposed of for the safety of all persons involved.

Q. I NEED TO ENTER MY RELATIVE/FRIEND'S RESIDENCE, BUT IT IS SEALED. WHAT CAN I DO?

- A.** In order to enter you need to obtain permission from the agency listed on the seal. Most of the time this will be the police agency involved.