



Bobbi Jo O'Neal

Coroner

Chief Deputy Coroner
Brittney Martin

Friends and Family Assistance Guide

Why is the Coroner's Office involved in the death of my loved one?

SC law requires the Coroner to investigate certain types of death and determine the cause and manner of the death. If the Coroner's Office is investigating the death of your loved one, it is likely the death falls under one of these categories:

- ...death associated with trauma or violence, or unlawful, whether homicide, suicide, or accident.
- ...deaths associated with suspicious or unusual circumstances.
- ...death not attended by a physician and where the cause of death cannot be certified by a physician.
- ...death occurring within 24 hours of admission to a hospital or death in the ER.
- ...deaths due to infections, contagious diseases, work related, or other hazardous public health conditions.
- ...death of children under age 18 who do not have a significant diagnosed condition that led to death.
- ...decedents who are unidentified.

How does the Coroner obtain information for the investigation?

The Coroner's Office uses several methods to gather information and evidence needed to complete their investigation. These may include, but are not limited to, forensic autopsy, medical and dental records review, photographs, fingerprints, police records, or other public records, interviews to include information gathered from family and/or friends and witnesses.

What should I do now?

Our office will continue to stay in touch with you during the entire investigation, and will inform you of any information that we can.

If you do not know what funeral home or arrangements that work best for your family and friends, now is the time to start working on that. Finding a funeral home you are comfortable with is the first step. They will assist you with the arrangements best suited to your family from there. They will also assist you in getting copies of the death certificate, transportation out of state for your loved one, insurance and veteran benefits, among many other things.

Please, always feel free to call us with any questions, concerns, or just to talk. We are always here for you. And we will do our best to lead an active investigation into the death of your loved one.

Click [[HERE](#)] for a list of Tri-County Funeral Homes

Is an autopsy always preformed?

No, in many instances, the Deputy Coroner can determine a cause and manner of death by medical records and other information obtained. In the instances that this information needs to be determined, verified, or evidence gathered, an autopsy will take place. While the Coroner does not need permission to have an autopsy completed, we at Charleston County believe in working closely with families to explain and come to an agreement on what would be best.

Can I get a copy of the autopsy report?

Yes, once the investigation is complete to include any toxicology, histological, or any other further testing, the Deputy Coroner will contact you and provide a copy. Typically, this process takes approximately 6-8 weeks. They can then either mail or email the document to you.

Will I be told the cause and manner of death of my loved one?

Yes, in cases where a forensic autopsy is needed, the Deputy Coroner will keep in contact with the legal next-of-kin in order to keep you up-to-date with the status of the investigation and will let you know the final determination once the investigation is complete. Many times, test results take longer to complete than the initial autopsy, and a 'Pending' death certificate will be issued in the meantime.

How do I obtain a death certificate?

There are two different ways. You can obtain copies directly from the funeral home, and they will assist you in getting as many copies as you need or either the Pending version, Completed version, or both. The second way is to obtain them directly from Vital Records (North Charleston, SC) once they are filed by your funeral home.

What is a 'Pending' Death Certificate?

The death investigation continues after the Coroner's Office has completed any initial examination and your loved one has been released to a funeral home. The marking of the cause and manner of death on the death certificate as 'pending' allows you to move forward with a planned final arrangement of cremation or out-of-state arrangements. It also allows you to begin other legal processed for your loved one while the investigation continues.

How do I get the personal items that were with my loved one when they died?

Once any needed procedures have been completed and your loved one is ready for release to the funeral home, those personal items will be sent to the funeral home with your loved one. There are occasions when your loved ones personal items must be held for evidence even though your loves one's release to a funeral home has taken place. If this occurs, the investigating Deputy Coroner can answer any questions about this process. Everything maintained at the Coroner's Office will be securely kept until it is able to be released.

Honoring the dead by serving the living



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for
our website!

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