

## **Q WHAT IS MY NEXT STEP?**

**A** You should select a funeral home to make final arrangements. The funeral home representative and the Office of the Weld County Coroner/Medical Examiner will coordinate with each other in order to facilitate these arrangements and to eliminate possible delays.

## **Q WHICH DEATHS MUST BE EXAMINED?**

**A** The Coroner/Medical Examiner is required by law to investigate all deaths

- 1) That occurs outside a physician's care.
- 2) That is sudden or unexpected.
- 3) That cannot be ascertained to be a natural death by documented medical history and circumstances. The involvement of the Coroner/Medical Examiner does not mean that an autopsy will automatically be performed.

## **Q IF SOMEONE'S DEATH APPEARS TO BE NATURAL, WHY IS THE CORONER/MEDICAL EXAMINER INVOLVED?**

**A** The Coroner/Medical Examiner may take jurisdiction over an apparently natural death if

- (1) the death was unexpected and no medical cause can be determined;
- (2) the decedent was not under the care of a physician, and/or there is no prior documented medical history to explain the death;
- (3) the death might be a public health hazard;
- (4) there are extenuating and/or suspicious circumstances associated with the death.

## **Q WHAT IS AN AUTOPSY AND IS IT REALLY NECESSARY?**

**A** An autopsy is the examination of the body to determine cause and manner of death. It is similar to a surgical procedure. Often, an autopsy can reveal an undiagnosed disease process or abnormality. It may also detect a genetic disorder that could be inherited by surviving family members. In an accidental death, the question of how a disease process contributed to the accident (if at all) must be answered. Often insurance companies will deny payment of benefits until the autopsy results are available. If the death is due to apparent natural causes and there is sufficient

evidence of a pre-existing illness or medical condition, an autopsy may not be necessary. However, if there is any question that the death may be due to "other than natural causes", an autopsy will be performed. In an obviously traumatic death, the cause of death may appear obvious; however, there may be contributing, underlying factors. Again, the insurance companies may deny benefits until they receive the autopsy results.

## **Q WILL AUTOPSY REPORTS BE AVAILABLE?**

**A** Yes. On-line request

[http://www.co.weld.co.us/departments/coroner/coroner\\_contact.cfm](http://www.co.weld.co.us/departments/coroner/coroner_contact.cfm)

or by submitting a written request to the Weld County Coroner's Office, 905 10<sup>th</sup> Street, Greeley, CO, 80631. (You may also fax the request to 970-392-4546). *Please include the decedent's name as well as your name, address and relationship.* One courtesy copy is given to family. All others requisites must pre-pay at a rate of \$.25 per page.

## **Q WHAT IF I DISAGREE WITH THE CORONER'S/MEDICAL EXAMINER'S DECISION TO DO OR NOT TO DO AN AUTOPSY?**

**A** Colorado law (CRS 30-10-606) provides the authority for the Coroner/Medical Examiner to perform an autopsy as part of an investigation.

1) If the Coroner/Medical Examiner deems it necessary to perform an autopsy as part of the investigation, the law grants us the ability to take jurisdiction of the body to perform the autopsy. There is no charge for an autopsy conducted under these circumstances.

2) If you or your family should disagree with our decision to perform an autopsy in spite of the benefits and the questions it will answer, you must obtain a Court Order through your attorney to prevent the autopsy from taking place. All legal financial obligations incurred are your responsibility.

3) If the autopsy is deemed unnecessary for the investigation, it will not be performed. By law, an autopsy cannot be performed by the Coroner/medical examiner solely for "medical curiosity". If the family or doctor would like a medical curiosity autopsy to be performed, it must be arranged by the family or

by the doctor with the family's permission, and be done by the Pathologist of your choice. You should be aware that the financial responsibility falls upon the requesting party.

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

**A** The approval of the Coroner's/Medical Examiner's Office is required for tissue/organ donation for deaths that are under the auspices of the coroner's jurisdiction. Only the heart valves, skin, long bones and corneas can be donated after a person has died. Persons on life support may be eligible for more extensive tissue procurement. With next of kin consent, the family's wishes for donation will be evaluated on a case by case basis.

## **Q WILL I BE CHARGED FOR OTHER CORONER SERVICES?**

**A** The Office of the Weld County Coroner/Medical Examiner does not assess any fees, other than those for processing requested autopsy reports and other documents.

## **Q HOW DO I OBTAIN THE CLOTHING, PERSONAL EFFECTS AND OTHER ITEMS TAKEN INTO EVIDENCE?**

**A** All personal property is released with the body to the funeral home to be given back to the family following an autopsy. The exceptions are as follows:

- 1) In suicides, if a weapon is involved, separate arrangements for its release must be made through the Coroner/Medical Examiner.
- 2) If a crime was committed by or against the decedent (homicide), all clothing and personal effects are generally retained as evidence by the investigating law enforcement agency.

## **Q WHERE DO I OBTAIN THE DEATH CERTIFICATE?**

**A** Death certificates are filed by the funeral director at the county health department in the county where death was pronounced. Should you require certified copies, they may be ordered from the funeral director. Copies may also be obtained from the County or State Department of Vital Statistics.

**Most asked Questions:**

1. You may obtain a copy of the police report from the agency investigating department:  
Police Report case #: \_\_\_\_\_
2. To obtain medical records please call the hospital or clinic where your loved one was seen and ask what is needed to obtain those records. This varies from place to place.
3. You may file for Social Security benefits by contacting the Social Security Administration at: 1800-772-1213//www.ssa.gov or the Social Security office in Greeley at 970-353-2192.
4. If the person who died was a veteran, contact the Veterans Administration at 1800-827-1000//www.va.gov or Weld County Veterans Service Office @ [www.co.weld.co.us/departments/veterans](http://www.co.weld.co.us/departments/veterans).
5. Weld County Victim Compensation Program: 970-356-4010.
6. Notify the insurance agent and the bank of the person who died.
7. The Weld County Coroner's Office can provide a proof of death letter to show that your love one is officially deceased, prior to the release of the final death certificate.

\*\* Note that it takes varying amounts of time to obtain death certificates, medical records, and autopsy/police reports. Ask officials when you may expect them.

*We trust that the advice and counseling provided by your funeral director and the information provided in this pamphlet will be of help. However, should you need additional assistance, please telephone our office at 970-392-4545.*

**WELD COUNTY MORTUARIES**

<b>Evans</b>		
Moser Funeral & Cremation Services		970-330-6824
<b>Fort Lupton</b>		
Erlinger Burial & Cremation Service		303-452-3133
<b>Greeley</b>		
Adamson Memorial Chapels		970-353-1212
Allnutt Funeral & Cremation Services		970-352-3366
Northern Colorado Crematory		970-351-0130
Segura Funeral Sevices		970-308-1140
Stoddard Funeral Home		970-330-7301
<b>Windsor</b>		
Mark's Funeral & Cremation Services		970-686-9525

**NEIGHBORING MORTUARIES**

<b>Brighton</b>		
Tabor-Rice Funeral Home		303-654-0112
<b>Fort Collins</b>		
Allnutt – Drake Chapel		970-482-3208
Bohlender Funeral Chapel		970-482-4244
Goes Funeral Care		970-482-2221
Resthaven Funeral Home		970-667-0202
Vessey Funeral & Cremation		970-382-5065
<b>Longmont</b>		
Ahlberg Funeral & Crematory		303-776-2313
Carrol-Lewellen Funeral & Cremation		303-776-4477
Howe Mort. & Cremation Services		303-776-2434
<b>Loveland</b>		
Allnutt-Hunter Chapel		970-667-1121
Kibbey-Fishburn Funeral Home		970-667-5885
Viegut Funeral Home		970-679-4669

**CLEANING SERVICES:**

Aftermath		1-800-366-9923
Bio-Clean of Colorado		
	970-686-5015 or Emerg.	970-215-2540
BioHarzard Cleaning Services		
	970-371-0396 or 24/hrs.	970-669-4911
Brandecon		970-531-1904



**OFFICE OF THE  
WELD COUNTY CORONER**

ANSWERS TO FREQUENTLY  
ASKED QUESTIONS

**Mark J. Ward**  
*Coroner*

915 10<sup>th</sup> Street  
Greeley, Colorado 80631  
Phone: 970-392-4545  
Fax: 970-392-4546

**WEBSITE:**

<http://www.co.weld.co.us/departments/coroner/index.html>