

Charleston County Coroner's Office Policy #47	
Title: Use of Forensic Specialists or Laboratory Services	Page: 1 of 5
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47.1 POLICY

The use of forensic specialists is a very important part of providing professional medicolegal death investigation services to the citizens of Charleston County. The Coroner has sole discretion in hiring and contracting with various specialists for their services. Specialists may or may not be board-certified in their field. All contracted forensic specialists will submit written reports upon completion of their findings. The Deputies shall utilize the services of local, state, or federal law enforcement agencies when crime laboratory services are necessary.

47.2 PROCEDURE

1. When identification by fingerprints is not possible, then the next method of identification may be odontology. Individual characteristics of the decedent's teeth can be compared to dental records, models, x-rays, and photos of the decedent. The investigating Deputy Coroner will need to obtain, by subpoena, if necessary, complete copies of the decedent's antemortem dental records including charts, X-rays, and photographs of the decedent's teeth. It is important when talking with family and friends to find out if the decedent was seen by more than one dentist/orthodontist. The hand-held dental X-ray unit may be used by the forensic odontologist or the upper and lower jaws of a decedent may be resected during autopsy for identification purposes. If a forensic odontologist's services are needed for dental or bite mark identification, the Charleston County Coroner's Office will obtain those through a contracted relationship.

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2. For cases involving skeletal remains or found bones, it may be necessary to use a forensic anthropologist. A forensic anthropologist will perform an in-depth examination of skeletal remains to determine if they are human or non-human. If the remains are human, they will be evaluated in an effort to determine race, sex, age, and height ancestry, injury information if applicable, and other valuable pieces of information.

47.3 RECEIVING, TRACKING, AND RELEASING BONES

1. Upon the arrival of a bone or more than one bone at the Coroner's Office facility, which is a CCCO case, the receipt of the bone(s) shall be memorialized on the CCCO Body Tracking Document.
2. The case Deputy shall make the initial entry in MDI. The additional form "Anthropology" should be added to the case and a communication log message added to tagging and notifying the forensic anthropologist that the bone(s) are in our facility.
3. If the bone is being received for the forensic anthropologist from an agency outside of Charleston County, the forensic anthropologist will make the initial MDI entry, however; the receiving Deputy/morgue and autopsy personnel shall fill out the CCCO Body Tracking Document.
4. Dry bones shall be stored in the right-side autopsy suite on a table or in the vented cabinet. The packaging, preferably a brown paper bag, shall be labeled with the coroner's office case number.
5. The CCCO Body Tracking Document shall always accompany dry bone(s) while in the building. Any bone(s) with flesh shall be kept in the morgue cooler in a container or bio-bag marked with the case number and the CCCO Body Tracking Document shall be kept in the box outside the morgue in the hallway.
6. After examination by the forensic anthropologist or other contracted specialists, human bones may be transferred to the evidence room, police agencies, the MUSC morgue, or

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other Coroners at the discretion of the case Deputy, forensic anthropologist, another contracted specialist, or the Coroner. Bones stored in our evidence room shall be entered into the Tracker system in accordance with the Property and Evidence Policy. The CCCO Body Tracking Document should reflect that determination and transfer. Utilize MDI Log to facilitate the transfer by the Property/Evidence section. Check “other” and enter a description of the bone(s). Then select “Create Release Form” and release per the form including the “Photo ID” entry if applicable.

7. Non-human bones may be transferred to the forensic anthropologist as part of a teaching collection or disposed of. The CCCO Body Tracking Document should reflect that determination in addition to appropriate MDI Log entries.

47.4 USE OF OTHER FORENSIC SPECIALISTS

Should a death investigation require the use of other forensic specialists, the Coroner has sole discretion in hiring and contracting with various specialists for their services. Specialists may or may not be board-certified in their field. All contracted forensic specialists will submit written reports upon completion of their findings.

47.5 USE OF CRIME LABORATORIES

Unless directed otherwise by the Coroner, the Deputies shall utilize the services of local, state, or federal law enforcement agencies when crime laboratory services are necessary. For the purposes of reference, the Charleston Police Department maintains full-time latent print examiners. Serologic and/or DNA testing services are contracted through NMS Labs or Richland County Sheriff's Office Crime Lab or SLED Crime Lab is utilized. Ballistics are generally tested via the Charleston County Sheriff's Office or the FBI. Trace evidence examination is usually conducted by law enforcement however should the need arise, local, state, and federal crime labs are available to the office as directed by the Coroner.

47.6 USE OF TOXICOLOGY LABORATORIES

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When the need arises for decedent toxicology testing, body fluid samples shall be sent to a forensic toxicology laboratory accredited by the American Board of Forensic Toxicology (ABFT), the College of American Pathologists (CAP), or a state-run laboratory or an accredited laboratory acceptable to the National Association of Medical Examiners (NAME).

1. All samples shall be shipped with the appropriate request form(s).
2. All samples shall be shipped in a box with a “cold pack” as needed.
3. Appropriate evidence tracking entries shall be made in the evidence management system and chain of custody documentation shall be retained in the case file documents section.
4. Shipping documents or tracking numbers shall be recorded in the case file.
5. Should residual samples be pertinent to a case, the return of those samples shall be authorized only by the Chief Deputy or the Coroner.

47.7 USE OF HISTOLOGY LABORATORIES

When the need arises for histology services, the Office shall contract a vendor laboratory that meets the standards of the National Association of Medical Examiners (NAME).

1. The vendor laboratory shall have adequate space and equipment provided for tissue cutting and histological preparation of microscopic slides, including an area for special staining methods.
2. Each workstation should be supplied with electricity and water and properly vented to remove solvent and fixative fumes to meet or exceed NAME standards.
3. Paraffin blocks shall be stored in a cool area and retained for at least ten years.
4. Special stains shall be returned with appropriate control slides.
5. A cryostat should be available for rapid diagnosis and fat stains.
6. Microscopic slides shall be prepared, examined, and reported in all sudden infant deaths, and where feasible, in unexplained deaths, and where necessary to establish a tissue diagnosis.
7. Formalin-fixed or paraffin-embedded tissues shall be stored for at least one year in cases in which microscopic slides are not prepared and in cases of homicide,

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those tissues shall be stored indefinitely in accordance with the Property and Evidence Policy.