

Charleston County Coroner's Office Policy #26	
Title: Morgue and In-House Autopsy Suite Policy	Page: 1 of 17
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26.1 POLICY

It is the responsibility of all employees and contracted personnel to handle all decedents, remains, personal effects, and evidence in the in-house autopsy rooms and morgue with reverence and professionalism at all times. All custody and movement of decedents will be documented from the time of receipt to the decedent's release from Coroner's Office custody. Computerized records will be held indefinitely. Only authorized personnel or escorted authorized visitors shall have access to the morgue/autopsy suite. Staff members, contracted employees, and escorted visitors of the morgue and autopsy suite will have access to confidential information as well as to decedents and are prohibited from releasing any information, reports, or photographs regarding a case(s) without prior authorization from the Coroner or Chief Deputy Coroner. During emergency operations or at other times that the Coroner may deem, the Forensic Supervisor and/or other designated personnel may be stationed in the morgue and autopsy suite to receive bodies and assist with communication. This may include shifts and/or after-hours work.

26.2 PROCEDURE

A. ACCESS

1. Access to the autopsy suite is restricted to authorized personnel including: the Coroner, Chief Deputy, all Deputy Coroners, Forensic personnel, other designated employees, contracted forensic examiners (anthropologist, odontologist, pathologist, etc.), contracted transportation staff, and others as approved by the Coroner or Chief Deputy.

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2. Anyone else entering the morgue/autopsy area shall be under escort from an authorized CCCO staff member including transportation staff for funeral homes, organ procurement representatives, law enforcement representatives, facility contract employees, etc.
3. Access “key fob” devices will be provided only to authorized personnel and at the discretion of the Coroner or Chief Deputy. Key fob devices issued to authorized personnel shall not be given or loaned to another person.
4. Any unprofessional behavior, such as unauthorized photographs, ill-treatment of decedents, etc., will result in disciplinary actions to be determined by the Coroner.

B. BODY TRANSPORT AND RECEIVING

1. Decedents transported from the scene(s) attended by the Coroner, Chief Deputy, or a Deputy, shall only be accepted in a CCCO body bag that has been sealed by a red numbered CCCO lock.
2. Decedents transported from medical facilities, assisted living facilities, nursing homes, other counties, and the like, shall be accepted in an un-locked body bag.
3. Decedents transported under other circumstances will need a written statement on the reverse side of the CCCO Body Tracking Form explaining the transport conditions.
4. A key fob to open the gate will only be provided to authorized personnel.
5. All decedents, bones, and cremains are only received in the CCCO building through the side door within the gated fence.

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6. The receipt of the decedent shall be memorialized in the logbook and on the CCCO Body Tracking Form with complete, signed entries by the transporter and the receiving coroner representative. The identification bands provided by facilities will be checked, proper photographs taken, and proper input into MDI.
7. The stretcher and body shall be weighed on the floor scale and weight noted on the document.
8. The receiving CCCO staff member shall check that the body bag lock (when installed) is properly secured (if it is not, photograph how it arrives); check the bag for signs of tampering or leakage; check the demographic information.
9. If the body bag is not sealed, the decedent shall be photographed by the autopsy/morgue personnel (unless unavailable, then another person may assist in this) per office guidelines.
10. The body tracking documentation, personal effects inventory sheet (if applicable), and other documentation received with the decedent shall be left in the box outside the morgue.
11. The proper information as well as scanned documents will be uploaded into MDI.
12. If the delivery is made after hours by the transportation service, the delivering person(s) shall complete the log and the CCCO Body Tracking Form and leave the form and BRT (when applicable) in the box on the wall outside the morgue.
13. The body shall be moved onto a tray or table in the morgue for storage.
14. Upon leaving the autopsy suite, the stretcher without the decedent shall be weighed and the weight documented on the CCCO Body Tracking Form.

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15. Upon arrival every business day, the autopsy/morgue personnel shall:

- a. Check the morgue for new deliveries of decedents;
- b. Check the body bag(s) for signs of tampering or leakage;
- c. Check the body bag lock number;
- d. Check the CCCO Body Tracking Form and ensure the appropriate MDI log entry has been made in the Body Tracking section;
- e. Ensure the MDI case number is documented on the CCCO Body Tracking Form;
- f. Bring any discrepancies to the attention of the case Deputy and/or a supervisor.

C. Body Identification and Labeling

1. At the discretion of the case Deputy, Chief Deputy, or Coroner, fingerprints will be taken on decedents. When the decedent's fingers are in good enough condition to be printed, inked ten-print strips shall be captured by either the Forensic personnel or the case Deputy, or a MorphoID unit may also be utilized by authorized personnel.
2. If a decedent enters the CCCO morgue and is not a CCCO case, no inked fingerprint strips will be captured unless specifically requested by the governing office.
3. Barcode labels shall be printed from MDI and these labels shall be used to identify forms, personal effects, and all samples obtained during an external examination or autopsy.
4. The MDI case number will be the number used to identify all cases, external exams, and autopsies. The case number will be listed on all paperwork.

D. Decedent Inventory and Storage

1. Forensic personnel shall ensure compliance with this policy for the receipt, storage, and release of bodies into and out of the morgue. Any discrepancies shall be

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reported to the Supervisor of Forensics, Chief Deputy, and/or the Coroner.

2. Body tracking (receiving, releasing) and/or requesting an autopsy in the MDI system will be updated in a timely manner by the case Deputy, other Deputies, and the Chief Deputy. The Supervisor of Forensic Services can assist with these endeavors.
3. Each decedent will be on a tray/rack of their own. No bodies will be placed on top of one another. No bodies will be placed on the floor except under emergency situations deemed by the Coroner or Chief Deputy.
4. Babies and small children shall only be placed in the morgue to ensure that they are not placed on top of another decedent and are not released until ready.
5. Heavier bodies shall be placed on the lower racks, never on the top racks unless necessary.
6. When an autopsy is complete, the decedent is placed back into the morgue and the case deputy or the Coroner shall be informed that the autopsy is complete via MDI or verbally.

E. Personal Effects and Clothing

All Morgue and Autopsy Suite employees are aware of the significance of the personal property to a decedent's family that may enter the facility with a body/remains. These items will be properly documented with photographs and on the MDI Property and Evidence inventory checklist. Small items and jewelry will be removed, packaged, labeled in Tracker, and stored in the evidence room. The remaining items, typically only clothing shall remain with the body in the morgue.

1. Coroner not on Scene – No Autopsy

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- a. If the decedent does not arrive in a locked body bag, the decedent's personal property will be entered into MDI upon admission to the morgue. If an inventory sheet arrives with the decedent, it will need to be scanned into MDI and verified against what is with the decedent.
- b. Items (clothing, jewelry, etc.) should be described by color and item i.e., 'yellow metal ring with white stone' or 'pink T-shirt'.
- c. The decedent and all personal effects will be photographed and collected as directed above.
- d. The decedent will be placed in a body bag with a **blue lock** seal indicating completion and placed in the morgue.
- e. When the decedent is released, the person taking custody will not only sign for taking the decedent into their care but also the personal property. The receiving representative shall sign all required documents and present identification which is copied/scanned into MDI.

2. Coroner not on Scene – Autopsy

- a. If the decedent does not arrive in a locked body bag, the decedent's personal property will be entered into MDI upon admission to the morgue. If an inventory sheet arrives with the decedent, it will need to be scanned into MDI and verified against what is with the decedent during autopsy.
- b. Items (clothing, jewelry, etc.) should be described by color and item. i.e., 'yellow metal ring with white stone' or 'pink T-shirt'.

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- c. All personal effects and clothing will be photographed on the decedent and once removed prior to the autopsy.
- d. Once the autopsy is completed, the decedent will be placed in a body bag which is secured with a **blue lock**, and placed in the morgue. The clothing bag will be kept with the decedent until they are transferred out of the facility unless otherwise agreed upon by the case Deputy, the Chief Deputy, and/or the decedent's family.
- e. When the decedent is released, the person taking custody will not only sign for taking the decedent into their care but also the personal property (red bag with them and/or locked bag). The receiving representative shall sign all required documents and present identification which is copied/scanned into MDI.

3. Coroner on Scene – Autopsy

- a. When a decedent arrives in a locked body bag, the bag will not be opened until the autopsy.
- b. Overall photographs of the decedent's clothing and jewelry will be taken photographed on the decedent and once removed during the autopsy process.
- c. A personal property inventory will be entered into MDI.
- d. Clothing will be placed into a red bio-hazard bag. Personal property will be placed in a separate bag and put on the locked temporary shelf in the autopsy suite.

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- e. Once the autopsy is completed, the decedent will be placed in a body bag which is locked with a **blue lock** indicating the completion of the autopsy, and placed in the morgue. The clothing bag will be kept with the decedent until they are transferred out of the facility unless otherwise agreed upon by the case Deputy, Deputy Coroner, Chief Deputy, and/or the decedent's family.
- f. When the decedent is released, the person taking custody will not only sign for taking the decedent into their care but also the personal property (red bag with them and/or locked bag). The receiving representative shall sign all required documents and present identification which is copied/scanned into MDI.

4. Coroner on Scene – No Autopsy

- a. When a decedent arrives in a locked body bag (red) and no autopsy will be performed, the lock will not be broken.
- b. A **blue lock** will be added to the body indicating the decedent can be released.
- c. Upon release to a funeral home, the receiving representative shall sign all required documents and present identification.

F. Evidence

- 1. It is the responsibility of all deputies, the evidence technician, the coordinator, and any contracted employees to handle property and evidence, to properly manage, secure, and document all evidence and property in accordance with the procedures outlined in other specific policies/manuals i.e. Medication and Illicit Drug Policy; Firearm Policy; Preservation of Evidence Act Policy (DNA Act) and the CCCO Packaging Manual.

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2. After the decedent and effects have been photographed, the personal effects (PE), medication, or other evidence brought into the morgue and autopsy suite may be directly turned over to the evidence technician in person or stored in accordance with the Property and Evidence Control Policy by a Deputy.
3. All US currency will be photographed, counted, collected, and stored in accordance with the Property and Evidence Control Policy.
4. Evidence collected after normal working hours will be submitted into the evidence room by the close of the next business day as indicated above.
5. Small, personal use amounts of illicit drugs found at autopsy may be stored in the evidence room after being double-bagged in plastic and documented in Tracker in accordance with the Property and Evidence Control Policy.
6. If any evidence is found during autopsy or when brought into the morgue and put into Tracker with the case Deputy not present, they will be notified through MDI.

G. Safety Precautions

All CCCO staff members and contracted employees are required to handle remains and/or potentially biohazardous substances while wearing personal protective equipment (PPE) to limit exposure to hazardous materials, other types of contaminants, infectious or contagious diseases, bloodborne or airborne pathogens, or other types of exposures. The PPE needed is dependent on the nature of the investigation and is determined by the circumstances of the autopsy or the condition of the body or as determined by the pathologist. All employees shall be familiar with and comply with the Charleston County Exposure Control Policy and the OSHA Policy.

1. No food, eating, or gum chewing is authorized in the autopsy suite. Additionally, in accordance with the Charleston County Exposure Control Policy, in the autopsy

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suite, smoking, applying cosmetics or lip balm, and handling contact lenses are prohibited.

2. Gloves are to be worn by all personnel in anticipation of exposure.
3. Gloves will be changed appropriately after soiling and immediately if torn. Dispose of gloves in red biohazard bins – NOT THE TRASH CANS.
4. Wash hands immediately following the removal of all gloves in the sink provided by the entrance to the suite.
5. Protective masks and eyewear are available to everyone who enters the suite in order to prevent exposure of body fluids to the mucous membranes of the face (mouth, nose, and eyes).
6. Protective gowns, hair covers, and shoe covers are available to everyone who will enter the suite and should be worn when appropriate.
7. Used gowns or eyewear, soiled or not, will be disposed of in red biohazard bins.
8. Reusable instruments and equipment are to be properly decontaminated with cleaning products provided.
9. Disposable items (NOT sharps) are to be disposed of in the red biohazard bins.
10. Any needles, syringes, scalpels, or any other sharp instruments are to be properly disposed of in the designated sharps containers.
11. Exposure is considered to be skin or mucous membrane contact with blood, body fluids, body tissue/organs. Any exposure should be flushed properly and reported

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to the Supervisor of Forensics or Coroner/Chief Deputy immediately.

H. Eyewash Stations

All eyewash stations will be checked weekly, and results noted in the proper log by the coordinator. If a problem is discovered, the station(s) need to be marked out of service and the coordinator will arrange for repair.

1. To properly use the eyewash station, pull down and allow the water to flush water directly into the eyes that have been exposed.
2. Every person who works directly in the morgue and autopsy suite will receive training on the proper use of this equipment by the coordinator before they will be allowed to enter the suite. This training will be documented and maintained by the coordinator.

I. Safety Showers

1. All shower stations will be checked weekly, and results noted in the proper log. If a problem is discovered, the station(s) need to be marked out of service, and the Supervisor of Forensics will arrange for repair.
2. Activate the shower by pulling down on the silver-colored handle while standing directly under the shower to flush away any exposure.
3. Every person who works directly in the morgue and autopsy suite will be trained in the proper use of the shower. This training will be documented and maintained by the Supervisor of Forensics.

J. Autopsy - Scheduling

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1. In order to schedule an autopsy, the case Deputy will need to contact the on-call morgue/autopsy personnel through MDI, email, or other communication with the decedent's name if available, MDI case number, and a brief description of the circumstances.
2. The Forensic personnel will appropriately schedule autopsies as they come in, knowing that some may have higher priority than others.
3. Once scheduled with the pathologist, the Forensic coordinator will document the information into MDI as well as place a note in the call log notifying the case Deputy when the autopsy will take place.

K. Autopsy – Attendance

1. If the case Deputy authorizes someone from an outside agency to attend the autopsy, they shall notify the Forensic personnel and escort the visitor during the autopsy.
2. The case Deputy may attend the autopsy at their discretion unless otherwise directed by the Coroner or Chief Deputy. Attendance is preferred for all cases where the manner is consistent with a homicide or any autopsy of a child under 17 years of age when staffing is available.

L. Autopsy – Procedures

1. General autopsy protocol shall follow best practices and excellence in forensic pathology and death investigation. Considerations for the specific features, findings, or condition of the decedent at hand and the age of the decedent allow for the professional judgment of the pathologist or at the request of the Coroner, Chief

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Deputy, or the case Deputy to further dictate the autopsy procedures and photographs of the decedent.

2. During the autopsy, the autopsy assistant is under the direct supervision of the pathologist and should remain present during the procedure until it is complete, or the pathologist has excused them.
3. Prior to the autopsy, the autopsy assistant will set up the autopsy workstation according to the specific case examination status including preparing tables for body dissection, preparing instruments, preparing specimen containers and collection tubes, and preparing paperwork for daily caseload.
4. Autopsy photographs of decedents shall depict photographs similar to those described in the guidelines or at the discretion of the pathologist.
5. All samples shall be labeled with the corresponding MDI number for the case as well as appropriate warning labels.
6. Place all organs in a viscera bag then place the viscera bag in the body cavity.
7. Clean the body and return it to the body bag.
8. Seal the body bag with a blue lock, document, and photograph.
9. Thoroughly clean and disinfect autopsy and dissection tables, sinks, drains, instruments, dry-erase boards and floor area.
10. Dispose of cleaning supplies or soiled disposable items in a bio-hazardous waste container.

M. Maintenance and Disposal of Tissues and Organs

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1. The tissue and organ samples kept from each autopsy will be labeled, preserved, and secured in the evidence room until final disposition. The evidence technician will facilitate the final disposition (written approval for disposal by the case deputy), organization, and security of the samples in the room.
2. Stock tissue jars will be kept for one year.
3. Microscopic slides or paraffin blocks from all cases will be kept indefinitely.
4. Blood spot cards and/or other forms of DNA samples will be transferred to the evidence room in accordance with the Property and Evidence Policy.
5. Toxicology specimen kits will be fulfilled and sent to the designated lab for testing. Scan any documents into MDI prior to sending them to the lab.
6. Any evidence from cases that potentially fall under the Preservation of Evidence Act will be held indefinitely.
7. Formalin-fixed tissue samples are retained in their “stock jars” until time for disposal. At this time, the formalin and any other liquid will be poured down the autopsy sink, while the tissues and container will be placed in the red biohazard bins.

N. Supply Management and Record-Keeping

The Supervisor of Forensics is responsible for the supply inventory of the morgue and autopsy suite. All documents received in the suite regarding equipment, repairs, or the like (instruction manuals, etc.) will be kept and logged appropriately until the equipment is no longer used.

O. Cleaning

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Universal Precautions shall be followed when performing the cleaning tasks whether daily or deep cleaning. The approved cleaning and disinfecting supplies will be maintained by the Supervisor of Forensic Services.

1. Discard any sharps in an approved sharps container.
2. Discard any exposed unused supplies i.e. blood tubes, syringes, etc.
3. Rinse gross tissue and body fluids into the drain on the autopsy table or dissecting table.
4. Place all instruments, photo scales, or other items used in the sink containing an approved detergent and disinfectant solution.
5. Spray the autopsy table, dissecting table, scale assembly, and any other work area used during the procedure with an approved disinfectant solution and thoroughly clean the area using a sponge and/or brush. Rinse.
6. Remove any tissue from the floor and spray any affected area with an approved disinfectant and wipe dry with a paper towel.
7. Clean the blade area of the autopsy saw with an approved disinfectant and thoroughly clean the handle of the saw.
8. Once the items are cleaned and dried, return the autopsy station to its ready state for the next case.
9. Sweep and mop the autopsy suite and the morgue floors with a disinfecting solution.

P. Release of Decedents, Skeletal Remains or Bones

1. Decedents, skeletal remains, or bones will be released from the building after the Coroner, Chief Deputy or Deputy authorizes the release via the MDI communication log. Ensure that the designated morgue/autopsy personnel are tagged on the notification. Releases are generally conducted only during normal business hours unless pre-arranged and with the approval of the Coroner or Chief Deputy.
2. If the release authorization by a Deputy, Chief Deputy, or the Coroner and the proper funeral home/ agency has not been listed in MDI under the call log as well as in the designated funeral home section, the decedent will not be released until clarification and the information is put into MDI.
3. The release of the decedent or skeletal remains shall be memorialized on the CCCO Body Tracking Form, and in the MDI body tracking section for the case.
4. Provide the transport person a signed copy of the personal effect inventory transfer sheet from MDI and/or Tracker.
5. The morgue/autopsy personnel or a Deputy shall be responsible to ensure that the correct decedent or skeletal remains are being released to the correct funeral home or cremation service. The Forensic personnel or Deputy and the receiving party shall confirm the name of the decedent, the BRT (if available), the body bag lock, and the personal effects inventory list if applicable, are correct.
6. The Forensic personnel or a Deputy will check Tracker for other personal effects or currency of the decedent and will release it according to the Evidence and Property Control Policy.

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7. If requested, the releasing employee shall break the body bag lock and confirm the identification band, which is on the decedent. The bag will not be locked again after opening.
8. The receiving and releasing individuals shall sign the CCCO Body Tracking Form. The releasing individual shall scan all documents to MDI.
9. After the release of the decedent, the used morgue tray shall be properly sanitized and placed back into the morgue.