

Charleston County Coroner's Office Policy #14	
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Effective Date: 9/29/2014 Reviewed: 6/19/2019, 5/26/2021, 9/15/2023 Authorized By: Bobbi Jo O'Neal, Coroner	

14.1 POLICY

The Charleston County Coroner's Office will respond to the scene of all non-natural deaths occurring outside the hospital and to the scene, if possible, of those transported to the hospital and dying en route or shortly after arrival. It is at the discretion of the Deputy Coroner whether to respond to a natural death that occurred inside or outside of a hospital to include hospice deaths. This decision is based on the information obtained during initial interviews with healthcare providers, emergency medical providers, and law enforcement personnel.

14.2 NOTIFICATION OF DEATH

Generally, the Charleston County Consolidated 9-1-1 Center will dispatch the on-call Deputy Coroner or a call will be received from other sources such as hospitals.

Once notified, the Deputy should:

- a) Document the date and time the call was received and the name of the caller.
- b) Obtain the death location and contact information for the agency that needs to be contacted.
- c) Notify the body removal service, if possible, to enable them to prioritize removals.
- d) Respond to the incident location in a timely manner.
- e) Notify the Investigations Supervisor, Chief Deputy, or the Coroner in circumstances potentially affecting public health, cases that will draw

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heightened interest from the media/public the report of a child death, or multiple deaths, i.e., 2 or more.

14.3 ON-SCENE PROCEDURES

The Deputy Coroner shall take the initiative to introduce themselves to law enforcement and emergency services representatives at the death scene as well as family members when appropriate. Introductions and conversations with first responders, family, witnesses, and other officials allow the Deputy Coroner to become familiar with the circumstances surrounding the incident and important elements leading up to the event, the event itself, and pertinent facts including medical history and safety considerations. Law enforcement should be present; check to see if a scene log has been started, if so sign in and make sure you are cleared to enter the scene.

14.4 SCENE SAFETY

Ensure scene safety has been established prior to entering the scene to prevent injury or loss of life and contact the appropriate agencies for assistance with any scene safety issues if necessary. If scene safety has not been established, the Deputy Coroner should wait until environmental and physical threats to the Deputy are removed and clearance has been given by the appropriate agency establishing scene safety. Deputies are required to utilize appropriate personal protective safety equipment and clothing as necessary to comply with applicable Charleston County policies regarding blood-borne pathogens exposure and general safety guidelines.

14.5 FIELD DECLARATION OR FORMAL PRONOUNCEMENT OF DEATH

Should a Deputy Coroner be in a position to make a formal pronouncement or declaration of death in the field, they shall do so after assessing for obvious signs of death such as rigor, livor, and body temperature, and in cases where none of these are present they shall assess for a radial pulse for 60 seconds or more, as well as observing for any respiratory effort for 60 seconds or more. Assessing for pulse and

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respiration is particularly important in situations where the death has reportedly or apparently just occurred.

14.6 SCENE INVESTIGATION

Deputies shall consider all details of the death scene in the determination of the manner of death. The Deputy Coroner should record all scene notes and observations on a Charleston County Coroner's Office death scene investigative report worksheet (Field Report) and refer to those notes to write the Coroner's Report. Notes and actions at the scene should include, but are not limited to:

- a) Observations on initial walk-through; note living conditions if applicable. If suspicious death, wait for entry until crime scene technicians have arrived so that the two agencies may work together to process the scene.
- b) Interview first responders and note any alterations made to the scene by them. If so, find out what, why, and who.
- c) Photograph the scene and body in accordance with the Photographs and Videos Policy prior to moving or examining the body.
- d) Assess the body for temperature if necessary.
- e) Note livor mortis – location and description; rigor mortis – location and description.
- f) Note all trauma/injuries including location and description.
- g) Blood, lack of blood, and any bloodstain patterns.
- h) Vomit, urine, etc., present.
- i) Remove, photograph, and collect the contents of the decedent's pockets.
- j) Collect all identification cards in the name of the decedent or found in the possession of the decedent. This includes, but is not limited to, identification issued by government agencies, educational systems, or businesses. Identification cards will be retained by the Charleston County Coroner's Office.
- k) Collect prescription and non-prescription medications as indicated after photographing them in place.

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- l) Once it is determined that the body can be moved, an armband, labeled with the decedent's name (if known) and date (DOD or date found), will be placed on the decedent's wrist or other appropriate areas as available. Other information such as "I-526 wreck Victim #1 Charleston County" and the date may be used if the name is not known.
- m) A photograph will be taken showing the armband on the decedent with a wide enough perspective to memorialize the band on the decedent.
- n) The body bag will be closed and locked with a numbered body bag lock. The lock number will be documented on the Coroner's Field Report.
- o) The same information on the armband and date will be written on the outside of the body bag.
- p) A close-up photograph will be taken showing the body bag lock sealed and a wider perspective photograph will be taken to show the name or other identifying information written on the bag.
- q) In cases in which the first body bag lock must be removed prior to autopsy, the reason for the removal and name of the person removing it should be documented and another body bag lock should be applied. The new tag should be photographed, and the number recorded.
- r) Remove the decedent with minimal amount of scene disturbance.
- s) Have the body transported to the appropriate facility. Generally, a funeral home is selected by the family and transports natural deaths when no autopsy is ordered. Contracted transporters are used to transport bodies for storage and traumatic/non-natural deaths.
- t) The Deputy will direct the contracted removal service regarding the decedent's removal.
- u) Regardless of the transportation arrangements, all decedents once in the body bag will be covered by a sheet or appropriate blanket once on the stretcher and in public view.
- v) Interview family members, other close friends, or anyone who may have had contact with the decedent to obtain additional information.
- w) Provide the forensic pathologist with appropriate information.

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- x) Each Deputy shall be in regular communication with the appropriate law-enforcement agent (s) as the investigation proceeds. It is particularly important that they be advised immediately of any death in the hospital that is related to trauma or foul play.
- y) Methods of communication may include phone calls, email, and meetings. Additionally, copies of reports necessary for their investigation, as well as copies of reports necessary for our investigation, shall be shared.

14.7 NOTIFICATION TO GOVERNMENT AGENCIES

As soon as possible, the Deputy Coroner will notify the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) of any death that is a result of a workplace incident. Any death that which related to a product failure or deficiency shall be reported to the Consumer Product Safety Commission. Probable contagious diseases that are discovered during a death investigation shall be reported to the South Carolina Department of Health and Environmental Control which will report the findings to the Centers for Disease Control.

Additionally, the Coroner's Office will work cooperatively to assist the respective agencies in their investigations.

14.8 DECOMPOSED BODIES

Decomposed bodies may create difficulties in determining the cause and manner of death, along with increased transportation, storage, and exposure risks. In addition to the above actions, when dealing with a decomposed body, the Deputy should:

- a) Double bag the decedent, if needed.
- b) Use Tyvek suits and boot covers, as needed.
- c) Use a respirator mask with filters, as needed.
- d) Use protective eyewear, as needed.
- e) It is a conflict of interest for the Office staff to recommend any one company however, you may direct the family to the local listings of biohazard clean-up companies.

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- f) When estimating the date and time of death, consider dated mail, receipts, and/or newspaper.
- g) Document the room temperature, windows open/closed, thermostat setting.
- h) Document any insects present on the deceased, infestation areas, and any insects or pets present in the room with the decedent.