**SECTION 6: BODY PROCEDURES**

**6a: BODY TRANSPORTATION AND HANDLING**

1. In situations in which the body is to be transported to the morgue for postmortem examination or storage the body shall be removed and transported from the death scene by approved personnel authorized by the Union County Coroner Office.
   1. Approved removal and transportation personnel/agencies currently include:
   2. RIP Transportation
   3. Storer Transportation
   4. Buckeye Funeral Trade Service
   5. Funeral Homes
      1. Underwood
      2. Wilson
      3. Ingram
      4. And any licensed funeral home
2. The body removal and transportation agency will respond to the scene in a timely fashion (no more than 1 1/2 hours from the time of their notification, unless unforeseen or unusual circumstances). They must have and maintain vehicles that allow for safe, dignified, private, and secure transportation of the body, have and maintain stretchers/carts that are sturdy and in good repair, and ensure that all vehicles and equipment are regularly cleaned, disinfected, and mechanically sound.
3. The body removal and transportation agency will be contacted by the Union County Coroner Office or the Union County Sheriff Office.
4. The Union County Coroner Office will attach an identification tag with the individual’s name, date of birth, date of death, time of death and SSN to the body before the body is removed from the scene and will record the same information on the investigator’s report.
5. If the name of the decedent is unknown or the body requires positive identification then the body shall be designated as “john doe unidentified, male, “jane doe unidentified, female”, or “unidentified, human remains” as is appropriate.
6. If there is more than one unidentified body at the scene of the same sex the bodies shall be designated by numbering (for example “unidentified, female #1”, “unidentified, female #2”, etc.)
7. If the presumed identity of the unidentified individual is known (based on circumstantial evidence from the scene) also list this name as “presumptive or possible \_\_\_\_\_\_\_” in addition to the above unidentified designation
8. The Union County Coroner Office shall remain on scene until the body removal personnel arrive on scene and remove the body. If for unavoidable reasons the investigator cannot remain on scene with the body, the investigator will ensure the body is supervised by an appropriate law enforcement agency (police agency, etc.) until the time of removal and chain of custody will be documented.
9. Clean, unused paper bags should be secured around the hands and/or feet of the decedent for homicide cases and other incidents as determined appropriate by the circumstances.
10. In homicide cases, hit and run pedestrian fatalities or cases in which the preservation of trace evidence may be relevant, the body should be wrapped in a clean white sheet before being placed in the body bag.
11. The body and any associated personal effects on/with the body shall be placed inside a zippered body bag and the zipper of the body bag secured closed with a plastic numbered tag. This number shall be recorded on the investigator’s report. An identification tag (bearing the same information as the tag placed on the body) should be attached to the zipper of the body bag.
12. The investigator should document in his/her report information regarding personal effects. The personal effects will again be inventoried at the morgue, after the body bag is opened.
13. At all times, the body removal personnel shall conduct themselves in a professional and dignified manner in regard to handling the body and in interactions with family members, investigators, and other persons at the scene. They will not speak to the media but refer them to the Union County Coroner Office.
14. At all times, the body removal personnel shall follow “universal precautions” when handling the body.
15. Transportation of body to Autopsy facility
16. Bodies transported from Union County shall be transported directly from the scene to the Autopsy facility.
17. Bodies may be transported to the Memorial Hospital holding facility (local morgue) for external examination or identification purposes before final transport to the Autopsy facility if circumstances dictate.

**6b: BODY RECEIVING AND RELEASE PROCEDURES FROM MORGUE**

To ensure the chain of custody of all decedents is documented and all decedents are released to authorized funeral directors and/or transporters.

1. Labeling of the body and personal effects
   1. Union County Coroner’s Office will ensure the body is placed in a zippered body containment bag and that the body has an identification label bearing the decedent’s name, Time of Death, Day of Death, Date of Birth, and SSN. If the name of the decedent is unknown or the body requires positive identification then the body shall be designated as “John Doe unidentified male”, “Jane Doe unidentified female”, or “unidentified human remains”. The label shall be affixed to a readily accessible body part and that an identification label bearing the decedent’s name is affixed to the zipper of the body bag.
   2. The personal effects discovered with the body will be documented on the Investigative/Evidence form along with photographs of each item and the form will be marked to indicate the disposition of each item (released with body or retained for evidence or released to N.O.K).
   3. The personal effects will be placed in an appropriate evidence bag labeled with the decedent’s name and location where found and placed inside the body bag with the body, typically in the region of the chest. (If a personal effect is to be released and is not in a bag with other personal effects, this must be noted on the Investigative/Evidence form.)
2. An authorized member of Union County Coroner Office or a member of Memorial Health Security must be present to open the locked morgue cooler to release a body to a funeral home or body transporter. A member of the Union County Coroner Office or security should accompany the funeral home representative/body transporter always while inside the secured cooler/refrigerator area.
3. The Morgue Intake/Release Log will be used to document the receipt of all decedents placed in refrigerated storage.
4. The **Intake** section of the log will include the following information:
   1. Record the name of the deceased
   2. Date and time of morgue placement
   3. County of Death
   4. Name of person transporting the decedent to the morgue
      1. Includes deaths of Hospital patients
   5. Name of Associate assisting with intake procedure
      1. ER Physician, Nurses, Or Hospital Staff
      2. Union County Coroner Office/Memorial Health Security Associate
5. Associates assisting with the intake process will verify the following:
   1. An appropriate name tag is attached to the exterior of the body bag.
      1. Verify the name on the body bag tag coincides with the name on the Intake log.
   2. When the body is received as a Coroner case, a numbered lock seal device is securely attached to the body bag for bodies received from outside Memorial Hospital.
   3. Placement of the body in the storage rack system allows for visual inspection of the body bag tag at the head of the body.
6. Releasing a decedent to the appropriately authorized funeral director and/or transporter requires due diligence on the part of any Associate.
7. An authorized member of Union County Coroner Office or a member of Memorial Health Security must be present to open the locked morgue cooler to release a body to a funeral home or body transporter. A member of the Union County Coroner Office or security should accompany the funeral home representative/body transporter always while inside the secured cooler/refrigerator area.
   1. Persons serving in the following capacity may be assigned to release a body:
      1. Memorial Health Security Associate
      2. Union County Coroner Office
8. Authorized Associates will adhere to the following procedures when releasing a body from the morgue.
   1. Determine the name of the deceased person the transporter is receiving
   2. Locate the designated decedent in the morgue cooler
      1. Verify the name on the body bag tag coincides with the name provided by the transporter.
      2. Verify the name on the Personal Effects bag if one is present to the body bag tag.
      3. Verify the assigned investigator has signed the **Release Authorization** section of the Morgue Log.
      4. If a **HOLD** tag is attached to the body bag do not release the body.
         1. Inform the transporter the decedent may not be released until the assigned investigator has authorized the release and contact the Union County Coroner Office for further instructions.
   3. Verify the identification tag on the body and personal effects bag.
      1. Authorized Associates will ensure the name tag on the body coincides with the name on the exterior of the body bag, Along with the Personal Effects bag. Confirm this with the name provided by the transporter
         1. **Do not release the body if these items are not consistent and contact the Union County Coroner Office.**
      2. Security Officers should ensure the transporter opens the body bag and verifies the name identification tag inside the body bag.
      3. Verify personal effects are visible and attached to the chest of the body as appropriate.
9. The plastic bags (if any) containing the personal effects to be released with the body should be checked for the appropriate identification label and the funeral home representative/body transporter may check the contents of the bags to ensure the appropriate personal effects are with the body.
10. After the above steps are taken to ensure the appropriate body and personal effects are released, the Intake/release log located inside the morgue cooler will be signed (with date and time) by the staff member or security member releasing the body and the funeral home representative/body transporter accepting custody.
11. By signing the Intake/release log located inside the morgue cooler the funeral home representative/body transporter assumes responsibility for the body and all documented personal effects from that time forward.
12. “Universal precautions” should be followed during the body release process.

**6c: Body Viewing**

1. Contact the pathologist assigned to the case. If no pathologist has been assigned, call or page the on-call pathologist.
2. Explain the circumstances of decedent’s death and ask if it would be acceptable to do a viewing before or after the autopsy.
3. If viewing before the autopsy be sure to document and photograph the seal and identification tags. (do NOT discard these tags, leave them with the body)
4. Contact pastoral care and ask if they can assist with a viewing. (They will interact with the family if they are available)
5. If pastoral care is unavailable, arrange for security to escort the family downstairs to the morgue. When they arrive.
6. Once arrangements have been made and a time frame agreed upon, prepare the body for viewing.
   1. Get body out of cooler and put on a cart.
   2. Open body bag only enough to show the top of the shoulders and head.
   3. Clean the parts of the decedent that will be visible (face, neck)
   4. Place a sheet over the entire body. Place a second sheet over the decedent’s chest and head.
   5. Fold the sheet over the decedent’s face down to show just the head. Try to cover the body bag.
7. After the family is done viewing the decedent, remove him/her from the viewing room, put the used sheets in the dirty linen and place decedent in the cooler and prepare for transport to the autopsy facility.

**SECTION 7: DECEDENT IDENTIFICATION**

**T I O N 1 9 - UN C LA I ME D O R I N D I G E**

**GENERAL**

All decedents need some type of positive identification. Decedents can be identified by visual methods, circumstantial considerations or by a scientific method.

**VISUAL IDENTIFICATION**

The normal way to identify a decedent is by a family member or friend. Even then, that identification should be corroborated by some type of circumstantial means to guard against possible fraud. Absent a visual identification, all decedents should have at least one means of scientific identification.

**CIRCUMSTANTIAL IDENTIFICATION**

Circumstantial considerations are easy but are the most unreliable and unscientific. Car registrations, driver’s licenses, jewelry, and other personal possessions are items that may be used to perform a circumstantial identification, but those items can be stolen leading to a possible misidentification. For example, a stolen car may have all sorts of personal identifying items in it, for the wrong person.

Circumstantial evidence does have its value in that it may point you towards evidence that is scientifically stable as identification. Circumstantial evidence can point you towards dental charts, fingerprint exemplars, medical records, x-rays tattoos, scars implanted medical devices and DNA samples, all of which are reliable identifiers.

**SCIENTIFIC IDENTIFICATION METHODS**

Do not positively identify a decedent that was not or could not be visually identified without at least one scientific identifier. Scientific methods of identification include fingerprints, radiology, Odontology, DNA, and forensic anthropology as well as others.

1. Fingerprints: The easiest scientific identifier is a fingerprint. Matching the deceased print can be done is several ways. Fingerprints may be obtained by a trained Coroner Investigator or by the assistance of trained law enforcement personnel. Prior to obtaining fingerprints, the Coroner Investigator should use the circumstantial identification, or presumed identification, to determine if fingerprints exist in some record for making a positive identification.
   1. In the event a circumstantial, or presumed identification, has not been made, then the law enforcement agency in charge will make the necessary requests for a fingerprint comparison in national databases. Fingerprints on drowning victims, decomposed or dehydrated remains are more difficult to print but can be done. Contact the Ohio Bureau of Criminal Investigation for advice.
   2. A certified fingerprint examiner should make the comparisons and submit a written finding.
2. X-rays or other radiology: Another identifier is the comparison of postmortem and ante mortem x-rays.
3. Healed, fractured bones, congenital anomalies and some medical implants will all show up on x-ray. Comparison with ante mortem x-rays will yield scientific identification.
4. Odontology: A forensic odonatologist, a specialist in the comparison of dental charting and x-rays with postmortem dentition, can do dental identification. Even a few teeth with unique identifiers will yield a satisfactory scientific identification.
5. DNA: Samples can be obtained from bones, teeth and fingernails on skeletal remains. Samples can also be obtained from internal organs and other tissue on burned or decomposed deceased persons. These samples can be compared with DNA from the maternal side of the deceased family and the identification is usually 99 percent accurate. If family is not known, DNA can be stored and entered a national data base for comparison with DNA samples from missing persons.
6. Forensic anthropology: If nothing is specifically known about the remains, a forensic anthropologist can tell you age, sex, stature, race, some medical history and whether the remains have forensic value or are from an historic burial. Skeletal remains, specifically the skull, can be the basis for a drawing by a forensic artist or a facial reconstruction, both of which have seen success in the identification of deceased persons when the likeness is widely circulated.
7. Other methods: Implanted medical devices with serial numbers are also good for making a scientific identification.

**SECTION 8: WORKING WITH FAMILY:**

**ASSIST THE FAMILY:** The Coroner Investigator provides the family with a timetable so they can arrange for final disposition and provides information on available community and professional resources that may assist the family.

When the Coroner Investigator is assisting the family, it is important to:

1. Inform the family if an autopsy is required
2. Inform the family of available support services
3. Inform the family of appropriate agencies to contact with questions (law enforcement, SIDS groups, etc.)
4. Ensure family is not left alone with the body (if circumstances warrant)
5. Inform the family of approximate timetable for release of the body
6. Inform the family of information release timetable (toxicology, autopsy results, etc., as required)
7. Inform the family of available reports, including cost, if any

**NOTIFICATION OF NEXT OF KIN:** The responsibility for formal notification of next of kin lies with the Coroner Investigator. Often, notification of next of kin has occurred by other individuals. The Coroner Investigator must determine that the notification has occurred and has been documented. The following are appropriate next of kin, in descending order:

1. Spouse
2. Adult child (18 and over)
3. Parent
4. Sibling (18 and over)
5. Grandparents
6. Aunt/Uncle

In cases where confusion exists (such as in divorces with remarriage) DO NOT release remains until the questions are resolved.

**NOTIFICATION BASED ON CORONER’S OFFICE IDENTIFICATION**: In cases where the remains have been identified by Coroner’s Office, reasonable attempts will be made to contact the legal next of kin who is to be advised of the location of the decedent, the pertinent details of the fatal event, and that an autopsy is/was performed. The Coroner Investigator making such notification will note in writing the name of the person advised, their relationship to the deceased, the method of notification and the time and date. If the Coroner’s Office representative has made notification, law enforcement should be made aware that notification has been made. When using outside law enforcement to make notification of death ask that they make the notification in person and then have them contact the Coroner Investigator as soon as possible.

**VIEWING OF DECEASED BY NEXT OF KIN:** At the scene of death, in the hospital (inpatient or morgue facility) or at the funeral home, the Coroner Investigator must be guided by the nature of the investigation, a concern for physical evidence that might be on the body and the health and safety of those who might handle the remains. Viewing should only occur when the Coroner Investigator and law enforcement in charge of the investigation concur that no harm will come from family viewing and/or touching the body.

**AT THE MORGUE FACILITY:** Clearly distraught, belligerent, under the influence of drugs or alcohol and disrespectful persons will not be allowed to view a body. No more than two persons from the family will be permitted to view the body. If viewing is to take place, the Coroner, Deputy Coroner or Coroner Investigator will make the body and the viewing area as presentable as possible.

In rare instances where identification depends on the recognition by the family, digital images will be taken by the Deputy Coroner/Investigator and made available for viewing by the family.

**INFORMING FAMILY WHEN AUTOPSY IS OR IS NOT TO BE PERFORMED:** The Coroner Investigator will make every effort to communicate with the next of kin to keep them apprised of what decisions are being made and where the body is at any given time. The Coroner Investigator must also notify next of kin when a decision has been made not to do an autopsy. Notification and communications with the family must be documented in the Report of Death. When a determination has been made that an autopsy will be performed, the Coroner Investigator in charge of the case will so advise the legal next of kin. The Coroner Investigator is advised to use tact, diplomacy, and sensitivity in advising the family of the autopsy requirement. A sensitive approach coupled with information will aid the family at this extremely emotional time.

The next of kin notified should be told the following:

1. That an autopsy will be performed
2. Why it is necessary (homicide, work-related, obscure cause and/or manner, to rule out other conditions, etc.)
3. Where the exam will take place
4. How the release is facilitated when the procedure is complete
5. There is no cost to the family

This communication with next of kin is not for purposes of asking their permission or obtaining their consent. It is advisory and communicates to them the steps this office will be taking in the investigative process. The contact with the next of kin must be recorded on the report of death or through a Supplemental.

**PROTESTS BY NEXT OF KIN:** When family members express opposition to the autopsy that is not allayed by the discussion of the reasons why the autopsy is required, the Coroner is to be made aware of the opposition. When relaying this information to the Coroner, a phone number for the next of kin is to be provided so that further discussion can be implemented.

If the legal next of kin expresses concerns or objections to an autopsy, the Coroner Investigator will explain the specific reasons why the Coroner’s Office has jurisdiction, why the death requires an autopsy and try to help the next of kin understand Coroner’s Office's involvement. Document time, date, person with whom discussions were held and pertinent issues discussed. If next of kin concur in the decision to autopsy, this will also be documented in the case file. If requests or limitations are included, the family should be advised whether these are or are not possible.

Where objections to the autopsy continue, or the Coroner’s Office is unable to accommodate the desired limitations, the Coroner’s Office may consult with the Office of the Prosecuting Attorney to obtain an opinion as to whether the autopsy must be performed for the Prosecuting Attorney to carry out legal responsibilities adequately.

If the Office of the Prosecuting Attorney and the Coroner’s Office agree that adequate information can be obtained without an autopsy, or with a modified procedure, this will be done. The family will be required to sign an official Coroner’s Office autopsy waiver form.

If it is not possible, the family will be informed by the Coroner’s Office that the body will be held for a reasonable time (24 hours) unless circumstances compel that the interval should be shorter. An extension of time may be granted if it does not jeopardize the ends of justice or expose any citizen to a dangerous situation. During this time, the family may pursue legal avenues to prevent the autopsy. These may include:

1. Contacting the Prosecuting Attorney
2. Obtaining a court order to prohibit the autopsy.

(In either of these situations, the family should be strongly advised that it might be to their benefit to obtain legal counsel.)

**NEXT OF KIN NOT LOCATED - AUTOPSY REQUIRED**: In autopsy cases where the decedent has been identified and the next of kin has not been located, cannot be located or are unknown, information in the report or a Supplemental must document efforts made by the Coroner Investigator in attempting to locate and/or notify next of kin.

**UNIDENTIFIED REMAINS - AUTOPSY REQUIRED:** In cases where remains are unidentified and an autopsy is necessary, the establishment of a positive identification and search for next of kin will not preclude the autopsy from commencing. Attempts to establish identity will commence as part of the ongoing investigation by the law enforcement agency responsible for the case. The Coroner’s Office will aid in this matter by providing any pertinent information that may be derived from the examination of the clothing and/or the body.

**PRIVATE AUTOPSY REQUEST**: In cases where the coroner has declined jurisdiction or determines that there is no state need for autopsy; the coroner may provide available resources so the next of kin can arrange their own autopsy at the family’s expense.

**FUNERAL HOMES DESIGNATED BY FAMILY**: The staff of the Coroner’s Office is discouraged from recommending the use of one funeral home or mortuary/crematory service over another. If family members or others inquire about facilities in an area, they should be referred to the alphabetical list in a telephone book or the Coroner Investigator may read to them from an alphabetical list which includes all funeral homes in that given area. The family member should be allowed to decide which if any services they might require by interviewing mortuary or crematory services directly. The exception to this would be a request by family members to conduct family burials or if they inquire as to what services they might perform themselves.

It is the responsibility of the lead Coroner Investigator to obtain the funeral home preference of the family as soon as practical.

**RELEASE OF PERSONAL EFFECTS TO NEXT OF KIN:** The Coroner Investigator must be attentive to details of the family network and only release personal property after establishing next of kin. Only then will personal property be released to family members when there is no question as to the relationship that exists. If there is ever a question as to the relationship or it appears that to release items such as large amounts of cash would present problems with others present, no release is to be made until documentation of Administrator or Executor of estate is provided.

**PROTECT THE ESTATE OF THE DECEASED**: The Coroner is responsible for releasing personal effects to the next of kin and making sure that property (house, cars, etc.) are secured until family can be found. Notification of the Office of Prosecuting Attorney is indicated where all attempts to locate next of kin have been exhausted.

**COST OF AUTOPSY WHEN DEATH OCCURRED OUTSIDE COUNTY**

Whenever an autopsy is performed, and the injury causing death occurred within the boundaries of a county other than the one in which the autopsy was performed, such other county shall pay the costs of the autopsy. The cost of such autopsy shall be no greater than the actual value of the services of the technicians and materials used. Money derived from the fees paid for such autopsies shall be credited to the coroner’s laboratory fund created in section [313.16](http://codes.ohio.gov/orc/313.16) of the Revised Code.

**SECTION 9: NOTIFICATION OF NEXT OF KIN**

**INTRODUCTION**

The most challenging duty of the Coroner Investigator is working with families. The Coroner Investigator is working with families on perhaps the worst day of their lives. Emotions run high and often families are unprepared for the event. The Coroner Investigator serves as a guide in providing the family with information they need. The Coroner Investigator must show the utmost professionalism, courtesy and empathy when dealing with families.

The Coroner Investigator must be aware that the moment you are sharing is a moment the family/survivors will never forget. The face and voice of the professional delivering such a message as well as their feeling of how they were treated will likely remain in their memory for a long time to come**.**

Once the next of kin have been notified, the Coroner will be in contact with the family to advise them of the results of the investigation and/or autopsy, to obtain other information as needed and to assist and coordinate the investigation with the funeral plans. The Coroner also makes referrals to specific groups such as the Sudden Infant Death Program and suicide survivor groups as the situation dictates.

If next of kin are outside the county (maybe in other states or countries), the Coroner connects with out of state law enforcement officials so that in person notifications are still facilitated. The Coroner may spend many hours locating these people and many more hours helping them to facilitate disposition of the body and/or understanding and dealing with death.”

Pursuant to ORC 313.14 the coroner shall notify any known relatives of a deceased person who meets death in the manner described by section [313.12](http://codes.ohio.gov/orc/313.12) of the Revised Code by letter or otherwise. The next of kin, other relatives, or friends of the deceased person, in the order named, shall have prior right as to disposition of the body of such deceased person. If relatives of the deceased are unknown, the coroner shall make a diligent effort to ascertain the next of kin, other relatives, or friends of the deceased person. The coroner shall take charge and possession of all moneys, clothing, and other valuable personal effects of such deceased person, found about or pertaining to such body, and shall store such possessions in the county coroner’s office or such other suitable place as is provided for such storage by the board of county commissioners.

**9a: NEXT OF KIN HIERARCHY**

Next of kin shall be considered in the following progression:

1. Spouse of decedent if any

2. Children of decedent 18 years of age and older, if any

3. Guardians of children of the decedent under the age of 18, if any

4. Parent of the decedent if any

5. Siblings of the decedent if any

6. Any other “blood” relative of the decedent, if any

If decedent has no next of kin, friends of the decedent may accept responsibility for final arrangements.

**9b: GUIDELINES FOR LOCATION NEXT OF KIN**

The Coroner Investigator should use all resources available to locate next of kin. Those resources include but are not limited to:

1. Information from bystanders/friends

2. Personal telephone books

3. Cell phone records

4. Landline phone records

5. Law enforcement records

6. Healthcare provider records

7. Mail found at the scene of death

8. Emergency contact cards in wallets/purses

9. Internet searches

Not all these sources will provide a physical location of next of kin. In this age of cell phones, a cell phone number may be all the Coroner Investigator may have, making in-person notifications impossible.

**9c: MAKING NOTIFICATION**

When next of kin are not on the death scene and next of kin have been located, the Coroner Investigator must make notification in a timely fashion. Time is of the essence in making notification. However, expediency should not be a substitute for proper etiquette regardless of the consequences of additional expenses that may be charged to the Coroner’s Office or a delay in making notification.

Sometimes, others on scene may want to make the notification. This can occur when a relative on the scene is other than the primary next of kin. Allowing this is acceptable with the understanding that the next of kin be instructed to call the Coroner Investigator upon notification.

When making the notification, the Coroner Investigator needs to be direct yet sensitive. Some next of kin may want very little detail, some may want complete detail. Each Coroner Investigator will have an approach that works for him/her.

The following are some basics to assist the Coroner Investigator:

1. Whenever possible, a team should make the notification. The team should consist of:
   1. A uniformed law enforcement officer,
   2. A Victim’s Assistant (i.e. VOCA) Program volunteer if appropriate and/or LOSS Team
   3. A coroner representative if appropriate
2. Offer official identification and business cards.
   1. You may want to delay the use of the word “Coroner” upon initial contact.
   2. Present your business card as part of your exit strategy.
   3. Wear your identification badge.
3. Make the notification in person, FACE TO FACE. Telephone calls are not preferable unless the Coroner Investigator cannot determine geographic location of the next of kin. Written notification may be used as a last resort when no physical address is available (for example, PO Box only).
4. Ask the person(s) to sit down and sit with them. Never stand over or physically down downward to the family member.
5. Verify that they are the family of the injured or deceased. Ask directly, “Are you the family of John Smith?”
6. Use the injured or deceased person's name and include the facts. Use direct language and do not try to overprotect through euphemisms. Say, “I’m afraid I have some bad news for you.” Pause a moment. “Your father, John has been assaulted and he is dead.” Pause a moment and then make a supportive statement “I wish I didn't have to tell you this” or “I’m so sorry.”
7. Let the person respond and ask questions.
8. Be prepared for a physical reaction, including fainting, shortness of breath and nausea. Be aware of the potential for a physical attack.
9. Do not restrain the person unless there is imminent danger of injury to themselves or others.
10. Those who are notifying should allow a display of their own emotions. This validates the person(s) being notified, demonstrates concern and has been shown to have a long lasting, positive effect.
11. Continue to use the victim's name not “the body” or “the deceased.”
12. If substantial time has passed before the notification was made, explain why. Explain the importance of taking the time to ensure information and verification before making the notification.
13. If information must be withheld, explain why. Do not tell the family, “you don't need to know” or “we can't tell you.” If possible, give them a time frame for when you can give them this information.
14. Ensure that the person(s) is transported to the hospital or any other destination.
15. Stay with the person(s) until they have alternate support.
16. Leave written information including the names of the staff that made the notification and the location of the victim. Also, include addresses and telephone numbers of resources and provide information on the autopsy and morgue procedures.
17. When making notifications, resist the temptation to try to comfort people by making promises.
18. Before leaving, tell the family “Dealing with the death of a loved one is harder than most people think” and “Please feel free to call anytime if you have any questions.”
19. Identify a contact person within the family. Ask that this designee be the one to make and receive all contact with the Coroner’s Office.
20. Always follow-up on any commitments to contact the family.
21. Provide families with the most recent copy of Union County Coroner’s Office information pamphlet.

If notification is to be made to next of kin outside of the Coroner Investigator’s county of jurisdiction, the Coroner Investigator shall:

1. Determine the jurisdiction of residence of the next of kin.
2. The Coroner Investigator shall personally contact that jurisdiction for their policy on receiving notification from the Coroner’s Office.
   1. Some jurisdictions will accept the Coroner Investigator’s verbal report as being legitimate and will make the notification.
   2. Some jurisdictions will require written documentation in the form of a teletype from the Union County Communications Center. Contact those personnel for assistance.
3. Provide the next of kin’s contact information, name of the decedent and brief history of the circumstances.
4. Provide a contact number for next of kin to use.
5. Ask for the law enforcement official to contact you when notification has been made.

Once the next of kin has contacted the Coroner Investigator, the above guidelines may be adapted to the circumstances. Telephones notifications my follow the above guidelines with the appropriate modifications.

**SECTION 10: UNCLAIMED OR INDIGENT REMAINS**

**INTRODUCTION**

# 9.15 Burial or cremation of body at expense of township or municipal corporation.

When the body of a dead person is found in a township or municipal corporation, and such person was not an inmate of a correctional, benevolent, or charitable institution of this state, and the body is not claimed by any person for private interment or cremation at the person’s own expense, or delivered for the purpose of medical or surgical study or dissection in accordance with section [1713.34](http://codes.ohio.gov/orc/1713.34) of the Revised Code, it shall be disposed of as follows:

**GENERAL PROCEDURE FOR INDIGENT CREMATIONS**

1. If the person was a legal resident of the county, the proper officers of the township or Municipal Corporation in which the person’s body was found shall cause it to be buried or cremated at the expense of the township or Municipal Corporation in which the person had a legal residence at the time of death.
2. If the person had a legal residence in any other county of the state at the time of death, the superintendent of the county home of the county in which such body was found shall cause it to be buried or cremated at the expense of the township or municipal corporation in which the person had a legal residence at the time of death.
3. If the person was an inmate of a correctional institution of the county or a patient or resident of a benevolent institution of the county, the person had no legal residence in the state, or the person’s legal residence is unknown, the superintendent shall cause the person to be buried or cremated at the expense of the county.

Such officials shall provide, at the grave of the person or, if the person’s cremated remains are buried, at the grave of the person’s cremated remains, a stone or concrete marker on which the person’s name and age, if known, and date of death shall be inscribed.

A political subdivision is not relieved of its duty to bury or cremate a person at its expense under this section when the body is claimed by an indigent person.

**SECTION 11: ORGAN AND TISSUE DONATION AND RECOVERY**

**GENERAL**

The Union County Coroner recognizes the benefit to the citizens of Union County and beyond related to anatomical donations. The Union County Coroner shall make every effort to recognize potential donors, coordinate with families, donor agencies and, when required, the forensic pathologist, to insure maximum benefit of a potential donor.

**STATUTORY IMPERATIVE**

# 2108.09 Anatomical gift after donor's death.

(A) Subject to divisions (B) and (C) of this section, and unless barred by section [2108.07](http://codes.ohio.gov/orc/2108.07) or [2108.08](http://codes.ohio.gov/orc/2108.08) of the Revised Code, an anatomical gift of a decedent’s body or part for purpose of transplantation, therapy, research, or education may be made in the manner provided for under section [2108.10](http://codes.ohio.gov/orc/2108.10) of the Revised Code by any member of the following classes of persons who is reasonably available, in the following order of priority:

(1) An agent of the decedent at the time of death who could have made an anatomical gift under division (B) of section [2108.04](http://codes.ohio.gov/orc/2108.04) of the Revised Code immediately before the decedent’s death;

(2) The decedent’s surviving spouse.

(3) The decedent’s surviving adult children.

(4) The decedent’s surviving parent or parents.

(5) The decedent’s surviving adult siblings.

(6) The decedent’s surviving adult grandchildren.

(7) The decedent’s surviving grandparent or grandparents.

(8) A surviving adult who exhibited special care and concern for the decedent.

(9) The persons who were acting as the guardians of the person of the decedent at the time of death.

(10) The persons, other than those in divisions (A)(1) to (9) of this section, to whom the right of disposition for the decedent’s body has been assigned pursuant to section [2108.70](http://codes.ohio.gov/orc/2108.70) of the Revised Code or who have the right of disposition for the decedent’s body as described in section [2108.81](http://codes.ohio.gov/orc/2108.81) of the Revised Code.

(B) If there is more than one member of a class listed in division (A)(1), (3), (4), (5), (6), (7), or (9) of this section entitled to make an anatomical gift, an anatomical gift may be made by a single member of the class unless that member or a person to which the gift may pass under section [2108.11](http://codes.ohio.gov/orc/2108.11) of the Revised Code knows of an objection by another member of the class. If an objection is known, the gift may be made only by most the members of the class who are reasonably available.

(C) A person shall not make an anatomical gift if, at the time of the decedent’s death, a person in a prior class under division (A) of this section is reasonably available to make or object to the making of an anatomical gift.

**11a: IDENTIFYING DONORS**

Potential donors are usually discovered by the Coroner Investigator during a scene investigation by viewing the decedent’s driver’s license. Ohio Driver’s Licenses use a symbol of a red heart indicating the holder of that license has an entry on the donor registration. When that designation is known to the Coroner Investigator the following procedure shall apply:

1. The Coroner Investigator must become familiar with the general guidelines for an eligible donor including, but not limited to, time since death or presence of diseases that preclude donation. Donor Alliance offers these minimal guidelines:
   1. Full term birth to no upper age limit (upper age limit may move around or decrease based on the need for the community)
   2. No HIV
   3. No infectious Hepatitis
   4. Cancer or Auto Immune Disease:
      1. Will need more information about current treatments
   5. Traveled or lived outside of the U.S. in the past 3 years?
      1. Will need to know where and for how long
   6. No use of IV drugs
   7. Ever an inmate of a correctional facility or jail?
      1. Will need to know how long
   8. Last known alive time must be less than 24 hours
   9. Decedent must be refrigerated within the first 12 hours of death
2. The Coroner Investigator shall inquire if family wants to allow donation.
   1. If the family concurs with the decedent’s request, the Coroner Investigator shall ask for approval in providing contact information to the appropriate donor agency.
      1. The Coroner Investigator shall contact the appropriate donor agency either at the scene or immediately after leaving the scene and shall provide minimum information to the donor agency such that that agency may begin their procedures.
   2. If the family denies the decedent’s wishes, the Coroner Investigator shall make note of that fact.
      1. The donor agencies shall not be contacted on denials.
3. In the event the decedent’s driver’s license is unavailable or the driver’s license indicates the decedent did not express wishes to be a donor, the Coroner Investigator shall tactfully initiate a conversation with the family following the guidelines listed above.

**11b. COORDINATING DONATIONS**

The Coroner Investigator is responsible for coordinating information between the appropriate donor agency, the family, and the forensic pathologist.

1. If the decedent appears to be an eligible donor, is released without a postmortem examination and the family agrees to donation the Coroner Investigator shall at a minimum:
   1. Call the donor referral line and provide minimal information required.
   2. Notify the family that the donor agency will be calling them.
2. If the decedent appears to be an eligible donor, will require a postmortem examination and the family agrees to donation the Coroner Investigator shall at a minimum:
   1. Call the donor referral line and provide minimal information required.
   2. Notify the family that the donor agency will be calling them.
   3. Notify the forensic pathologist assigned to the postmortem examination and coordinate a schedule to facilitate the donation.
      1. Organ donation may or may not be approved based on circumstances of the death. However, all efforts shall be made to accommodate the donation.
      2. Tissue donation may or may not be approved based on the circumstances of the death. However, all efforts shall be made to accommodate the donation.
      3. Tissue donation may be allowed either prior to or after the postmortem examination based on the circumstances of the death.
3. The Coroner Investigator/Coroner shall be the sole contact point, excluding the donor’s family, for the donor agency and shall insure that all donor agency responsibilities have been performed including the transfer of the decedent to the designated mortuary/funeral home.

**SECTION 12: DEATH CERTIFICATES**

**DEATH CERTIFICATES NOT SIGNED BY A PRIMARY CARE PHYSICIAN**

Death Certificates for decedents under jurisdiction of the Union County Coroner’s Office for autopsy will be signed by the Coroner or a Deputy Coroner.

1. If cause and manner of death can be determined at time of autopsy, the Death Certificate shall be signed with those findings considered.
2. If cause and manner of death cannot be determined at time of autopsy, then a Death Certificate Indicating “Pending” shall be signed.
3. If a Death Certificate indicating “Pending” is signed, a final Death Certificate should be issued immediately upon completing the investigation.
4. Occasionally, a decedent may not have an established relationship with an Ohio physician. However, the scene investigation revealed the decedent had significant, verifiable medical history. The Coroner Investigator may either release the decedent on scene or request transport of the decedent to the Union County Morgue. In either case, the Death Certifier shall be a representative from the Union County Coroner’s Office.

**DEATH CERTIFICATES INDICATING “PENDING”**

*“The physician in charge of the patient's care for the illness or condition which resulted in death shall complete, sign, and return to the funeral director or person acting as such all medical certification within forty-eight hours after a death occurs. In the absence of said physician or with his approval, the certificate may be completed and signed by his associate physician, by the chief medical officer of the institution in which the death occurred, or by the physician who performed an autopsy upon the decedent, if such individual has access to the medical history of the case, if he views the deceased at or after the time of death, and if the death is due to natural causes.”*

The Union County Coroner’s Office recognizes at times a mortuary/funeral home may need to release a decedent for burial, cremation or transport and the designated certifier is unavailable. Because of these events, the Coroner or Deputy Coroner/ Investigator may assist under the following conditions:

1. If the decedent’s primary care physician (designated certifier) is unavailable to sign a Death Certificate, the mortuary/funeral home personnel shall make every effort to have the Death Certificate indicating “Pending” signed by an associate of the designated certifier.
   1. Mortuary/funeral home personnel need to assure the associate of the designated certifier they are signing a Death Certificate indicating “Pending” and are not rendering a determination on the cause and manner of death in any way.
   2. In the event the designated certifier’s associate is unavailable or unwilling to sign a Death Certificate indicating “Pending Investigation”, the Coroner or a Deputy Coroner/ Investigator may sign.
2. Mortuary/funeral home personnel should be prepared to detail which doctors they talked with and why they refused to sign for their associate.
3. Mortuary/funeral home personnel should be prepared to give a complete report of the circumstances of death, including medical history, to the Coroner Investigator to determine if signing the Death Certificate is appropriate.

**REJECTED DEATH CERTIFICATES**

The Local or State Registrar’s Office may, from time to time, reject a Death Certificate based on many criteria. Usually, the rejection is due to the manner of death being classified as “Accident” or the cause of death is typically not a natural disease.

1. If the Death Certificate has been rejected due to manner of death being listed as “Accident”, a Coroner’s Case shall be initiated.
   1. Notice of the rejection may come from either the local or state registrar or the corresponding mortuary/ funeral home.
   2. The Coroner Investigator who received notification of the rejection shall create a case file, investigate and complete all usual and customary documents to determine if the cause of death and manner of death, as reported by the certifier on the rejected Death Certificate, is appropriate.
2. If the rejected Death Certificates related to an unacceptable cause description and that manner of death is “Natural”, the Coroner Investigator may assist in correcting the Death Certificate and no Investigation is indicated.

**SECTION 13: WORKING WITH THE MEDIA**

The Union County Coroner's Office realizes the important service provided by the local media outlets in informing the residents of Union County and beyond. The Union County Coroner’s Office will endeavor to supply the media with information in a timely fashion.

**MEDIA RELEASES-UNION COUNTY CORONER’S OFFICE RESPONSIBILITY**

The Union County Coroner’s Office will be responsible in releasing the names of the decedents and the cause and manner of the death for persons who die in Union County. Such releases shall take the form of a written Media Release only. No verbal releases shall be permitted.

1. 1. The release shall follow approved templates to the extent applicable.
   1. In the case of apparent suicides, names will be released but responsible journalism regarding the next of kin and circumstances of the event is expected.
2. The release shall be made in a timely fashion only after:
   1. Positive identification has been made
   2. Designated next of kin have been located and notified
   3. A postmortem examination has been completed and the forensic pathologist has been consulted on the content of the media release
   4. Designated next of kin have been informed of the content of the Media Release; specifically, the cause and manner of death
3. The Media Release shall be submitted to all outlets of record as evidenced by a current email address maintained on the account.
4. If the death occurred in Union County but the act that initiated the sequence of events occurred in another jurisdiction, and that jurisdiction has accepted the same (receiving jurisdiction), the Union County Coroner’s Office shall not release any information and direct all inquiries to the receiving jurisdiction.
5. Information requests not related to the cause and manner of death shall be directed to the appropriate investigating agency.

**MEDIA RELEASES-MEDIA RESPONSIBILITY**

1. The media is requested to not call the Union County Coroner’s Office requesting information regarding a current case.
2. Once a Media Release has been issued, media outlets are requested to submit follow-up questions via the email address.
   1. Questions via telephone contact will be entertained
   2. If the question is a simple clarification, the question will be answered immediately
   3. If the question posed will provide information meaningful to the entire media community, that question will be answered via a return email sent to all media outlets with the possibility of a further Media Release posting to the Coroner’s Website or other stated method.

**MEDIA REQUESTS NOT RELATED TO CURRENT CASES**

From time to time, media outlets will request information relating to topics of interest but are not specifically regarding a current case. Such topics may evolve from a current case and may provide helpful information for the community at large.

1. The Coroner or Coroner Investigator may provide information relevant to the media request
2. If an on-camera interview is requested, the Coroner shall be contacted for approval

**SECTION 14: EMERGENCY OPERATIONS**

**GENERAL**

A mass casualty incident (MCI) (sometimes called a multiple-casualty incident or multiple-casualty situation) is any incident in which [emergency medical services p](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Emergency_medical_services)ersonnel and equipment at the scene are overwhelmed by the number and severity of casualties at that incident. Most any MCI would likely include many fatalities and cause the Union County Coroner’s Office to go into emergency operation.

Union County offers many opportunities for an MCI to occur. The following are some, but not all, examples where an MCI could occur:

1. Transportation
   1. Busses
   2. Aviation
2. Large gatherings of people
3. Industrial sites
4. School districts

MCI’s could include physical accidents or could be a result of a chemical or biological agent either accidentally or intentionally introduced.

**MASS FATALITY PLAN**

The Union County Coroner’s Office has a Mass Fatality Plan in place. Appendix D contains that plan.

**SECTION 15: HEALTH AND SAFETY**

**INTRODUCTION**

The following safety procedures will help limit the risk of exposure to infectious disease. Union County Coroner’s Office personnel may be concerned with contracting an illness from an individual who may have died with or from a contagious disease. Although dead bodies are a potential source of infection, they are less so than the living infected person. A living infected person provides a continuing living source for the infection and may actively shed a virus or bacteria through coughing and sneezing or through their body secretions and excretions. The dead person, on the other hand, merely serves as a repository for the organism. Since infections are caused by living organisms which are not mobile, it is nearly impossible to contract an infectious disease by merely being around an infected dead body or in the same room with one.

However, Deputy Coroners/Investigators often must come into direct contact with dead bodies during death pronouncements, external examinations or assisting with transportation. In these instances, a small potential of being infected from the body exists. The potential can be reduced using reasonable precautions.

**TRAINING**

All new Deputy Coroners/Investigators must attend training coordinated by the Union County Health Dept. Safety training sessions include lectures and/or discussions of health and safety issues and guidelines.

**EMPLOYEE HEALTH REQUIREMENTS**

HEPATITS-B INOCULATIONS are required for employment as a Coroner Investigator. The Union County Coroner’s Office offers this immunization to employees who do not have primary employment in the medical field at no cost. This is a series of three injections over a six-month period. This vaccine provides over 90% protection against Hepatitis B for 7 or more years following vaccination. The vaccine is to be administered at 0, 1, and 6- month intervals.

**POTENTIAL EXPOSURES**

The following are all investigative personnel tasks that offer potential for exposure to infectious disease:

1. Scene investigation
2. Handling bodies, blood, fluids, tissues, or contaminated personal property accompanying bodies
3. External examination
4. Processing toxicology samples, evidence, or items of property from the body or scene

When carrying out any of the above tasks, the Coroner Investigator must wear impermeable gloves at a minimum. When conditions are such that contamination of the Coroner Investigator's clothing may occur, either through splashing or because of workspace limitations, impermeable protection such as aprons and over sleeves are to be used. If the possibility of splashing exists, some form of eye protection, eyeglasses, goggles or face shield and an N95 face mask must be worn. Shoe covers are to be worn over shoes if there is a risk of contaminating them with blood or fluids.

**PERSONAL PROTECTIVE EQUIPMENT (PPE)**

When the Coroner Investigator is participating in any type of postmortem examination, conducting a scene investigation in which there are large amounts of blood and body fluids present, full PPE is required including: protective gloves, plastic apron, surgical mask, shoe covers, over sleeves and protective eyewear must be worn for the duration of the examination and until the scene investigation is complete. When handling, personal property accompanying bodies or items of property from the body or scene, and processing toxicology samples, and conducting scene investigations that are clean (no blood or body fluids visible), protective gloves are required.

**SCENE INVESTIGATIONS**:

The Coroner Investigator will encounter an extremely diverse range of potential scene situations. The Coroner Investigator should access each scene prior to the entry to determine the assumption of contamination that exists. Whenever the possibility for exposure to blood or blood-contaminated body fluids exists, the appropriate protection must be worn.

1. A natural home death where there is no blood or body fluids present:
   1. The Coroner Investigator must wear protective gloves at a minimum.
2. A contaminated scene:
   1. A contaminated scene may be a homicide, suicide, or motor vehicle collision where large amounts of blood and body fluids are present.
   2. The Coroner Investigator must wear protective gloves, plastic apron, protective shoe covers, over sleeves and a mask.
   3. These items are to be changed if torn or soiled and always be removed prior to leaving the scene.
   4. While wearing gloves, avoid handling personal items, such as combs and pens that could become soiled or contaminated.
   5. Face masks and eye protection are required if potential exposure to blood via a splash to the face, mouth, nose or eyes exists.
   6. Where there is massive blood contamination on floors, the use of disposable impervious shoe coverings must be worn.
   7. Protective gloves are to be worn to remove contaminated protective gear.
   8. All protective gear must be removed prior to leaving a scene and placed in biohazard bags and disposed of properly.
   9. Biohazard bags will be provided for the disposal of contaminated items.
3. Handling bodies, blood, fluids and tissues or contaminated personal property accompanying bodies:
   1. The Coroner Investigator must wear gloves and cover all cuts and abrasions to create a barrier when handling bodies, blood, fluids, tissues or contaminated personal property.
   2. If a glove becomes torn it must be immediately replaced.
   3. Carefully wash all exposed areas with disinfectant soap after any contact with blood.
   4. During loading, unloading and bagging of bodies, the Coroner Investigator must wear gloves.
   5. All paperwork processed at the scene must be managed without gloves or with fresh gloves.
   6. The outside of the body bag must be cleaned with disinfectant solution if contaminated with blood.
   7. If the Coroner Investigator is bagging a "known" infectious disease body (one that has been medically documented), do not write "Infectious Disease" on the body bag. Rather, verbally inform the transporter or the mortuary/funeral home personnel that this is a "known" infectious disease case.

**DISPOSAL OF WASTES:**

Waste generated while performing job tasks on cases where there is no contamination of the materials with biological waste matter can generally be double bagged, sealed and dumped in the regular trash for pick up. Waste generated while performing investigative tasks on cases that become contaminated with biological materials must be disposed of in the following manners:

1. Trash - all trash, normal waste generated during a case that becomes contaminated with biological fluids is to be discarded in trash containers marked "Infectious Waste".
2. Sharps - all sharps, contaminated or not, are discarded in labeled "SHARPS" containers
3. Biological - all biological wastes must be double bagged.
4. Receptacles for the above may be found at Memorial Hospital of Union County.

**DISINFECTING EQUIPMENT:**

1. For washable surfaces - first wash excess soil from the equipment then apply one of the following solutions liberally over all surfaces: 70% ethyl alcohol, 70% isopropyl alcohol or 10% household bleach. 10% household bleach is made by mixing 1-part bleach and 9 parts water.
2. For small items: Soaking the item for 20 minutes in a disinfectant solution ensures complete surface contact. All surfaces must be thoroughly rinsed afterward, especially if the bleach solution is used.
3. For clothing: Rinse out excess soil and then soak in 10% household bleach for 20 minutes. Then wash normally. CAUTION: Bleach may fade colors. Check for color fastness first.

**EQUIPMENT AND SUPPLIES:**

The following equipment/supplies shall be issued to and maintained by the Coroner Investigator:

* Eye protection
* Over sleeves
* Sharps container
* Gloves
* Shoe covers
* N95masks
* Biohazard bags

**PROTOCOL FOR BODY FLUID EXPOSURE**

*DEFINITION:* Any exposure to body fluids from another person that is compounded by a cut, needle or other sharps puncture, or a splash to mucous membranes (eyes, mouth, etc.)

**IMMEDIATE PROCEDURES:**

1. Contamination by injury: Stop the activity/task, remove gloves, and wash out the injury. The wound should be flushed for at least 3 minutes with water and then washed with disinfectant soap and betadine.
2. Contamination without injury: Immediately disengage from the activity, remove gloves, and wash the contaminated areas(s) with water and disinfectant. The Coroner Investigator may then return to normal duties.

**REPORTING THE EXPOSURE:**

Union County Coroner’s Office personnel must follow procedures outlined in the Union County Human resources.

1. Report the exposure to your supervisor (usually the Coroner) immediately. The Deputy Coroner/Investigator will be directed on steps to follow.
2. The supervisor will notify the proper county personnel regarding the exposure. Paperwork will need to be completed by all parties including witnesses, if any.
3. If possible; obtain a blood sample from the donor for screening.
4. Contact Human Resources for current Work Related Injuries Care Providers authorized locations for treatment of any work-related injury. If the injury occurs after hours or if the injury is emergent, personnel must go to Memorial Hospital Emergency Department for treatment.

**NON-UNION COUNTY CORONER’S OFFICE PERSONNEL:**

1. In cases where NON-Union County Coroner’s Office personnel are involved in potential exposure, the person exposed must take responsibility to seek medical care as soon as possible.
2. The Union County Coroner’s Office will assist in providing screening information from the donor.

**BACK SAFETY AND LIFTING**

To provide a safe working environment focused on Investigators safety, a “no single lift policy” is integral to a comprehensive safe handling and movement program. This “no single lift policy” does not mean Investigators will never transfer or reposition any decedent individually, but rather that the Investigators will consider the weight loads and mechanics before transferring or repositioning.

**Investigators are required to:**

1. Complete training on body mechanics and proper patient lifting techniques during orientation.
2. Demonstrate proper body mechanics and patient lifting techniques.
3. Request help from others at the scene before lifting.
4. Successfully complete Safe Patient Lifting competency to include:
5. Training/competency assessment to include:
   1. Proper body mechanics
   2. Transfer techniques for bodies, for example from floor to cart, bed to cart.
6. Investigators will encourage their co-workers and contracted transport agents to use proper lift/transfer techniques.

**SECTION 16- COURT**

**GENERAL**

Any representative of the Union County Coroner’s Office is subject to being summoned to legal proceedings to provide information relevant to the proceeding in question. Further, any portion of a Union County Coroner’s Office investigation and any report, record or photograph produced during that investigation is subject to the scrutiny of the examining or questioning body.

**METHODS OF NOTIFICATION**

When summoned to give testimony or information in any civil or criminal proceeding, the Deputy Coroner/Investigator will notify the Union County Coroner to record the date and review the case.

**SUBPOENA**: A subpoena is an order to appear and provide testimony. A subpoena must be personally served to the individual whose appearance is required unless arrangements have been made to comply without personal service, usually in the form of a signed waiver of service.

Prior to a court hearing, a Coroner Investigator may be called upon for an informal interview or a formal deposition where actual testimony is recorded. The Coroner Investigator may use notes made by them for review in court. However, the only documents that can be produced as file reports are those generated and maintained by the Union County Coroner’s Office. No Coroner Investigator should enter a situation to give testimony without having spoken to the summoning party in advance and will meet with the prosecuting attorney.

**SUBPOENA DUCES TECUM**: A subpoena duces tectum is an order that commands an appearance by an individual, with instructions to bring certain records. In most criminal and civil court proceedings, the summoning party will have already obtained copies of the records in the matter. If a member receives a subpoena duces tectum, the records in the case are held by the Union County Coroner’s Office and certified copies will be provided to the member being summoned along with any personal notes kept by the Coroner Investigator. Images pertaining to a case are held within that case and are reproduced when requested by an outside agency or individual.

**PRIVILEGED DOCUMENT**: A privileged record is a record within the Union County Coroner’s Office file generated by an agency other than the Union County Coroner’s Office. These are usually medical records and/or law enforcement reports. These documents are privileged documents, i.e., those that are not part of the public domain and as such, are not released except by subpoena or court order made to the creating agency. In any case where such documents exist within a subpoenaed Union County Coroner’s Office file, they are not to be produced along with Union County Coroner’s Office documents. Instead, the subpoenaing agency is to be apprised that the records exist, that they are privileged, and that they are the property of the generating agency. By making attorneys in civil and criminal proceedings aware of the existence of the documents, the court can then determine a course of action. If the court proceeds and orders that the privileged documents be produced, the Union County Coroner’s Office has shown good faith in the attempt to protect the records.

**INFORMED NOTIFICATION:** A request for testimony or information preliminary to a formal hearing may be requested on the telephone. Any such request can be made through the service of a subpoena. Representatives of the Union County Coroner’s Office may respond with or without a subpoena depending on the circumstances, time element and other factors.

**RESPONSIBILITY IN CRIMINAL PROCEEDINGS**

Representatives of the Union County Coroner’s Office are to be neutral presenters of the facts in any legal proceeding. The Coroner Investigator is primarily used in court hearings to initiate the chain of custody testimony. Another component of testimony may be the description of the scene as the Coroner Investigator saw it and a description of the body as the Coroner Investigator saw it. Finally, any documents generated by the Coroner Investigator, including photographs taken by the Coroner Investigator or in his/her presence can be used. This entire process sets the forthcoming testimony of the pathologist, who must rely on the information supplied by the Coroner Investigator for identification of the body as that of the deceased. In some instances, (usually grand jury) the Coroner Investigator may be asked to read the opinion of the pathologist from the Autopsy Report. When summoned to criminal proceedings, the Coroner Investigator should not hesitate to telephone the attorney in charge to ask what testimony will be required.

**RESPONSIBILITY IN CIVIL PROCEEDINGS**

Although the same type of information is required in civil matters, the rules of evidence differ from criminal and other hearings. The proceedings are less formal and structured than in criminal proceedings. Attorneys for both plaintiff and defendant may subpoena the Coroner Investigator/Coroner, and the information provided should be the same. As in criminal proceedings, the Coroner Investigator/Coroner should not hesitate to call the attorney in charge to ask what testimony will be required.

Interview: A request for information either in person, on the telephone or with a letter can constitute an interview. Coroner Investigator's should not hesitate to ask the purpose of such a query and can take steps in assuring one knows the identity of the person asking for information. Interviews or information gathering sessions are to be considered part of the legal process as far as information content.

Deposition: A deposition is a formal statement made through a prescribed set of questions outside of a courtroom setting. Only the summoning attorney and court reporter are present. Such a deposition can take place in a location other than where the fatal episode occurred. When travel and lodging are required, all details for reimbursement should be made prior to the deposition.

**EXPERT WITNESS**

A witness becomes an expert witness when the court so rules. Pathologists are routinely "qualified" as experts, usually after a prescribed line of questioning as to their training and experience has been conducted. A Coroner Investigator or any other member of the Union County Coroner’s Office performing in a technical manner can be, at the discretion of the court, qualified in the same manner. When so qualified, opinions based on that experience can be given on the case in session. The coroner is a professional with specialized training, if the court allows the coroner may qualify as an expert witness and provide factual and expert testimony.

**TESTIMONY**

Testimony is direct information or evidence since the Coroner Investigator/Coroner has firsthand knowledge of the situation and can offer that information when specifically asked for it.

**TESTIFYING - POINTS TO CONSIDER**: Do not read from a report and offer an opinion. A difference exists between reading a report, such as the "Opinion" on the Autopsy Report or the blood alcohol level on the toxicology report and offering an explanation as to what that citation means. Although interpretation of the report is the responsibility of the pathologist, there are situations where other staff members can read information from a document into the court record.

Do not be too absolute in your responses. "That is all I can recall having seen" is preferred to "that's all I saw." Recognize the fact that a party to the proceedings may attempt to discredit you. This is usually attempted by confusing the witness, leading them into compromising answers or attacking the qualifications or character of the witness. The only way to avoid looking bad is to remain in control always. Know your facts; know your scene; know what you did (or did not do) and be aware of what your responsibilities are under the law.

Do not feel obligated to "explain" an answer. That is the job of the person questioning you. Sometimes questions can be answered with a "yes" or a "no." A typically human response is to want to add to that. If more clarification is required, it will be asked of you. Certainly, do not be put in a position of having to answer a quest ion with only a "yes" or "no" when that answer is clearly not sufficient. Do not hesitate to ask that a question be repeated. Just say simply, "I do not understand the question" or "Could you please repeat the question."

Remain in control. Very rarely will anyone else in the courtroom have been with you at the scene. You know what you saw, and it is your job to convey that. If a question is one that you do not know the answer to, say so. If you are asked "Did the fire department respond" you can say, "I don't know." However, if you are asked "Was the fire department there when you were" and they were not, your answer is, "No."

The three big troublemakers for individuals testifying in court are:

1. To lose control, argue with the questioner or become sarcastic,
2. To feel an obligation to say things that are not asked of you and
3. To rush to answer, often while the question is still being asked.

Regardless of how "clear cut" certain cases may be, you can alienate a judge or jury with these attitudes that can indeed have them give less credence to your testimony. In the event, you are being paid for your court appearance, a question may be, "isn't it true they are paying you to testify." The response is that you are being reimbursed for your time in court.

Do not talk within earshot of jurors or in a public place regarding the proceedings. This can result in a mistrial being declared. Do not discuss the case or proceedings anywhere other than private locations.

Rarely can you say something during a proceeding that jeopardizes the actual proceeding. If this occurs, it is usually because you have offered something you were not asked. Much of what is presented during a legal proceeding is done so after a proper legal foundation has been established for its introduction. Just answer each. Question in a direct and concise manner without embellishment or attempts at explanation.

**SECTION 17: PAPERLESS ELECTRONIC FILE STORAGE**

**GENERAL**

Effective July 1, 2013, all Union County Coroner case files shall be kept on the Union County computer system. No new hard copies shall be generated as of that date. Storage location is currently designated as the “P” Drive on the county system or equipment per county IT procedures.

The Coroner, Deputy Coroner or Coroner Investigator will prepare, at a minimum, a Report of Death on all cases. Other reports that may be prepared include the Medication Log, the Union County Coroner Media Release, and the Supplemental Report. These reports shall be created using an approved word processing or spreadsheet program. These reports shall be stored, at a minimum, on the “P” Drive “Private” Folder. The Coroner, Deputy Coroner, or Coroner Investigator may keep a copy of each item on the county-assigned personal computer.

In addition to the above-mentioned reports, the following documents may become part of the case file: Body Diagram, scene images, medical records or other supporting documents not specifically mentioned. These items shall be scanned into a portable document format (PDF), named in accordance with this section and stored in the associated case file.

**CREATE A FORENSIC FILE**

A Forensic Folder shall be created for every case that falls within the coroner’s jurisdiction. Those folders shall be created on the counties “P” Drive. The following is the procedure for creating a Forensic Folder on the “P” drive:

1. Create the forensic folder on the “P” Drive, “Private” Folder, “Case Files” in the appropriate yearly folder using the following format: The date pronounced dead MM-DD-YYYY First Name, Middle Initial, and Last Name.
2. Open the folder just created. Create new folders with the appropriate designation as follows:
   1. Photographs within that folder
   2. Coroner
   3. Sheriff, Police, OSP, as appropriate
   4. Autopsy if available
   5. Medication
   6. Other
3. Investigative Notes and Worksheets
4. Property Release Forms
5. Medical Records
6. Death Certificate, Supplemental Death Certificate
7. Autopsy and Coroner Report
8. Miscellaneous Reports

**R D S A N D**

**SECTION 18: RECORDS AND FEES**

**GENERAL**

Records documenting investigations and subsequent findings of those investigations of deaths reported to the Union County Coroner’s Office are prepared, stored and made available for public requests. The Union County Coroner’s Office is the sole record repository. All reports, investigative findings, images and any other material gathered during a death investigation shall be maintained within accordance of the guidelines in this section.

The information gathered during these investigations is compiled at public expense. Therefore, any person requesting specific reports or any information concerning the cause and manner of death may do so from the Union County Coroner’s Office and shall receive the reports after paying reproduction fee. See “FEES” at the end of this section.

Various reports are prepared to assist in determining cause and manner of death. The Report of Death is prepared by the Coroner Investigator assigned to the case. The coroner’s report is prepared by the coroner or deputy coroner. The autopsy report is prepared by the pathologist following a postmortem examination. The toxicology report is prepared by the toxicologist. The toxicology report reflects results of only those tests requested.

The following records are exempt from release in accordance with 313.10

(a) Preliminary autopsy and investigative notes and findings made by the coroner or by anyone acting under the coroner’s direction or supervision;

(b) Photographs of a decedent made by the coroner or by anyone acting under the coroner’s direction or supervision;

(c) Suicide notes;

(d) Medical and psychiatric records provided to the coroner, a deputy coroner, or a representative of the coroner or a deputy coroner under section [313.091](http://codes.ohio.gov/orc/313.091) of the Revised Code;

(e) Records of a deceased individual that are confidential law enforcement investigatory records as defined in section [149.43](http://codes.ohio.gov/orc/149.43) of the Revised Code;

(f) Laboratory reports generated from the analysis of physical evidence by the coroner’s laboratory that is discoverable under Criminal Rule 16.

There are exceptions that are addressed in this section such as, a journalist ORC 313.10(D) request to view items of the coroner’s record including pictures and suicide notes, the insurer of the decedent, ORC 313.10(E), and the surviving spouse and next of kin ORC313.10(C) should be carefully read and if there is any questionable request consult your prosecuting attorney.

Internal correspondence represented by reports, memoranda, opinions, photographs or other parts of a case file are protected by ORC313 and are released by subpoena or when authorized by the Union County Coroner. A reproduction fee may be assessed.

Records within case files obtained from other agencies, including, but not limited to, hospitals, mental health facilities, law enforcement agencies or physicians' records shall not be released by the Union County Coroner’s Office. Those documents must be requested from the primary source of the record.

**RETENTION**

All investigative files are maintained in accordance with the Union County Coroner’s Record Retention Schedule, and the Union County General Records Retention Schedule. Reports, images and test results prepared by or requested by the designated pathologist in fulfilling the agreement between Union County and the designated pathologist shall become property of the Union County Coroner’s Office.

Effective January 1, 2010, all reports shall be maintained electronically on the Union County computer system. Reports previously stored as hard copies shall be maintained at the Union County Archives, 128 South Main St Marysville, Ohio.

Microscopic slides and tissue blocks are held in perpetuity or until such time that deterioration renders them invalid. Fixed tissues are retained for 12 months. Toxicology samples are held 12 months. Destruction will occur at the end of the retention periods unless formal requests for continued preservation are received.

**FEES**

The primary next of kin may receive one copy of the Autopsy Report including the toxicology report at no charge. The primary care physician, the hospital where the death occurred, the law enforcement agency of record and the Prosecuting Attorney may receive one copy of the Autopsy Report and supporting documents at no charge. The Union County Coroner’s Office requests all copies of files to be sent electronically.

Any other agency or individual requesting an Autopsy Report may do so in writing and must be accompanied by the appropriate fee set forth below. Checks shall be made payable to the Union County Coroner.

Next of kin are discouraged from receiving any images. If next of kin are insistent on seeing scene or autopsy images, those interested parties should review the images in the presence of a Coroner Investigator and/or the pathologist who conducted the postmortem examination.

ORC 313.10(B) & ORC 149.43(B) 2013 Fee Schedule:

Autopsy Report with supporting documents to include toxicology report only via email................................... $1.00

Autopsy Report with supporting documents to include toxicology report only via USPS........................ $.25/page

Autopsy images via email.................................................................................................................................................... $1.00

Autopsy images via CD ROM or other portable storage device.................................................................$1.00

Other reports not listed may incur similar fees. Fees are subject to change without notice.

**SECTION 19: QUALITY ASSURANCE PEER REVIEW**

**Principle, spirit and intent:** *A core component of the investigative procedure is a scientific peer review that ensures that all findings and test products meet acceptable and recognized professional standard.*

**PURPOSE AND SCOPE:** This policy outlines procedures used for peer review of reports issued by the Union County Coroner’s Office, including notes and other documents obtained during an investigation.

**PEER REVIEW PROCESS:** The first intent of this process is to verify that the conclusions of the investigator are reasonable and within the constraints of validated scientific knowledge, supported by the examination documentation of the autopsy, along with the investigation of the scene and all information is reported in a professional manner. As such, the notes and other documentation, as appropriate, are subject to peer review. The second intent of the peer review process is to serve as an administrative check of the report and the notes to judge compliance with office policies.

Peer reviews are for practice improvement and are conducted in a professional and objective manner. The peer review process is not:

* A forum for scientific debate of controversial issues.
* An opportunity to impose heavy idiosyncrasies.
* An opportunity to further personal agendas.
* A venue for retaliation or payback or, conversely, court favor or practice sycophancy.

**Peer Reviews:** The peer reviews are done in the Union County Coroner’s Office using the peer review checklist and form. The Union County Coroner randomly selects 10% of all completed cases for peer review. The information and materials presented to the reviewer include the complete case file, and the review form.

To protect the integrity of the peer review process and to maximize its value, peer review assignments should be diverse and varied. One reviewer should review the work of multiple individuals.

**Peer reviewer responsibilities:** The peer reviewer will review all casework documentation in a timely manner. The reviewer should check and, verify that the conclusions are reasonable, determine compliance with appropriate procedures and standards, and document all findings on the appropriate form.

**Reviewee responsibilities:** The reviewee will write reports on a level of professionalism such that the review will result in no significant revision. The reviewee should provide complete notes and include all special documentation used to draw the final conclusions. The case file should contain pertinent notes of all conversations regarding the case which may be important later.

**Results of Peer Review:** The peer review must result in either a verification of the casework or its referral to be discussed at the weekly Tuesday meeting. Substantive professional disagreements over casework that cannot be resolved between the reviewer and the reviewee will be discussed by all employees of the office.

**DOCUMENTATION**

* As peer reviews are for the record, documentation should be of a permanent nature. Consequently, annotations should be made with permanent markings (i.e., no pencil) on the appropriate forms. Post-it notes, scratch paper, etc. are not to be used.
* The results of all peer reviews are maintained in the Quality Assurance File.