

Charleston County Coroner's Office Policy #37

Title: Release of Information to the Public

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37.1 POLICY

The Charleston County Coroner's Office realizes the importance of accurate and timely release of information on a case-by-case basis to the public. In addition, the Charleston County Coroner's Office will strive to provide the media with timely information within the law.

37.2 PROCEDURE

1. An employee will not use his/her official title, position, or affiliation with the Charleston County Coroner's Office in any statement to the media which is outside the customary course of business (releasing names of decedents, date of death, and "cause" and/or "manner") without the permission of the Coroner or a supervisor. All other media releases and/or statements will be made by the Coroner unless directed otherwise. No media releases will include the decedent's date of birth or Social Security number.
2. Media releases should be made in the form of an e-mail whenever possible. Verbal releases shall be permitted should e-mail not be available. The release shall follow the approved format to the extent applicable. If the manner of death is a "Suicide", no name shall be released without approval from the Coroner.
3. The release shall be made in a timely fashion only after:
 - a. Positive identification has been made;

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- b. Legal next of kin have been located and notified;
 - c. Legal next of kin have had a reasonable amount of time to notify other family members;
 - d. A postmortem examination has been completed (where applicable) and the forensic pathologist has been consulted;
 - e. Legal next of kin have been updated on the “Cause” and “Manner” of death if it was dependent on autopsy findings.
4. The media release shall be submitted to all outlets of record as evidenced by a current email address maintained for such public contact by this office. If the death occurred in Charleston County but the act that initiated the sequence of events occurred in another jurisdiction, and that jurisdiction has accepted the same (receiving jurisdiction), the Charleston County Coroner’s Office shall not release any information and direct all inquiries to the receiving jurisdiction. Information requests not related to the cause and manner of death shall be directed to the appropriate agency.

37.3 OTHER MEDIA REQUESTS

From time to time, media outlets and other citizens will request information, statistics, and/or demographics relating to certain types of deaths or other areas of interest which are not specifically regarding a current or specific case. A deputy coroner or other designee may provide information relevant to the request *with approval* from the Coroner or Chief Deputy. If an on-camera interview is requested, the Coroner shall be contacted for approval.

37.4 REQUESTS FOR DOCUMENTS, PHOTOS OR CASE FILES

1. Other agencies and individuals requesting information from case files must submit a written request for the information to the paralegal.
2. No employee other than the paralegal will distribute information or copies regarding case reports/records unless directed by the Coroner or Chief Deputy Coroner.
3. The evidence technician or case deputy may release CDs of photographs to law enforcement when requested by the case deputy or a supervisor.

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4. Copies of the applicable law, regulations, guidelines, and legal opinions available in regard to the release of records and information on the shared “F” drive are only available to the Coroner’s staff at F:/Statutes or on the web at <https://www.scstatehouse.gov/statmast>.