**Collection, Inventory, and Safeguarding of Property and Evidence**

**Policy**

The purpose of this policy is to establish procedures for handling the personal property of a decedent, including proper documentation of the property, safekeeping, and release of property.

***THE KCCO DOES NOT COLLECT PROPERTY OR EVIDENCE***

**Procedure**

After personal property and evidence have been identified at a death scene, the Coroner, in the presence of a witness, should:

1. In homicides, all property found on the decedent will be inventoried, photographed, and entered into MDILog by the Medicolegal Death Investigator or Forensic Staff.  All evidence will be released to the investigating law enforcement agency by Forensic Staff only. Proper chain of custody procedures are to be followed at all times.

1. Any illegal or contraband property or property that may be hazardous to public safety and that is not retained by law enforcement will be inventoried and then destroyed at the discretion of the Coroner by Forensic Staff only.

1. Personal property on or accompanying decedents during transport will be inventoried, photographed and entered into MDILog under property/evidence. Any additional property found during the investigation or examination will also be inventoried, photographed and added into property/evidence in MDILog. After the investigation or examination is complete, property that is to remain with the deceased will be placed in a property bag, labeled and kept with the decedent.

1. If the Forensic staff is unable to remove a particular piece of property, (such as a religious medallion) the item(s) will be photographed, inventoried and noted in MDILog that item is ‘with the body’.  The receiving party for the decedent will be informed.

1. Personal property that accompanies a body, but is not located on the body, will be inventoried by the Medicolegal Investigator when the body arrives at the coroner’s office. The property will be photographed, inventoried and all information uploaded into “Personal Property” in MDILog. Property will then be sealed in a property bag, labeled, and placed in an inventory locker, locked and secured or kept with the body.  An Inventory/Property form will be printed and attached to the bag.

1. In cases that involve personal property being released to NOK, instead of accompanying the deceased to the funeral home, the property will be photographed, inventoried and all information uploaded into “Personal Property” in MDILog. The Coroner’s Office will retain the property for safe keeping until the decedent’s NOK retrieved the personal property. Identification and relation to decedent must be verified and proper release forms obtained.

1. Property will be released to the next of kin or the person or agency designated by the next of kin. The person receiving the property will confirm the individual items of property and electronically sign in MDILog to indicate that they received the property. **Only forensic staff may release property to anyone.**  In the event that an electronic signature is unattainable, an inventory list will be printed and signed by the receiving party.  It will then be scanned into the decedent MDILog file. All property that is not evidence will be released with the decedent or to NOK. Unclaimed property will be turned over to the Kootenai County Public Administrator or handled in a manner authorized by the Public Administrator.

1. Should it be necessary to mail personal property to the family or next of kin, the property will be packed and mailed by Certified Mail with a return receipt requested. Copies of the original property list will be sent with the property to allow the receiving party to verify the property.  All shipping, email communications and signed receipts will be uploaded into MDILog under documents.

**Evidence Collection and Handling**

**Policy**

This policy establishes procedures for collecting and securing evidence associated with a death and establishes procedures for evidence/ personal belongings.

**Procedures**

1. ***Evidence:***

1. The Kootenai County Coroner’s Office does not collect &/or store evidence. All evidence collected will be held at the Law Enforcement agency who is responsible for the case.

2. Projectiles collected during a postmortem examination will be photographed, packaged, and released to law enforcement.

3. Any trace evidence collected at autopsy will be collected by the Forensic Medical Examiner, given to Law Enforcement with proper chain of custody procedures.

3. Any and all personal belongings of the decedent will be collected and documented at the autopsy and returned to the NOK as designated.

**Public Administrator**

**Policy**

The Kootenai County Coroner’s Office will utilize the Kootenai County Public Administrator’s Office (ACPA) to secure the decedent’s personal property on an as needed base. The role of the Kootenai County Public Administrator’s Office is to secure the decedent’s personal property in the event that the decedent’s legal next of kin cannot be found.

**Procedure**

1. If, while at the scene of a death the Investigator is not able to make contact with the decedent’s legal next of kin and/or legal representative, the Investigator will secure the decedent’s residence. The Investigator will collect keys to the residence and to vehicles confirmed to be the decedents. The Investigator of the Kootenai County Coroner’s Office will place warning seals on the doors to secure the subject’s property. Seals will be signed and dated and a photo taken for the MDILog file.
2. If the property cannot be secured and is collectable by the Investigator, the Investigator will collect the subject’s property, document it, and log it into the MDILog and then place it securely into the morgue lockers. The property form will then be printed and attached to the outside of the locker and a lock placed on the locker.
3. If there is too much property to collect for the Investigator he/she will contact the Coroner so that the Kootenai County Public Administrators Office (Treasurer) can collect and secure the decedent’s property.
4. The Kootenai County Coroner’s Office will not act as the witness for the Kootenai County Public Administrator, nor them for us. Another person will have to bear witness for the ACPA. The Kootenai County Coroner’s Office is also not liable for the security of the decedent’s property, residence and vehicles once the case is turned over to the ACPA.
5. The Kootenai County Coroner’s Office will exhaust all resources to find and contact the decedent’s next of kin, before turning the property to the Kootenai County Public Administrator. All cases, in which the NOK has not been located and notified, will be turned over to the ACPA within 48 hours of the death.
6. If the family has been notified, but has “abandoned” all responsibilities to the decedent and decedents property will also be referred to the ACPA as soon and the Kootenai County Coroner’s Office determines that the body has been abandoned.