

Confidentiality & Release of Information

Confidentiality

Skagit County Coroner's Office will protect the privacy and security of confidential information through proper storage and handling procedures.

Employees must follow established procedures to ensure the appropriate handling of confidential information.

When not in use, all materials containing confidential information must be kept in a locked file cabinet or office.

All contact with or viewing of confidential information by unauthorized individuals is prohibited.

Employees shall not release confidential information to unauthorized individuals including unauthorized employees or the general public.

Release of Information

According to HIPAA compliance, covered entities may disclose protected health information to funeral directors as needed, and to coroners or medical examiners to identify a deceased person, determine the cause of death, and perform other functions authorized by law.

RCW 68.50.105

Autopsies, postmortems — Reports and records confidential — Exceptions.

Reports, records of autopsies or post mortems, and photographs shall be confidential, except that the following persons may examine and obtain copies of any such report or record: The personal representative of the decedent as defined in RCW 11.02.005, any family member, the attending physician or advanced registered nurse practitioner, the prosecuting attorney or law enforcement agencies having jurisdiction, public health officials, or to the department of labor and industries in cases in which it has an interest under RCW 68.50.103.

The coroner, the medical examiner, or the attending physician shall, upon request, meet with the family of the decedent to discuss the findings of the autopsy or post mortem. For the purposes of this section, the term "family" means durable power of attorney, executor of the estate, the surviving spouse, state registered domestic partner, or any child, parent, grandparent, grandchild, brother, or sister of the decedent, or any person who was guardian of the decedent at the time of death.

Confidentiality & Release of Information Cont.

RCW 68.50.300

Release of information concerning a death

(1) The county coroner, medical examiner, or prosecuting attorney having jurisdiction may in such official's discretion release information concerning a person's death to the media and general public, in order to aid in identifying the deceased, when the identity of the deceased is unknown to the official and when he does not know the information to be readily available through other sources.

(2) The county coroner, medical examiner, or prosecuting attorney may withhold any information which directly or indirectly identifies a decedent until either:

(a) A notification period of forty-eight hours has elapsed after identification of the decedent by such official; or

(b) The next of kin of the decedent has been notified.

During the forty-eight hour notification period, such official shall make a good faith attempt to locate and notify the next of kin of the decedent.

The Coroner's Office, upon receipt of written request and copy of government issued identification, will release documents, photographs, and/or reports generated by the Skagit County Coroner's Office to authorized individuals only. Authorized individuals may include but are not limited to durable power of attorneys, legal next of kin, immediate family members, investigating agencies, treating physicians, and legal representatives.