

Identification and Disposition of Human Remains

Created 11/28/2010
Revised 11/01/2023

Purpose

To identify the proper ways in which to identify an individual and the means in which to release them for their final disposition.

Policy

During life, a person's identity is composed of a number of physical features. These physical features are documented in a variety of records including dental and medical records. When death occurs, it is the direct comparison of these physical features with all existing antemortem records that provides the basis for positive identification.

Once a decedent has been identified, or all avenues for identifying the individual have been exhausted, the [REDACTED] [REDACTED] [REDACTED] will release the remains to the organization of the next-of-kin's choosing. This must be documented both in the computerized file, as well as the physical file.

Procedures

Identification of Remains:

Categories of Identification

- Positive ID: A direct comparison of documented antemortem physical facts with those collected postmortem.
- Presumptive ID: This category is used when the documentation needed for a positive ID is not available. Care must be exercised to verify that the circumstantial materials are consistent with the deceased.
- Tentative ID: Used when the investigator is awaiting documentation.
- Unknown: The total lack of any possible identifiers.

Methods of Identification

- Fingerprint or footprint ID: A method of comparing postmortem prints taken from the remains with antemortem prints of a person thought to be the decedent. Resources for antemortem prints would include driver's license records, military records, corrections or law enforcement databases, and certain government jobs.
- Dental ID: Based on a comparison of postmortem dental findings with antemortem dental records.

-
-
- DNA, serology and cytology ID: Made by direct comparison of antemortem findings with postmortem materials.
 - Radiological ID: Made by direct comparison of antemortem radiographs with postmortem radiographs of a body or portions of a body.
 - Physical ID: Identification based on comparison of physical features including comparison of facial photographs, medical or non-medical scars, identifying marks or tattoos, and may include comparison of autopsy findings with medical or surgical history.
 - Personal possessions ID: Establishing of identity by means of clothing, jewelry, pocket contents and/or other material goods. This is also known as traveling or portable ID.
 - Circumstances of the event ID: This would include the time and location of disappearance, vehicles used, location found and other miscellaneous information.

Of these methods, the first four are methods of positive scientific identification. The last three are presumptive in nature and are a source of potential error; with adequate investigation these may be the source of information leading to a positive ID.

Unidentified Remains Designations:

- DOE: Any full or partial remains which are recognizably human where anatomic sex cannot be determined on initial examination.
- DOE BABY GIRL, DOE BABY BOY & DOE BABY: Stillborn or live born infants where a name has not been assigned. Doe Baby is only to be used when the sex of the infant is unknown. If a name has been given, the name of the infant may be used.
- DOE JOHN OR JANE: Skeletal, mutilated or burned remains where anatomic sex is determined on examination.
- DOE (ANCIENT): Remains determined to be ancient or of historical, not medicolegal, significance.
- NONHUMAN (ANTHRO): Remains determined to be of nonhuman (animal) origin.

Documents Required for Identification: When remains are received as unidentified or Doe, it is the responsibility of the medical investigator to collect the following whenever applicable:

- All dental records and dental X-rays on presumed identifications.
- All medical records and medical X-rays on presumed identifications.
- Dental models
- Dental appliances
- Fingerprints
- Footprints (birth certificate)
- Description of clothing
- Physical descriptors
- Photographs

The decedent's identifying and case information shall then be entered into the NamUs database as soon as possible.

Remains:

Receiving and Releasing of Decedents/Human Remains: The coolers located at the [REDACTED] are the official holding and storage facility for all [REDACTED] cases. As such, all cases requiring an autopsy and all unidentified remains are received and stored there. The volume of bodies being received and released requires absolute accuracy in the

[REDACTED]

management of the receiving and release functions of this office.

The entire staff is responsible for the release and receipt of cases. During normal duty hours, the investigator in charge of the case will assure that the case is received and logged. Preparation for release and releasing will be followed according to protocol.

During non-business hours, no releases are permitted unless scheduled in advance, and with appropriate staffing.

Body Receiving and Releasing Log: In every case where a body is received or released by the [REDACTED] the date and time are entered into the electronic case management system where the body census is maintained.

The initial medical investigator of record for a case will enter all pertinent information into the ECMS and will process the body and place the body in the cooler/freezer. The investigator will place the name of the decedent on the garage dry-erase board or allow the transport service to place the name and time of arrival on the board. The investigator will place the name of the decedent on the front office dry-erase board with all associated information. When items are received with the body but are not in the body bag or on the body, they shall be noted in the property section of the ECMS with the date and time of collection, and then placed in the secure property locker.

Non-sealed body bags: Any case being received without a seal must be inventoried and processed.

Authorization for Release: Jurisdictional cases (autopsy/external) can only be authorized for release by the pathologist. Cases not examined (jurisdiction released) must be authorized for release by the coroner, pathologist or medical investigator. This authorization indicates that a death certificate is being generated, or a letter indicating that the death certificate is pending will be placed with the paper file.

Special Releases: In cases where the legal next of kin is in custody or facing formal charges in the death, that person has lost his/her legal rights per CRS 12-54-109. In child abuse cases where only one parent is being investigated and/or charged, the other parent remains the legal next of kin.

Identification Band: It is extremely important that proper identification of bodies received and released is maintained. Every body must be identified by an ID bracelet attached to the ankle or wrist at the death scene prior to transport. Any body received without an ID bracelet attached directly to the body must have such a bracelet affixed at this office once proper identification has been made. Under no circumstances should a body be received, autopsied, or released without a proper ID bracelet. At the time of release to a funeral home/mortuary, both the mortuary transport personnel and an [REDACTED] staff member must confirm the identity of the body being released by directly inspecting the name on the ID bracelet.

Releasing Personal Property that Accompanies Decedents:

Non-criminal cases: During normal duty hours, valuables will be retrieved for release by the [REDACTED] staff. Personal property will be released directly to the next-of-kin or to the mortuary at the time of body release. When clothing and/or valuables are not released with the body nor held for evidence, the ECMS will so indicate; every effort will be made to contact the legal next of kin for transfer of property, and any abandoned property disposed of using established county guidelines.

Criminal Cases: When criminality exists, evidence, clothing, property item or valuables

[REDACTED]

will only be released to the law enforcement agency having jurisdiction, or to the next-of-kin with the authorization of law enforcement.

Indigent/Unclaimed cases: All non-evidentiary articles belonging to decedents receiving indigent burials through the public administrator or social services are to be turned over to the appropriate agency authorizing burial/cremation (clothing is to remain with the body).

Unclaimed or Unidentified Decedents:

In [REDACTED] cases where identification is not readily available or where next of kin cannot be located, the body, with few exceptions, will be held in the morgue. The investigator assigned to the case shall work closely with the law enforcement agency to facilitate identification of remains and proper notification of next of kin.

No release of unclaimed or unidentified remains for final disposal can occur before the expiration of 7 days and the record of activities showing due diligence in attempting to secure an identity and a legal next of kin. Such documentation may include:

- Who was contacted and by whom, along with the date of contact.
- A completed file including body and dental x-rays, fingerprints, DNA sample, and documentation of other identifying markings
- A list of X-rays and dental charts submitted for comparison.
- A list of persons and/or individuals involved in attempts to locate next of kin.
- Reports from the investigating agency regarding attempts to locate next of kin.
- The exhaustion of all leads in personal property items which could include business cards, phone numbers, etc.

At the end of the 7 days, all documentation regarding attempts to locate next of kin or to find a claimant shall be reviewed by the Coroner and County Attorney. If the existing documentation satisfies the condition for due diligence, the body can be released by [REDACTED] for burial or cremation at county expense.

Policy/Procedure Violations

Violations of this policy are grounds for disciplinary action, up to and including termination.

Revised Effective: 10/18/2015

Revised Effective: 10/24/2017

Revised Effective: 09/28/2019

Revised Effective: 10/13/2021

Revised Effective: 11/01/2023

Approved by:

[REDACTED]