

Charleston County Coroner's Office Policy #27

Title: Notification to Next-Of-Kin

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27.1 POLICY

It is the goal of the Charleston County Coroner's Office to make personal notifications to next-of-kin as quickly as possible, following the identification of the decedent. It is imperative that prior to doing so, you have reason to believe that the decedent has been properly identified in accordance with the Decedent Identification Policy and that the correct next-of-kin has been identified and located.

27.2 PROCEDURE

1. Upon the need to investigate who the decedent's next of kin are and where they are located, the case Deputy will use the current software subscription service to search public records and/or utilize all available information at their disposal.
2. Upon locating probable next of kin locally, the case Deputy shall contact a law enforcement agency for a security escort. The identity and relationship of the potential next of kin should be confirmed prior to relaying information about the death. In-person notification should take place in a safe, private environment, if possible, and a support person should be present prior to leaving the next of kin following the notification.

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3. The case Deputy shall relay information about the circumstances surrounding the death, the current location of the body, plans for the timely release of the body, and the Deputy's contact information. Additionally, the case Deputy shall advise the next of kin regarding an update post autopsy if applicable, or upon learning new information regarding the investigation. Should the next-of-kin object to an autopsy, a diplomatic conversation shall ensue about the importance of the autopsy in determining the cause and manner of death. Should there be religious objections, a further conversation may be warranted. Ultimately, the decision to autopsy or not comes from the Coroner or the case Deputy, however, every consideration shall be made to either address the family's concerns or adjust to their desires where possible without compromising the death investigation.

4. The circumstances of notification shall be documented in the communication log in MDILog and the Coroner's Report.

27.3 OUT OF COUNTY NOTIFICATION

1. Should the next-of-kin reside outside of Charleston County; it is the policy of the Coroner's Office to seek the assistance of Coroners or others responsible for death notification in the respective locations where the next-of-kin is located. Individuals being asked to assist with notification should be provided with information to include the decedent's name, age, address, and basic information about the incident. They should also be provided information about the individual(s) being notified, including contact information, and their relationship to the decedent. Furthermore, the individual should be provided with contact information for the Deputy so that they may call back upon locating the next of kin. The individual assisting with the notification should be asked to call back to the Deputy while they are with the family so that additional information can be provided, and questions can be asked and answered.

2. The case Deputy shall relay information about the circumstances surrounding the death, the current location of the body, plans for the timely release of the body, and

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the Deputy's contact information. Additionally, the case Deputy shall advise the next of kin regarding an update post autopsy if applicable, or upon learning new information regarding the investigation. Should the next-of-kin object to an autopsy, a diplomatic conversation shall ensue about the importance of the autopsy in determining the cause and manner of death. Should there be religious objections, a further conversation may be warranted. Ultimately, the decision to autopsy or not comes from the coroner or the case deputy, however, every consideration shall be made to either address the family's concerns or adjust to their desires where possible without compromising the death investigation.

3. The circumstances of notification shall be documented in the communication log in MDIlog and the Coroner's Report.

27.4 NOTIFICATION FOR OTHER JURISDICTIONS

Upon notification from the Consolidated Dispatch Center, the on-duty Deputy may have to assist other jurisdictions with notification of next of kin. The Deputy shall gather basic demographic information regarding the decedent and their next of kin including but not limited to the name of the decedent and their kin, how identified, circumstances of death, address of the kin with validation method, and the requestor's name and phone number. The Deputy may need to independently verify the information for the next of kin. The appropriate law enforcement agency shall be contacted for an escort. The identity and relationship of the potential next of kin should be confirmed before relaying information about the death. While with the next of kin, the requesting agency is contacted via telephone. If no contact is made with the next of kin, the Deputy shall notify the requesting agency. A case number with basic information shall be created. A brief synopsis of whether or not contact was made should be added to the file.