



2024

Shelby County Alabama
Office of the Shelby County Coroner

Coroner Handbook of Procedures

Office of the Shelby County Coroner

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INTRODUCTION

This handbook is to provide the county coroners/death investigators as a guide to assist them in the performance of their duties. This document will act as a ready reference to answer questions that may arise during the course of a death investigation. It is not intended to be comprehensive.



The mission of the Shelby County Coroners Office (SCCO) is to create consistency of high quality medicolegal death investigation and forensic autopsy services. The purpose of the office is to serve its fellow citizens by protecting the public's health and safety, participating in the criminal justice system and providing data for vital statistics.

Alabama has a mixed medical examiner system of death investigation with the state office primarily responsible for laboratory and postmortem exams. The SCCO investigators collect and maintain records of deaths investigated. The SCCO investigators are responsible for conducting death investigations in coordination with various professionals and providing an opinion as to the cause and manner of death. One regional forensic center (DFS Montgomery) provides forensic autopsy services for the county.

County coroners are uniquely qualified to investigate the deaths of individual citizens in their counties, not only because of their medical training, but also by virtue of the fact they usually live and work in the counties in which they serve. County coroners must maintain uncompromising honesty and integrity. They should be loyal to their community and their oath, regardless of any pressure they may receive from outside sources.

The SCCO is committed to providing support, education and training, and consultation to each of the deputy coroner/death investigators in order to assist them in the investigation of deaths throughout the county.

My staff and I hope this reference will be of help to the county coroner and their investigators.

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Coroner

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DEPARTMENT OF FORENSIC SCIENCE MONTGOMERY

Autopsy cases can be reported to the DFS Montgomery 24-hours per day, 7 days per week, and 365 days per year including holidays. An investigator can be reached at any time by calling 334-676-5292. The on-duty investigator will return your call promptly. The death report should be made before it has been decided to send a decedent to DFS for autopsy.

All bodies being sent for autopsy at to DFS should be in a sealed body bag. The body bag should have the decedent's name written on the exterior- name tag. The body should be placed supine in a clean, white sheet (if available) then into the body bag. If identity of the remains is unknown, write "John/Jane Doe(age/race)" on the body bag exterior. All clothing, jewelry and personal effects on the body should be removed from the body before sending to DFS. All EMS interventions and therapies should be left in place. Weapons and illicit drugs should be documented, photographed, collected and secured by law enforcement prior to removal of the body. If sharps or other hazardous items are being transported with the body, please notify the investigator prior to transport. If trace evidence collection is requested to be place the hands in paper bags, sealing them securely around the wrists with tape. GSR is not performed by DFS. The law enforcement agency must perform the test at autopsy. Label each bag with the name of the person placing the bag and the date and time the bags were placed.

For ER and other hospital deaths, a copy of the chart should be send with the body to the DFS. Admission blood/urine should also be procured and sent with the body. Any prescription medications should be identified, photographed and inventoried on the scene, then tagged as evidence. They should be brought to the SCCO office for inventory and disposal.

Family members can be given our phone number to call for more information. Viewing of remains at the SCCO morgue is not permitted. Law enforcement members should contact the SCCO or DFS if they wish to view the autopsy on their case.

All cases sent to DFS for autopsy must have been reported to the DFS investigator, DA and LEA.

Death certificates will be completed by the SCCO once the examination is complete.

INTRODUCTION

Shelby County encompasses an area over 810 square miles which consists of agricultural, lowlands and some hilly areas. Shelby County is home to more than 223,000 people over 12 cities and towns.

- The office of the Coroner is established by Ala. Code § 11-5-1. A coroner shall be elected in each county for the term of four years. The office for the Shelby County Coroner is located in Columbiana, AL.
- The Shelby County Coroner is defined as the elected official of the agency and has the legal authority to investigate deaths and determine the cause and manner of death.
- The Shelby County Coroner is authorized to appoint the Chief C/DC and the Deputy Coroners. The Coroner may delegate any of his powers to one or more deputies who shall then have the same duties with respect thereto as the Coroner. Any act of a deputy shall be done in the name of the Coroner and signed by the deputy performing such act. The deputies shall hold office during and subject to the pleasure of the Coroner.
- The Deputy Coroner is defined as a professional having the legal authority to investigate deaths for the coroner's jurisdiction. The Deputy Coroner has many tasks including performing scene investigations, collecting evidence, making positive identification of the deceased, gathering the decedent's medical and social histories to assist the forensic pathologist in determining the cause and manner of death, discussing examination results with family and friends of the deceased and to perform follow-up investigations that are deemed necessary by the Coroner's Office. Certification by the American Board of Medicolegal Death Investigators (ABMDI) is required after two years, for a Deputy Coroner.
- Funds for the operation of the Shelby County Coroner's Office shall be provided by Shelby County Commission.