

Establishing Cause and Manner of Death

Policy:

The *cause* of death is the specific disease or injury that leads to the death.

The *manner* of death is the determination of how the disease or injury leads to the death.

Medicolegal classification of the manner of death is mainly for statistical purposes.

The manner of death stated on the death certificate is to clarify circumstances of death and how an injury was sustained. The manner of death has no direct bearing on criminal prosecution or insurance settlements.

The determination as to the Manner of Death by the Skagit County Coroner's Office is based on *the National Association of Medical Examiners: A Guide for Manner of Death Guidelines, First Edition, 2002*.
<https://name.memberclicks.net/assets/docs/MANNEROFDEATH.pdf>.

The classifications for Manner of Death are:

- **Natural**
 - Is defined as a death caused solely by disease and/or the aging process.
- **Accident**
 - Applies when an injury or poisoning causes death and there is little or no evidence that the injury or poisoning occurred with intent to harm or cause death. The fatal outcome was unintentional.
 - Per the National Association of Medical Examiners: A Guide for Manner of Death Guidelines, First Edition, 2002:
 - ***“Unintentional deaths from drug toxicity/poisoning in which the drug is administered by someone with the consent of the decedent may be classified as Accident, as long as there is no evidence by reasonable investigative inference that the drug was given with the intent to kill the victim. Prosecution may still occur, if appropriate. This approach may seem inconsistent with some other scenarios, but it is reasonable on the basis that severe injury or death is not near as likely as, for example, when a loaded gun is placed to the head and the trigger is pulled.”***
- **Suicide**
 - Results from an injury or poisoning as a result of an intentional, self-inflicted act committed to do self-harm or cause the death of one's self.
- **Homicide**
 - When death results from a volitional act committed by another person to cause fear, harm, or death. This may also include willful neglect. Intent to cause death is a common element, but not required for classification of homicide. Homicide for the purposes of the death certificate is a “neutral” term and neither indicates nor implies *criminal* intent, which remains a determination within the province of legal processes.
- **Undetermined**
 - This is a classification used when the information pointing to one manner of death is no more compelling than one or more other competing manners of death in thorough consideration of all available information. If new credible information regarding the case is provided at a later time, then the manner of death can be changed.

Establishing Cause and Manner of Death cont.

- **Pending**
 - May be listed temporarily when there is additional investigation, information and/or test results required for certification. The death certificate is amended with a cause and manner of death as soon as additional information becomes available.

Per the National Association of Medical Examiners:

Manner of death certifications should be objective and based on simple, established criteria.

Manner of death SHOULD NOT BE formulated to facilitate prosecution, avoid challenging publicity, build a political base, or promote a personal philosophy or agenda.