

Next of Kin and Claiming of Human Remains

Policy:

Notification:

The Skagit County Coroner's Office is responsible for identifying the next of kin in the order of priority for the purposes of release in cases where jurisdiction is assumed.

Within the first 48 hours preceding the Coroner's involvement, the Coroner's Office will attempt in good faith to locate and notify the legal next of kin of the decedent per RCW 68.50.300

- The case investigator will be certain of the victim's identity and provide notification as soon as possible.
- The case investigator will make a death notification in person if possible.
- The case investigator will always try to have two people present to make the notification
 - This may include a law enforcement officer or Support Officer
- If an investigator is unavailable to perform the in-person notification then a Chaplain, Support Officer or Law Enforcement Officer will be requested to assist in making the in person notification.
 - This might be necessary when attempting to deliver notification outside the county or in another state.
- When making a notification the investigator or messenger should:
 - Clearly identify his or her self
 - Relay the message directly and in plain language using victim's name.
 - Provide Coroner's contact information.
- The Coroner's Office will follow up with the next of kin within 24 hours.

Identifying Legal Next of Kin:

When making contact with the relative that was notified by law enforcement or other party, the Coroner's Office shall work to identify the legal next of kin by inquiring about the existence of other survivors in the order of priority.

If a decedent has left no written authorization for the cremation and/or disposition of the decedent's body as permitted by law, the following competent persons, in the order of priority listed below, may authorize the type, method, place, cremation and/or other disposition of the decedent's body:

- (1) Executor of the Estate or Durable Power of Attorney (must provide documentation)
- (2) The surviving spouse or state registered domestic partner;
- (3) Any child of the decedent who is eighteen years of age or older;
- (4) One of the parents of the decedent;
- (5) Any adult brother or sister of the decedent;
- (6) A person who was guardian of the decedent at the time of death;

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(6) Any other person or agency authorized or under an obligation to dispose of the remains of the decedent. The chief official of any such agency shall designate one or more persons to execute authorizations pursuant to the provisions of this section.

Deviations from Order of Priority:

Survivor wishes to relinquish control of disposition. The legal next of kin may relinquish his or her control over disposition of the decedent to another family member or friend. The Skagit County Coroner's Office requires written and signed authorization from the legal next of kin accompanied by a copy of government issued identification. This written authorization can be scanned and emailed to the Coroner's Office, mailed, or faxed to the office.

Legal Next of Kin cannot be located. If the survivor cannot be located, the next survivor in the order of priority may take over disposition. This is after all efforts have been exhausted to locate the legal next of kin.

Unclaimed remains. If no next of kin can be located or the legal next of kin has declined to take care of disposition, the Skagit County Coroner's Office shall take over the disposition (RCW 68.50.010). All documentation to locate next of kin will need to be entered in the case file under case notes. If family has declined disposition, then a *cremation authorization form* must be completed along with a government issued id prior to the Coroner's Office pursuing cremation. The Skagit County Coroner's Office will contact a contracted funeral home to take care of the cremation. After 45 days, a family member or friend can claim the decedent's cremains and will have to reimburse Skagit County for the cost of the cremation (\$600-\$850). A release of cremains form will be completed and signed and retained in the case file and MDI log.

THE SKAGIT COUNTY CORONER'S OFFICE WILL DOCUMENT THE NOTIFICATION OF NEXT OF KIN IN THE INVESTIGATIVE REPORT.