

## **Associated Responsibilities**

### **Pronounce death and determine what time the death occurred**

Only a physician or a Coroner may pronounce death. The determination of the time of death is critical to a criminal case, and may be extremely important with issues related to insurance and beneficiaries.

### **Scene Investigation**

The Colorado Law is specific that the body of a deceased person may not be moved from its place of death until the Coroner arrives at the scene and performs the investigation. In rural counties the Coroner typically handles most of the scene investigations; and in urban areas, due to the large volume of cases, the Coroner typically has Coroner Investigators who handle the scene investigations. It is the Coroner's responsibility to be certain that their deputies and investigators are well trained in scene and follow-up investigations. Scene investigation not only includes evidence collection, scene interviews, and examination of the body and circumstances, but must be followed up with additional interviews of family, friends, physicians, procurement of medical records and other material that might provide the information needed to make the cause and manner of the death determinations. The Coroner must correlate the scene findings with clinical history, antimortem medical records, criminal, psychological and family medical history.

### **Take Custody of the Body**

This is Colorado Law. It is the Coroner's responsibility to see that the body is removed from the scene. This must be done with extreme skill when there is evidence to preserve. It must be done with sensitivity and respect as often family members are at the scene. The Coroner must make arrangements to have the body transported in cases where an autopsy or other tests must be done. The Coroner must transport the body to their forensic facilities. This responsibility must be carried out in the same professional manner regardless of whether the body is in a hospital setting, or is a decomposed, maggot infested, unknown body in the woods.

### **Make Positive Identification of the Deceased**

A positive identification is made on all deceased persons whose death is investigated by the Coroners Office. This can be an extremely time consuming and difficult procedure. Fingerprints, dental records, radiological records, and DNA may all be used for positive identification, but the antimortem records must be found and obtained. Due to Colorado's location and good economy, there are many immigrants, illegal and legal, which often make identifications very difficult.

### **Identification and Notification of Next of Kin**

It is the Coroner's responsibility to determine who is the next of kin. When the determination is made, the person must be located and notification made. Death notifications must always be made in person and can be one of the most difficult and emotionally charged duties of the Coroner.

Once the next of kin have been notified, the Coroner will be in constant contact with the family to advise them of the results of the investigation and/or autopsy, to obtain other information as needed, and to assist and coordinate the investigation. The Coroner also makes referrals to specific groups such as the SIDS Program and suicide survivors groups as the situation dictates. If the next of kin are outside the county (maybe in other states or countries), the Coroner connects with out of state Coroners or law enforcement officials so that in-person notifications are still facilitated. The Coroner may spend many hours locating these people and many more hours helping them to facilitate disposition of the body and/or understanding and dealing with the death.

### **Discovery of Remains**

Often times skeletal remains, complete or partial, are found in all areas of Colorado. The Coroner is responsible for first determining if the bones are human or animal, and if human, are they ancient, or Native American, the Coroner must follow certain statutory obligations regarding notification of appropriate State agencies.

### **Death Certificates**

At the conclusion of a death investigation, the Coroner issues a death certificate, which is the legal document that states the cause and manner of death. This is an extremely important document as it is used to settle legal matters, criminal and civil, and insurance benefits for survivors.

### **Reports**

Coroner must keep records and reports of each death investigation. Their records are often subpoenaed into court for criminal or civil purposes, and requested by physicians, insurance companies, and families.

### **Other Responsibilities of the Coroner**

The Coroner's Office provides information, and works closely with other state and federal agencies (Health Department, OSHA, FAA, NTSB, Consumer Product Safety Commission), local physicians, hospitals, law enforcement agencies, district attorneys, public defenders, private attorneys, and insurance companies. The Coroner is also often a member or ambulance, fire department, area trauma councils, and emergency management boards. Coroners also provide learning opportunities for many agencies, which facilitates coordinated investigations. Schools and community organizations, as well as hospitals and nursing care facilities, also receive education about the role of the Coroners Office.

### **Certification**

Coroners in Colorado have the opportunity to become Certified Death Investigators through the Colorado Coroners Association. The Colorado Coroners Association was formed in 1988 with the goal of providing continuing education for Colorado Coroners. Colorado Coroners take advantage of continuing education provided by the association's programs as well as numerous other training programs provided on the national level.