

WESTMORELAND COUNTY CORONER'S OFFICE

2503 SOUTH GRANDE BOULEVARD

GREENSBURG, PENNSYLVANIA 15601

www.co.westmoreland.pa.us/coroner

All persons involved in death investigations, including law enforcement officials, emergency personnel, hospital personnel, nursing/personal care home personnel and funeral directors, should follow the following guidelines. The list provided is by no means exhaustive. My staff is available to assist with any questions you may have. In any death case, WHEN IN DOUBT, CALL THE CORONER.

Sincerely,
Kenneth A. Bacha, Coroner

GUIDELINES TO BE FOLLOWED IN DEATH CASES

- A. The Coroner, Chief Deputy Coroner or Deputy Coroner having view of the body, shall investigate the facts and circumstances concerning deaths WHICH APPEAR TO HAVE OCCURRED WITHIN THE COUNTY, REGARDLESS WHERE THE CAUSE THEREOF MAY HAVE OCCURRED, for the purpose of determining whether or not an autopsy should be conducted or an inquest thereof should be had in the following cases:
- (1) Sudden death not caused by readily recognizable disease, or wherein a physician on the basis of prior medical attendance cannot properly certify the cause of death.
 - (a) **SUDDEN DEATH DEFINED:** The Coroner shall regard any death as sudden if it occurs without prior medical attendance by a person who may lawfully execute a certificate of death in this Commonwealth, or if, within twenty-four hours of death, the decedent was discharged from such medical attendance or a change of such medical attendance had occurred, or if any such medical attendance began within twenty-four hours of death and the medical attendant refuses or is unable to certify the cause of death. Medical attendance includes hospitalization. (The provisions stated above regarding sudden death shall not be construed to affect the Coroner's discretion as to whether or not any death was suspicious, nor shall they be construed to authorize a Coroner to investigate a sudden death any further than necessary to determine cause and manner of death).
 - (2) Death occurring under suspicious circumstances including those where alcohol, drugs or other toxic substances may have a direct bearing on the death.
 - (3) Death occurring as a result of violence or trauma, whether apparently homicidal, suicidal or accidental (including but not limited to, those due to mechanical, thermal, chemical, electrical or radiation injury, drowning, cave-ins and subsidence).
 - (4) Any death in which trauma (falls or fractures), chemical injury, asphyxia, exposure, fire related, drug overdose or reaction to drugs or medical treatment was a **PRIMARY** or **SECONDARY, DIRECT** or **INDIRECT, CONTRIBUTORY, AGGRAVATING** or **PRECIPITATING** cause of death.
 - (5) Operative and peri-operative death in which the death is not readily explainable on the basis of prior disease.
 - (6) Any death wherein the body is unidentified or unclaimed.
 - (7) Deaths known or suspected as due to contagious disease and constituting a public health hazard.
 - (8) Deaths occurring in a prison or penal institution or while in the custody of the police.
 - (9) Deaths of persons whose bodies are to be cremated, buried at sea or otherwise disposed of so as to be thereafter unavailable for examination.
 - (10) Any sudden, infant death.
 - (11) Stillbirth.
 - (12) **ALL** emergency room, residence, personal care and assisted living (including **ALL** hospice).
- B. The purpose of an investigation shall be to determine the cause of any such death and to determine whether or not there is sufficient reason for the Coroner to believe that any such death may have resulted from criminal acts or criminal neglect of persons other than the deceased.
- C. **UNCLAIMED BODY** – Hospitals, nursing homes and personal care homes are required to contact the Humanity Gifts Registry as soon as they realize they have an unclaimed body, but not longer than 36 hours after the death. The County will not accept an unclaimed body because the healthcare or personal care facility failed to notify Humanity Gifts Registry on time and failure to do so makes that facility responsible for all arrangements for the disposition of the remains.
- D. In all cases where the Coroner has jurisdiction to investigate the facts and circumstances of a death, **THE BODY AND ITS SURROUNDINGS SHALL REMAIN UNTOUCHED** until the Coroner, Chief Deputy Coroner or Deputy Coroner has had a view thereof or until he shall otherwise direct or authorize (Section 120, County Code, Amended 11/29/90, P.L. 602, No. 152) and the laws of the Commonwealth provide that the Coroner shall take custody of all personal effects which appear to have been **ON** or **ABOUT** the person at the time of death until lawfully claimed by proper persons. Care should be taken in gathering of these effects in order to facilitate identification of the deceased and further any police investigation that may be in progress.

**TO REPORT A CORONER'S CASE
24 HOURS A DAY – 7 DAYS A WEEK
CALL (724) 830-3636**

If the Deputy is out of the office, calls will automatically forward to the Department of Public Safety (911) after six rings. They will contact the appropriate person or provide instructions to do so.