

Marin County
Sheriff's Office
Coroner Division



**Information for
Survivors After a
Death**

Robert T. Doyle, Sheriff-Coroner
Marin County Sheriff's Office
Coroner Division
3501 Civic Center Drive, Room 241
San Rafael, CA 94903

Phone: 415-473-6043
Fax: 415-473-6048
email: coroner@marinsheriff.org

**Marin County Sheriff's Office
Coroner Division**

The Coroner's Division is responsible for investigating the cause and manner of death of all sudden or unexpected deaths, natural deaths when the deceased has not been under a physician's care, as well as homicide, suicide and accidental deaths.

The Coroner's Division is also responsible for the identification of unknown decedents, for locating next-of-kin, and preserving all criminal or civil evidence, personal assets and estates.

Government Code Section 27491 mandates that the Coroner will inquire into and determine the circumstance, manner and cause of all deaths reportable to the Coroner in our jurisdiction.

Coroner Case Number _____

Coroner Release Number _____

Investigator _____

Helpful Resources

Marin County Public Administrators Office
415-473-6151

Marin County Recorder's Office
415-473-7215

Marin County Office of Vital Statistics
415-473-6876

Marin County Veteran's Affairs Office
415-479-6193

Grief Counseling Program of Marin
415-499-1195

Compassionate Friends of Marin
415-457-3123

Social Security

File a report of the death with the local Social Security Office by visiting in person at 1001 Lootens Place, 3rd floor, San Rafael. Their phone number is 1-800-772-1213. You will need the decedent's social security number and a certified copy of the death certificate. Ask if there are survivor benefits. Have Social Security flag the social security number so that it cannot be used.

Veteran's Administration

If your loved one was a veteran, call the Veteran's Administration at 415-473-6193 to inquire about benefits. You will need the decedent's honorable discharge papers, (D.D.214) and social security number. The Veteran's Office can assist if you need help in locating the discharge papers. They can also help with providing an honor guard for the funeral and with burial costs.

Wills

Locate the will and/or trust. The decedent's lawyer may have a copy, or you may find the will and/or trust located in a safe deposit box or in the decedent's personal files.

Marin County Probate Court Local Rules state that the will must be lodged with the court within 30 days. See www.marincourt.org/probate.htm for more information or consult with an attorney.



Please accept our condolences for the loss of your loved one. The following material is intended to provide you with helpful information to assist you during this difficult time.

Autopsy

An autopsy is not always required. When a death is the result of a homicide, suicide, accident, or in the case of some natural deaths, the cause of death is pending until forensic testing has been completed and/or medical records are received. If the coroner decides an autopsy is needed to determine the cause of death, the body will be released to a funeral home after the autopsy has been completed. There is an exception to this procedure if the death was the result of a homicide. If so, the body may be held for a longer period of time while the investigation takes place.

Contact a Funeral Home

The County of Marin does not have a morgue and contracts with several funeral homes in the area for use of their facilities on a rotating basis. Just because the body has been taken to a particular funeral home (acting in the capacity as our county morgue), you are under no obligation to use that funeral home.

Contact a funeral home of your choice to discuss funeral arrangements and sign a release establishing your legal right to the remains.

Legal authority to handle disposition of remains, and the reasonable cost thereof, is established by Section 7100 of the Health and Safety Code. The general order of priority for authority to release the body is:

1. Durable Power of Attorney for Healthcare
2. Surviving Spouse or Registered Domestic Partner
3. Surviving Adult Child—if multiple children—majority signatures needed
4. Surviving Parent or Parents—both signatures needed.
5. Surviving Sibling—if there are multiple siblings—majority signatures needed.
6. Other relatives meeting the test of Health and Safety Code section 7100

Probate

Probate is the process of paying the deceased's debts and distributing the estate to the beneficiaries. Do not pay any bills until you have contacted the Clerk of the Court. Confirm with the Clerk that you have the authority to administer the estate.

The probate process begins with the court appointing someone to administer the estate unless the will names an executor. If there is no will, the court will appoint an administrator. See www.marincourt.org/probate_decedents for more detail. Depending on the size and complexity of the estate, legal assistance may be required.

If there is a surviving spouse and the estate consists of community property, or if the property is held in joint tenancy with another person, the estate will not be handled in probate. Property transferred by gift prior to death and property placed into a living trust is not subject to probate.

Proceeds from a life insurance policy or from an IRA which are paid directly to a beneficiary are also not subject to probate.

Personal Property

If the coroner's investigator has collected personal property belonging to your loved one, please contact the Coroner's Division at 415-473-6043 to arrange for a time to come in and claim the property. The next of kin must present identification and must sign for the property in person. The next of kin may give written authorization for another person to pick up the property. The next of kin is established by Section 6402 of the Probate Code.

The general order of priority to release property is:

1. Spouse or Registered Domestic Partner
2. Adult Child
3. Parent
4. Sibling
5. Other Relatives meeting the test of code
6. Public Administrator

Death Certificates

Your funeral home director can provide you with certified copies of the Death Certificate, or you can obtain them from the Office of Vital Statistics within one month of the death. After one month from the date of death, the death certificate may be obtained from the Marin County Recorders Office of Vital Statistics, Marin Civic Center. (Contact information is listed below.)

There is a cost for certified copies of the death certificate. You may need several copies to allow you to close bank accounts, credit cards and insurance policies.

In some cases a Death Certificate will be filed with the cause of death listed as "Pending Investigation." This occurs when the cause and manner of death are not immediately identifiable upon the conclusion of the initial investigation and/or autopsy. This filing allows funeral arrangements to move forward, while forensic lab studies, additional medical records review or further investigation continues. This process can take several weeks or months, all dependent on the complexity of forensic studies and/or the investigation. Upon completion of all lab studies and investigation, a cause and manner of death can be completed. The Coroner will file an amendment to the Death Certificate listing the cause and manner of death. An updated Death Certificate can then be obtained.

Office of Vital Statistics
20 N. San Pedro Rd., San Rafael, CA
415-499-6876

Marin County Recorders Office
Vital Statistics, Room 232
3501 Civic Center Dr., San Rafael, CA

Important Papers

You may also need the following important papers and if you can not find these, copies can be obtained at:

Marriage	County Office, Clerk or Recorder Office where marriage was performed
Birth	State or County Public Health Office or/Recorder Office where born.
Military Discharge	National Personnel Record Center 9700 Page Ave, St. Louis MO 63132 Attention: Branch of service in which deceased served. You may also call the local V.A. office at 415-473-6193 for assistance.

Military documents will only be released to next of kin. The form to request documents (SF-180) can be downloaded from National Archives at www.archives.gov

Medi-Cal

If the decedent has Medi-Cal, notify Medi-Cal of the death. This number can be obtained through your local Social Security office.

Other

Insurance Policies:

Insurance policies may include life, mortgage, loan, accident, health, auto, credit card and employer provided insurance. Contact each insurance company and employer for information.

Auto:

If the deceased owned a vehicle, the title may need to be changed. Contact the Department of Motor Vehicles at www.dmv.ca.gov. Do not sell the vehicle until you are sure you are authorized to do so.

Bank Accounts and Investment Accounts:

If the accounts are held in joint tenancy, contact each institution for information. If the accounts were held in the decedent's name alone, those assets will need to go through probate.

Credit Cards:

It is a good idea to order a credit report to make sure that you are aware of all of the credit cards in the decedent's name. Contact each card company to close the account. Check to see if any cards carry a life insurance policy which pays any balance due on the card.

Income Tax:

Federal and State income taxes are due for the year of death. See www.irs.gov to obtain IRS Booklet Publication 559, Information for Survivors, Executors and Administrators. See www.ftb.ca.gov for State of California tax information. You may need to consult with a tax advisor