

Marin County Sheriff's Office

Coroner Division

Information for Survivor's after a Death



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Marin County Sheriff's Office
Coroner Division
1600 Los Gamos Drive, Suite 205
San Rafael, CA 94903

Phone: 415-473-6043

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IN PARTNERSHIP WITH OUR COMMUNITIES

Marin County Sheriff's Office Coroner Division Hours:

Monday through Friday

8:00 am to 4:00 pm

If there is an *urgent* matter which requires contact with a Coroner Investigator on
off hours, please contact the

Marin County Sheriff's Office Non-Emergency Dispatch at:

#: 415-479-2311

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



Please accept our condolences for the loss of your loved one. It is our goal to serve you during this most difficult time with the utmost respect, consideration and dignity.

It is the mission of the Coroner Division to provide competent and timely law enforcement and scientific investigations into deaths occurring within the County of Marin to provide timely and accurate answers to survivors with regard to the deaths of their loved ones.

The Marin County Sheriff's Office

Coroner Division

The Coroner's Division is responsible for investigating the cause and manner 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 has specially trained medicolegal death Investigators, who investigate the deaths of those who die in Marin County. The Coroner Division completes lawfully required forensic examinations when jurisdiction is assumed, as efficiently and as timely as possible.

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

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

On occasion, Coroner Division personnel may be away from the office conducting investigations or other follow up. If you need to *urgently* speak with an investigator, please contact the Marin County Sheriff's Office Communications Center and ask for an investigator to be paged, (415) 473-2311.

If you are planning on coming to the office to pick up copies of reports or property, we encourage you to contact the Coroner Division prior to doing so in order to insure someone is in the office (415) 473-6043.

Autopsy

Not every person who dies requires a forensic examination. If individuals were under medical care and the primary care physician can furnish the Coroner Division with acceptable causes, and /or there is a "natural" death determination, they do not come to the coroner's morgue facility, but may be directly released to the mortuary the family has chosen. 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.

If the Coroner Division determines a forensic examination is required, the Coroner may retain tissue samples and or blood / biological fluid specimens, for diagnostic testing and /or training purposes to assist in determining the cause of death as deemed necessary pursuant to Government Code §27491.45.

Academic forensic examinations are not completed by the Coroner Division but may be pursued privately with the associated expense borne by the legally authorized person.

Contact a Funeral Home

The Marin County Sheriff's Office Coroner Division contracts with Monte's Chapel of the Hills to utilize their facility as our Coroner Division morgue and holding facility. There is no obligation to utilize their funeral home for funeral services. Their phone number should you wish to contact them is:

415-453-8440

You may contact any funeral home of your choice to complete disposition - 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. Executor, Trustee or Durable Power of Attorney
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
7. 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 Recorder's 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 opined. 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 Recorder's Office

Vital Statistics, Room 232

3501 Civic Center Dr., San Rafael, CA

#: 415-473-6092

Toxicology and Microbiology Testing

Toxicology testing is not always pertinent and tests are run on a case by case basis. If the Coroner Division decides toxicology testing is necessary for assisting in the determination of cause of death, toxicological specimens will be sent to an Forensically accredited laboratory for testing. Test results normally take approximately 4 to 8 weeks to return. If you would like to know the results of the testing once they are received, please contact the Coroner Division. Toxicology specimens are collected for each case which merits an external or autopsy examination. These specimens are retained by the Coroner Division for two years and a day. Should the Coroner Division elect not complete toxicology testing, and you would like toxicology testing to be completed privately, the Coroner Division can facilitate the testing borne at your own expense. Please contact the Coroner Division for more information.

Microbiology testing if warranted and performed may take up to 4 to 8 weeks to receive and interpret the results.

Requesting a Coroner's Report

Coroner Reports are available to the public once the case investigation has been concluded and finalized. These Coroner Reports include the following reports: the Coroner Investigator's report; Toxicology results (if testing was completed); and the Forensic Pathologist's Autopsy Protocol (if an autopsy was completed).

Reports which are not requested by the legal next of kin will be redacted to protect the personal information of the decedent and their family. Redacted information includes but is not limited to: all personal and private information, all Medical Record information, and all next of kin information. Reports requested by the legal next of kin will not be redacted.

There is a copying fee for a copy of the report. The fee varies depending on the amount of pages included in the report. This fee can only be paid using cash or a check made out to the Marin County Sheriff's Office. We do not accept credit cards or any electronic payments at this time.

To request a Coroner's Report, please e-mail your request to:

coroner@marinsheriff.org.

Please include the decedent's name, date of birth, date of death, and case number (which should be written on the inside of this guide).

Important Papers

Marriage

County Office, Clerk or Recorder Office where marriage was performed

Birth

State or County Public Health Office or/Recorder Office where born.

National Personnel Record Center
9700 Page Avenue, St. Louis, MO 63132

Attention: Branch of service in which deceased served

Military Discharge

You may also contact the local Veteran's Affairs 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, please notify Medi-Cal of the death.

The Medi-Cal office can be reached at:

#: 1-800-541-5555

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

Personal Property

If a Coroner Investigator has collected personal property belonging to your loved one, please contact the Coroner's Division to arrange for a time to come in and claim the property. Please call the office at: 415-473-6043.

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. Executor or Trustee
3. Adult Child
4. Parent
5. Sibling
6. Other Relatives meeting the test of code
7. Public Administrator

If you would like to authorize another family member to act in your stead, please contact the Coroner Division for the appropriate paperwork. Collected property is normally stored at the Coroner Division for 90 days and if uncollected by next of kin, it is set for disposal.

If there is a Coroner Division seal placed on the decedent's residence, please contact the Coroner Division and request a Premise Release Authorization form from the Coroner Division prior to entering the premises.

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.

For additional assistance a private probate attorney or the Marin County Public Administrators Office may be contacted for additional assistance and guidance at:

<https://www.marincounty.org/depts/df/divisions/public-administrator/pa-information>

Social Security

File a report of the death with the local Social Security Office by visiting in person at:

1001 Looetens Place, 3rd floor,
San Rafael, CA.

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.

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