

## THE ROLE OF THE CORONER'S OFFICE

The Douglas County Coroner's Office investigates all deaths occurring in Douglas County. The Coroner's Creed establishes questions that must be answered to fulfill the requirements of these investigations, as well as provide care and justice for the deceased and for the family and friends of the deceased. These questions are: Who, How, Where, When, and Why? Based on the findings of the autopsy or toxicology results, the manner of death can sometimes be determined as well. It is also the responsibility of the Coroner's Office to notify next of kin. When an investigation has been completed and these questions have been answered, the information becomes available through the Public Information Policy.

### Who is the deceased?

This can be answered by looking at identification found on the deceased or through verification by family members or friends. When identification of an individual is unable to be determined, DNA can be tested to determine identity. Dental records can also be compared to the deceased when possible.

### How did the deceased die?

This question can be answered by the person who found the deceased or by officers called to the scene. It is important to know the location and position of the body as well as the condition of the surrounding area.

### Where was the deceased found?

This question can be answered by the person who found the deceased or by officers called to the scene. It is important to know the location and position of the body as well as the condition of the surrounding area.

### Where did the deceased die?

While the answer to this question will typically be the same as the answer to the above question, a difference will exist in cases where the deceased has been moved. It is important to know the location of death in order to look for evidence of how, why, or when death occurred.

#### When did death occur?

This can be answered by determining when the deceased was last seen and how much time has passed since that time. This provides a frame within which death must have occurred. Determining the actual time of death, however, is very difficult to do. As a result, while an approximate time of death can be determined by asking the previous questions, the time of death as recorded by the Coroner's Office is the time at which death is confirmed upon responding to a call.

#### Why did the deceased die?

This question asks why a person died in a given situation. As explained in the question of how above, the answer to why a person died will be the particular medical reason for death. In an accident, for example, head trauma would explain the reason why death occurred. In other words, the question of why can be answered by determining the particular cause of death. Determining the medical history of the deceased can also provide insight into why a person died. It is also important to know what medications were in the possession of the deceased at the time of death. Why a person died can ultimately be determined through autopsy and toxicology test. It is possible; however, that why a person died cannot be determined through autopsy or toxicology results.

#### What is the manner of death?

While the Coroner's Office does not investigate legal matters concerning death, the manner of death may be apparent through determining why a person has died. Based on autopsy or toxicology findings, it may be determined that a person died by homicide, suicide, accidental death, natural death, or an undetermined manner of death.

## Coroner's Act

Illinois Compiled Statutes: Chapter 55

Laws pertaining to the Notification of the Coroner and Authorization of the Removal of the Deceased.

### SECTION: 5/3-3020

#### Coroner to be notified-Violation

Every law enforcement official, funeral director, ambulance attendant, hospital director or administrator or person having custody of the body of a deceased person, where the death is one subject to investigation under Section 3-3013, and any physician in attendance upon such a decedent at the time of his death, shall notify the Coroner promptly. Any such person failing to so notify the Coroner promptly shall be guilty of a Class A Misdemeanor, unless such person has reasonable cause to believe that the Coroner had already been so notified.

### SECTION: 5/3-3019

#### Removal of Bodies-Violation

No dead body which may be subject to the terms of this division, or the personal property of such deceased person, shall be handled, moved, disturbed, embalmed or removed from the place of death by any person, except with the permission of the Coroner, unless the same shall be necessary to protect such body or property from damage or destruction, or unless necessary to protect life, safety, or health. Any person knowingly violating the provisions of this Section is guilty of a Class A Misdemeanor.

### SECTION: 5/3-3017

#### Cremation

In any death where the remains are to be cremated, it shall be the duty of the funeral director or person having custody of the dead body to obtain from the coroner a permit to cremate the body. The Coroner's permit to cremate shall be presented to the local registrar in applying for Permit of Disposition of Dead Human Body provided for Section 21 of the Vital Records Act, and the local registrar shall attach the Coroner's permit to cremate to the Permit for Disposition of Dead Human Body which is

issued. No crematory shall cremate a dead human body unless a Permit for Disposition of Dead Human Body with an attached Coroner's permit to cremate has been furnished to authorize the cremation.

Please Consult the Coroner's Office

Regarding any death about which you have any doubt or question.

Coroner's Office (217) 253-4808

## What Are Inquest Cases?

A Coroner's Inquest is neither a civil nor a criminal trial proceeding. It is simply an inquiry into the cause and manner of an individual's death.

An inquest is conducted by the Coroner with six to eight jurors present. The inquest takes place in the Douglas County Board Room located inside the Douglas County Courthouse.

The purpose of the inquest is to present pertinent information concerning the unnatural death of the victim in order for the jury to arrive at a manner of death. The cause of death is often readily apparent and obvious, based on the facts, circumstances, medical evidence and in some cases toxicology and autopsy results. The real essence of the jurors' responsibility is to establish the manner of death (suicide, homicide, accident, natural or undetermined).

The Coroner will summon to the inquest the individuals who have pertinent information concerning the incident. This often includes, but is not limited to the person who found the deceased, witnesses to the incident, those involved, police officers and investigators, and in some instances, a direct relative. All individuals summoned will present testimony (answer questions) to the jury. Any professional reports (autopsy, toxicology, x-ray, and laboratory reports) will be presented at that time. These reports are not released to the public until the inquest procedures are concluded.

All information and testimony at the inquest is recorded and/or transcribed by a stenographer. The inquest is open to the public and may not be closed pursuant to any requests to do so. Anyone may attend proceedings.

Upon completion of the testimony, the coroner's jury will deliberate in private. They may request additional testimony, evidence, or conference, as they deem necessary. When the jury has concluded their deliberations, they will issue a verdict through the foreman as to the cause and manner of death (accident, homicide, natural, suicide, or undetermined).

The death of a loved one is one of the most difficult things you will face. But during this time, you can make a decision that offers your family members the opportunity to give a final gift to someone else in need. This decision may also offer you and your family some comfort in knowing that another person's life was saved by this special gift.

You and your family might be contacted by a member of the Gift of Hope Organization or the MTF (Musculoskeletal Transplant Foundation) and asked to consider donation as a possible last act for your loved one. Depending on your situation, you may be offered the option to consent to the donation of various organs, tissue, eyes or corneas. We also use the Mid America Transplant Service.

Please be assured that:

- Organ and tissue/eye donation is, in essence, a gift of life. Each tissue is extremely valuable to the recipient.
- The donation will not delay the funeral or memorial services and will still allow for open casket viewing if desired.
- Your family will not incur any additional medical costs because of donation.

Every year, families are offered the opportunity to give the gift of life through donation. We understand the decision to donate is a difficult and personal choice, one which often needs to be made at a time when the family is experiencing a traumatic loss. We encourage you to discuss this topic with your family and loved ones.