



# King County Medical Examiner's Office Guide for Family and Friends of the Deceased



## *Supporting You and the Community*

*The mission of the King County Medical Examiner's Office (KCMEO) is to investigate sudden, unexpected and unnatural deaths in King County with the highest level of professionalism, compassion and efficiency, and to provide a resource for improving the health and safety of the community consistent with the general mission of Public Health.*

*We recognize the loss of a loved one can bring deep sorrow. Death investigations are performed in part to assist grieving family and friends. This guide is intended to provide you information about the investigation process, answer some Frequently Asked Questions, and provide a checklist of your unique responsibilities.*

### The Investigation Process

Investigation at the scene of death includes taking photographs, collecting evidence, and obtaining information from family and other witnesses.

From the death scene, the KCMEO Investigators will transport your loved one's body to the Medical Examiner's Office, which is located at 908 Jefferson Street in Seattle (on Harborview Medical Center Campus).

Here, the investigation will continue and will include an examination of the decedent by a qualified KCMEO physician, usually performed the following morning.

The examination may or may not include an autopsy. If one is included, it will be performed by a KCMEO physician in order to most accurately determine the cause and manner of your loved one's death.

While the examination is being performed, it is time for you to choose a funeral home or crematory to whom the body should be released after the examination is complete. In most cases, this can be accomplished within 24-48 hours.

You may contact KCMEO at any time during the process to inquire about the process or ask about investigation and examination findings.

### Checklist for Families

- Download the **KCMEO Resource Guide** from the website for support services and other important things to consider.
- Designate a primary contact person for your family
- Provide your contact's information to the Medical Examiner's Office.
- Select a funeral home or crematory.
- Inform the Medical Examiner's Office of your selection.
- Obtain a copy of the Death Certificate from the funeral home or from King County Vital Statistics.
- If you would like copies of ME reports, download and complete the **KCME Records Request** form. *Please note there could be a 4-6 month wait for some reports.*

### Frequently Asked Questions

***Q: Will I be able to view my loved one after an autopsy?***

A: **Yes.** An autopsy will not alter the appearance of the body in any way that interferes with a standard viewing. **However,** because body holding facilities at KCMEO are designed to ensure security and public safety, it is not possible to view bodies at KCMEO. Rather, we request that viewing be done only at your designated funeral agent's facility.

***Q: How and when will I be notified of the results of the investigation and examination?***

A: In most cases, some initial findings may be available within 24 hours. Final results may take several months, sometimes 4-6. You may call KCMEO at any time to inquire about findings.

***Q: Will clothing and personal property be returned?***

A: In most cases, yes. Clothing and property generally accompanies the body to the funeral agency.

***Q: Will I be charged a fee for the investigation or examinations done by KCMEO?***

A: No. All components of the investigation and examination are done as part of the public service mission of KCMEO.

***Q: Are KCMEO findings and reports confidential?***

A: Yes. KCMEO will release investigation and examination findings and reports only to: (1) the decedent's next of kin; (2) a physician who was involved in the decedent's care; and (3) an investigating public agency (e.g. law enforcement, Labor and Industries, etc.). Please be aware, however, that by state law the decedent's identity and cause and manner of death are public record.