

INFORMATION HANDBOOK

GEAUGA COUNTY CORONER'S OFFICE

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This “information handbook” has been assembled as a guide for individuals and agencies who interact with the Coroner’s Office to help explain how one should respond to a Coroner’s case. It is intended to help protect the public and the concerned, so that no one is unjustly accused of wrongdoing. Please consult the Coroner’s Office at (440) 279-2165 regarding any death in which you have questions. The following selected sections of the Ohio Revised Code (ORC) are summarized in this handbook so that any reporting institution or individual may fully understand that providing information to the Office of the Coroner is merely in compliance with the law.

Qualifications and Duties of the Geauga County Coroner's Office

Qualifications: Must be a licensed physician in the state of Ohio for at least two years preceding his/her election or appointment.

Duties/Authority: Investigates the CAUSE & MANNER of death when a person dies as a result of criminal or other violent means, by casualty, by suicide, or in any suspicious manner, or when a person, including a child under two years of age, dies suddenly when in apparent good health.

May perform (or cause to be performed) autopsies, toxicology tests, and radiology exams as part of the investigation

May testify in court as an expert witness of cause(s) of death.

DUTIES

The coroner, his deputy, and assistants shall be available at all times for the performance of their duties as set forth in [sections 313.01](#) to [313.22](#), inclusive, of the Revised Code.

Authority and Purpose of the Geauga County Coroner's Office

The purpose of the Geauga County Coroner's Office is to serve the citizens of Geauga County, particularly in those circumstances where a decedent suddenly expires, when in apparent good health or by violence or by casualty or where the deceased is unknown or unclaimed.

The Coroner, or designated Investigator, shall have such powers and duties not inconsistent with those provided by general law. The "general law" referred to is ORC 313; Sections of Chapter 313 and rulings by the Ohio Attorney General's Office (OAG). These sections of the law relate to the responsibility of the Coroner as well as to the handling of the deceased.

The authority of the Coroner, or designated Investigator, comes from the Ohio Revised Code 313, Ohio Administrative Code, and Ohio Attorney General Opinions. Its basis and authority resides in the Ohio Revised Code, Chapter 313.

Ohio Revised Code Terms and Qualifications

Chapter 313: CORONER

313.01 Elected - term.

(A) A coroner shall be elected quadrennially in each county, who shall hold office for a term of four years, beginning on the first Monday of January next after election.

(B) As used in the Revised Code, unless the context otherwise requires:

(1) "Coroner" means the coroner or medical examiner of the county in which death occurs or the dead human body is found.

(2) "Deputy Coroner" means the deputy coroner or deputy medical examiner of the county in which death occurs or the dead human body is found.

Amended by 131st General Assembly File No. TBD, HB 240, §1, eff. 8/31/2016. Effective Date: 11-04-1965 .

313.02 Qualifications for coroner - continuing education.

(A) - (l) Except as provided in division (A) (2) of this section, no person shall be eligible to the office of coroner except a physician who has been licensed to practice as a physician in this state for a period of at least two years immediately preceding election or appointment as a coroner, and who is in good standing in the person's profession.

(2) No person shall be eligible to the office of coroner of a charter county except a physician who is licensed to practice as a physician in this state and who is in good standing in the person's profession.

(B) – (1) Beginning in calendar year 2000 and in each fourth year thereafter, each newly elected coroner, after the general election but prior to commencing the term of office to which elected, shall attend and successfully complete sixteen hours of continuing education at programs sponsored by the Ohio state coroners association. Within ninety days after appointment to the office of coroner under section 305.02 of the Revised Code, the newly appointed coroner shall attend and successfully complete sixteen hours of continuing education at programs sponsored by the association. Hours of continuing education completed under the requirement described in division (B) (1) of this section shall not be counted toward fulfilling the continuing education requirement described in division (B) (2) of this section.

As used in division (B) (1) of this section, "newly elected coroner" means a person who did not hold the office of coroner on the date the person was elected coroner.

(2) Except as otherwise provided in division (B)(2) of this section, beginning in calendar year 2001, each coroner, during the coroner's four-year term, shall attend and successfully complete thirty-two hours of continuing education at programs sponsored by the Ohio state coroners association. Except as otherwise provided in division (B)(2) of this section, each coroner shall attend and successfully complete twenty-four of these thirty-two hours at statewide meetings, and eight of these thirty-two hours at regional meetings, sponsored by the association. The association may approve attendance at continuing education programs it does not sponsor but, if attendance is approved, successful completion of hours at these programs shall be counted toward fulfilling only the twenty-four hour require described in division (B)(2) of this section.

As used in division (B)(1) of this section, "newly elected coroner" means a person who did not hold the office of coroner on the date the person was elected coroner.

(3) Upon successful completion of a continuing education program required by division (B)(1) or (2) or this section, the person who successfully completed the program shall receive from the association or the sponsoring organization a certificate indicating that the person successfully completed the program.

Ohio Revised Code Records of the Geauga County Coroner's Office

313.09 Records.

The coroner shall keep a complete record of and shall fill in the cause of death on the death certificate, in all cases coming under his jurisdiction. All records shall be kept in the office of the coroner, but, if no such office is maintained, then such records shall be kept in the office of the clerk of the court of common pleas. Such records shall be properly indexed, and shall state the name, if known, of every deceased person as described in section [313.12](#) of the Revised Code, the place where the body was found, date of death, cause of death, and all other available information. The report of the coroner and the detailed findings of the autopsy shall be attached to the report of each case. The coroner shall promptly deliver, to the prosecuting attorney of the county in which such death occurred, copies of all necessary records relating to every death in which, in the judgment of the coroner or prosecuting attorney, further investigation is advisable. The sheriff of the county, the police of the city, the constable of the township, or marshal of the village in which the death occurred may be requested to furnish more information or make further investigation when requested by the coroner or his deputy. The prosecuting attorney may obtain copies of records and such other information as is necessary from the office of the coroner. All records of the coroner are the property of the county.

Effective Date: 08-26-1975.

313.11 Unlawfully disturbing a body

(A) No person, without an order from the coroner, any deputy coroner, or an investigator or other person designated by the coroner as having authority to issue an order under this section, shall purposely remove or disturb the body of any person who has died in the manner described in section [313.12](#) of the Revised Code, or purposely and without such an order disturb the clothing or any article upon or near such a body or any of the possessions that the coroner has a duty to store under section [313.14](#) of the Revised Code.

(B) It is an affirmative defense to a charge under this section that the offender attempted in good faith to rescue or administer life-preserving assistance to the deceased person, even though it is established he was dead at the time of the attempted rescue or assistance.

(C) Whoever violates this section is guilty of unlawfully disturbing a body, a misdemeanor of the fourth degree.

Effective Date: 09-26-1990.

313.12 Notice to coroner of violent, suspicious, unusual or sudden death.

(A) When any person dies as a result of criminal or other violent means, by casualty, by suicide, or in any suspicious or unusual manner, when any person, including a child under two years of age, dies suddenly when in apparent good health, or when any person with a developmental disability dies regardless of the circumstances, the physician called in attendance, or any member of an ambulance service, emergency squad, or law enforcement agency who obtains knowledge thereof arising from the person's duties, shall immediately notify the office of the coroner of the known facts concerning the time, place, manner, and circumstances of the death, and any other information that is required pursuant to sections [313.01](#) to [313.22](#) of the Revised Code. In such cases, if a request is made for cremation, the funeral director called in attendance shall immediately notify the coroner.

(B) As used in this section, "developmental disability" has the same meaning as in section [5123.01](#) of the Revised Code.

Amended by 131st General Assembly File No. TBD, HB 158, §1, eff. 10/12/2016. Effective Date: 01-30-2004.

Types of Deaths Reportable to the Geauga County Coroner's Office

Manners of Death:

Natural: "Due solely or nearly totally to disease and/or the aging process."

Accident: "There is little or no evidence that the injury or poisoning occurred with intent to harm or cause death. In essence, the fatal outcome was unintentional."

Suicide: "Results from an injury or poisoning as a result of an intentional, self-inflicted act committed to do self-harm or cause the death of one's self."

Homicide: "Occurs when death results from...an injury or poisoning or from...a volitional act committed by another person to cause fear, harm, or death. Intent to cause death is a common element but is not required for classification as homicide."

Underdetermined: "Used when the information pointing to one manner of death is no more compelling than one or more other competing manners of death when all available information is considered."

Accidental Deaths:

When a person dies under any of the circumstances described below, the death must be reported to the Geauga County Coroner's office.

1. Accidental deaths: If the death occurs when in apparent good health or in any suspicious or unusual manner including:
 - a. Asphyxiation by gagging or foreign substance, including food in airway; compression of the airway or chest by hand, material, or ligature; drowning; handling cyanide; exclusion of oxygen; carbon monoxide; and/or other gasses causing suffocation.
 - b. Cutting or stabbing.
 - c. Drug overdoses by any means. From medication, chemical, or poison ingestion, whether it is actual or suspected. This includes any medical substance, narcotic or alcoholic beverage, whether sudden, short or long term survival has occurred.
 - d. Motor vehicle accidents, including auto, bus, train, motorcycle, bicycle, buggy, watercraft, snowmobile, or aircraft, including driver, passenger, or related non-passenger, such as being struck by parts flying or thrown from a vehicle.
 - e. Burns from fire, liquid, chemical, radiation, or electricity.
 - f. Blows or other forms of mechanical violence.
 - g. Carbon monoxide poisoning (resulting from natural gas, automobile exhaust, or other).
 - h. Deaths from electrocution.
 - i. Drowning (actual or suspected).
 - j. Electrical shock.
 - k. Explosion.
 - l. Falls, including hip fractures or other injury.
 - m. Firearms.
 - n. Stillborn or newborn infant death, where there is a recent or past traumatic event involving the mother. Such as, vehicular accidents, homicide, suicide attempt, or drug ingestion. Any event that may have precipitated delivery or had a detrimental effect to the newborn.
 - o. Weather related deaths including lightning, heat exhaustion, hypothermia, tornado, or environmental event.

. Suicides:

By any means, suspected or known, which contributed to death.

Homicide Deaths:

By any means, suspected or known.

Occupational Deaths:

Instances in which present or past employment may have caused or contributed to death by trauma or disease. Occupational deaths may include caisson disease (bends), industrial infections, pneumoconiosis, present or past. Exposure to toxic waste or product (e.g. nuclear products, asbestos or coal dust), fractures, burns or any other injury received during employment or as a result of past employment, which may have contributed to death.

Sudden Deaths:

If the death occurs when in apparent good health or in any suspicious or unusual manner including:

- a. Any death where one is pronounced dead on arrival at any hospital, emergency department of a hospital, or doctor's office shall be reported.
- b. All deaths occurring within 24 hours of admission to a hospital unless the patient has been under the continuous care of a physician.
- c. Any death involving allegations of suspicious medical malpractice or possibly poor medical/surgical care, including any maternal or infant death where there is suspicious or illegal interference by unethical or unqualified persons or self-induction.
- d. All stillborn infants where there is suspected or actual injury to the mother or infant.
- e. Deaths occurring while in any jail, confinement, or custody.
- f. Deaths occurring under unknown circumstances.
- g. Deaths where there are no witnesses or little to no information can be elicited concerning the deceased person.
- h. Drug abuse, habitual uses of drugs, drug addiction, or alcoholism.
- i. Infants and young children, including Sudden Unexpected Infant Death Syndrome (SUIDS or Crib Death).
- j. Sudden death on the street, at home, public place, or at place of employment.
- k. When any mentally retarded person or developmentally disabled person dies regardless of the circumstances.

Delayed Death:

- l. "Delayed death" an unusual type of case, where the immediate cause of death may actually be from natural disease. However, injury may have occurred days, weeks, months, or even years before death and is responsible for initiating the sequence of medical conditions or events leading to death. This would be considered a Coroner's case and is therefore reportable. The most common examples of this type of case are as follows:
 - a. Past traffic accidents with debilitating injury and long-term care in a nursing home.
 - b. Hip fractures where there is a downward course of condition after the injury.
 - c. Gunshot, shotgun, stabbing, beating, assaults with subsequent death, months to years later, as a delayed consequence of the assault.

Nursing Home/Assisted Living Death:

Ohio Revised Code 313.12 requires nursing home/assisted living deaths to be reported to the Geauga County Coroner's office immediately upon death with the following criteria:

- a. When the cause of death is in doubt, is questionable, or suspicious as to how the patient may have expired.
- b. The death has occurred within one (1) year of a significant fracture, such as long bone, vertebrae, skull, etc.
- c. The patient has expired after being involved in an accident that may have influenced the cause of death or where the cause of death may be traced back to the accident.
- d. Any falls, fractures, or medical incidents (aspiration, overdose, etc.) sustained by the deceased while in the nursing home.

Pronouncement of death may be made by the attending physician over the telephone, after being given clinical information by the nurse on duty or other competent observer as defined by the State Medical Board of Ohio Rule #4731-14-01 of the Administrative Code. This is a choice of the attending physician, and if the physician declines to do this, the deceased must be transported to a hospital for pronouncement of death.

Therapeutic Death:

- I. Death occurring while under the influence of anesthesia or during the anesthetic induction, or post-anesthetic period without the patient regaining consciousness. Including death following long-term survival, if the original incident is thought to be related to the surgical procedure and/or anesthetic agent.
- II. Death occurring during or following any diagnostic or therapeutic procedure, which thought to be directly related to the procedure or complications from the said procedure.
- III. Death due to the administration of drug, serum, vaccine, or any other substance for any diagnostic, therapeutic, or immunological purpose.

Anytime Death Where there is Doubt, Question or Suspicion:

When the origin of the cause of death falls into any of the previous classifications, it must be reported to the Geauga County Coroner's Office, even if the survival period subsequent to the onset is over twenty-four hours.

Only the Geauga County Coroner can legally sign a death certificate of a person who has died as a direct or indirect result of any cause listed in the previously mentioned sections.

Should the Geauga County Coroner decline jurisdiction, after an initial investigation concerning the circumstances surrounding the death, the jurisdiction shall be returned to the institution where the death occurred. The physician, who attended to the deceased person prior to death, shall sign the death certificate as being the result of natural causes.

How To Report a Death:

If a person expires in any of the above mentioned circumstances, the death shall be reported to the Geauga County Coroner's office by calling the Geauga County Sheriff's Dispatch non-emergency phone (440) 286-1234, day or night, and state the following: "I wish to report a death, please contact the Geauga County Coroner's office". Please give the name of the deceased, age, sex, race, marital status and location. The Geauga County Dispatch will then contact the Coroner/investigator to obtain all necessary information.

Information for Physicians and Medical Personnel

Ohio Law requires that physicians and medical personnel cooperate with the Geauga County Coroner's office. Often the Coroner will require photocopies of hospital records to supply background for accurate evaluation of the case. The authority to request and receive such medical records is contained in ORDC 313.091. In addition, blood and other specimens, especially those obtained on admission to the hospital, may also be requested. Radiographic studies and specimens retained in the laboratory should be brought to the attention of the Coroner's Investigators. Medical apparatus such as endotracheal tubes, airways, monitor pads, CVP-IV lines, pacemakers, including leads, drain tubes, catheters, or similar equipment, must be retained in their original positions on the body. Medical personnel are encouraged to discuss cases with the Geauga County Coroner's Office.

Deaths in Government Institutions

Deaths occurring in any public institution, especially during the period of detainment, treatment, incarceration, or correction of an individual, the physician in charge, or the individual who has the administrative responsibility directly concerned with the decedent, shall report the death to the Geauga County Coroner's Office. The Coroner will decide whether the death of the individual falls within its jurisdiction as it is stated in the Revised Code of Ohio. Federal or State jurisdiction may take precedent.

Law Enforcement Officers

The Geauga County Coroner believes that death investigations are the proper function of the police, sheriff, EMS, and the Geauga County Coroner's office. Death investigation requires the greatest cooperation between all concerned in evaluating the circumstances surrounding the death and working in close cooperation to:

1. Obtain information that may aid in determining the cause, mode, and manner of death;
2. Safeguard the effects of the deceased.
3. Identify the deceased
4. Notify the next of kin
5. Or any other procedure deemed necessary or advisable, in accordance with State law.

Custody of Bodies

If the Geauga County Coroner's Office determines a case falls under its jurisdiction, the Coroner/Investigator may periodically need to obtain copies of the medical records or need to obtain blood, urine, or other samples, which were obtained at the time the person was admitted to the hospital.

All dead bodies in the custody of the Geauga County Coroner shall be held, in accordance with Ohio Law, until it is no longer necessary to decide on a diagnosis, give a reasonable and true cause of death or to assist any other officials in their duties.

When the death scene appears to be the result of unnatural causes, or there is reason to believe the death was caused by unlawful, suspicious, or violent means, the body or bodies are not to be disturbed until the Geauga County Coroner or his assistant completes their investigation. All clothing, jewelry, wallet, purse, or other personal items shall not be disturbed until the Geauga County Coroner or his assistant completes their investigation. Said items shall become the sole responsibility of the Geauga County Coroner's office.

Where there is possible foul play, the dead body shall **not** be removed from the site until permission is given by the Geauga County Coroner's office. Once the investigation has been completed by the Geauga County Coroner or his assistant, the body will be transported to the Cuyahoga County Medical Examiner's office for an autopsy and/or toxicology testing. If no foul play, unnatural causes, suspicious or violent means is evident, the family can notify the funeral home of their choice for transport for burial/cremation. If no next of kin can be located, the body will be transported to UH Geauga Medical Center, 13207 Ravenna Road, Chardon, Oh 44024.

Should the Coroner decline jurisdiction after an initial investigation concerning the circumstances surrounding the death, the jurisdiction shall be returned to the institution where the death occurred. The physician, who attended to the deceased person prior to death, shall sign the death certificate as being the result of natural causes.

ORC 2108.52 provides that the Coroner does not need permission for an autopsy. The Office of the Coroner will attempt to comply with the wishes of the next of kin, especially if there is a family religious interest and when this does not conflict with the duties of the Coroner as charged by Ohio law.

Cremation

If cremation is requested for decedents under our jurisdiction, the Geauga County Coroner's office must be notified. No embalming procedures may be started in suspected cases until permission is given by the Geauga County Coroner. Rings or other jewelry that cannot be readily removed from the body will be left in place and undertakers must give a receipt for such items to the office before the body will be released. The Geauga County Coroner will make every effort to release bodies as soon as possible, consistent with the statutory responsibility.

The Geauga County Coroner will not participate in aiding or depriving any undertaker of business, nor will it tolerate any such activity by anyone on his staff. Ohio law requires that death pronouncement must be made only by physicians.

Identification of Body

Identification is necessary in order to establish verification of the identity and to complete the death certificate. A decedent may also be brought to the Geauga County Coroner's office if the identity of the deceased or the next of kin is unknown. The decedent is retained by the Geauga County Coroner's Office for a reasonable period of time before internment at a cemetery, or until the next of kin can be located by law enforcement, identification established, and funeral arrangement made. An unidentified decedent cannot be released until a positive identity is established. There are seven methods of identification, which include: Fingerprinting, dental records, x-ray records, anthropology, visual identification – DNA, mechanical implants or devices, or tattoos. Depending on the method used to make the identification, the process could take anywhere from days to weeks. Each case is different, but most are done within a few days. In the event that a visual notification is required, you will be notified by the Coroner.

Public Records

The Geauga County Coroner shall keep a complete record of and shall fill in the cause of death on the death certificate in all cases under his jurisdiction. All records shall be kept in the office of the coroner. The records of the Geauga County Coroner or by anyone acting under their direction or supervision are public records, with the exception of unsolved homicides. All records, except unsolved homicides shall be open to inspection by the public and any person may receive a copy of such a record, or part thereof, upon demand in writing. All records are kept in the Geauga County Coroner's Office which is physically located at 12450 Merritt Road., Chardon, Ohio 44024. Copies of Coroner's reports, Autopsy reports and/or Toxicology reports may be obtained only at the Geauga County Coroner's office.

Cell Phones for Geauga County Coroner's Office:

Name:	Cell:
Coroner Dr. John M. Urbancic	(440) 901-9035
Dorothy Battles	(440) 901-9129
Ted Peterson	(440) 901-9049
Ed McCormack	(440) 901-9128

****When reporting a death please contact the non-emergency dispatch first at (440) 286-1234, day or night, and state the following: "I wish to report a death, please contact the Geauga County Coroner's office". Please give the name of the deceased, age, sex, race, marital status and location. The Geauga County Dispatch will contact the Coroner/investigator to give all necessary information.**

Referred Cases and Coroner's Cases:

Referred cases are cases in which the decedent died of natural causes and the attending physician or family physician agrees to sign the death certificate. Even in these cases, the Coroner/Investigator needs to be notified to determine if that is the case.

Coroner's cases are deaths in which the decedent died of unnatural, sudden, or unexplained nature, as stated in pages 5-7 of this Handbook. These types of cases require a complete investigation with the Coroner's office, Law enforcement, EMS and other agencies. Almost all Coroner deaths are sent to the Cuyahoga County Medical Examiner's office for autopsy and/or toxicology testing. During this time the Coroner will fill out the death certificate as "pending". Once all information is complete, the Coroner will complete and sign the death certificate with the cause of death. Death certificates would then be available from the Funeral home or through Vital Statistics.

Support Groups/Organizations:

Name:	Telephone:
Tracy Jordan, LOSS Team/Victim Advocate	(440) 279-2062
Cope Line	(440) 285-5665 or (888) 285-5665
Michaels House (works with grieving children)	(440) 338-5936
Care Corp Bereavement Support Group	(440) 286-2273
Neighboring Bereavement Group	(440) 354-9924 or (440) 946-5048
Lake-Geauga (overdose deaths)	(440) 255-0678
Hospice of Western Reserve	(216) 486-6838
Ravenwood Health	(440) 285-3568
Family Pride Northeast Ohio	(440) 776-8075
Catholic Charities	(440) 285-3537
Ubuntu Wellness	(440) 565-2475
Lost Loved Ones to Overdose	(440) 328-4415
Walking Through Grief	(440) 424-5823
Grief Share Support Group	(440) 565-2229
Jones – Wood Psychological Associates	(440) 723-3533
The Behavioral Wellness Group	(440) 709-8245 ext. 122
Cornerstone of Hope	(216) 524-4673

Clean-up Companies:

ArchAngels Trauma Sanitation Specialists	(888) 750-0200
Aftermath	(800) 366-9923
ServePro	(844) 576-7348 or (440) 248-0022

