

Next-of-Kin

1103.1 PURPOSE AND SCOPE

Notifying a decedent's legal next-of-kin of the death is a core duty of the Coroner set forth by Government Code 27491. This policy serves to establish rules and guidelines for Deputy Coroners in the performance of next-of-kin searches, notifications, and making determinations as to legal status.

1103.2 PROMPT NOTIFICATIONS

Following a positive identification, the Deputy Coroner's efforts to locate and notify a decedent's next-of-kin shall begin immediately.

(a) When investigating the death of an unidentified person where a tentative identification is available, next-of-kin may be notified if they are needed to assist the Deputy Coroner by providing information that may lead to positive identification.

1. Examples include providing the Deputy Coroner with dental x-rays or DNA samples.
2. In these cases the Deputy Coroner shall inform next-of-kin that identification is not yet confirmed.

1103.3 NEXT-OF-KIN SEARCH

When a decedent's next-of-kin is not immediately known, Deputy Coroners shall initiate a search for that next-of-kin using any and all available resources. Deputy Coroners shall document his/her efforts in the Coroner Investigator's written report. When all possible leads have been exhausted and next-of-kin remains unknown, Deputy Coroners shall refer the case to the Orange County Public Administrator.

1103.4 NOTIFICATION APPROACHES

Death notifications shall be performed in-person whenever case circumstances permit. If the apparent next-of-kin resides outside of Orange County jurisdiction, Deputy Coroners shall contact the local law enforcement agency or Coroner/Medical Examiner to request assistance with an in-person death notification. If the Deputy Coroner determines that the need for an expeditious notification outweighs the need for an in-person delivery, or if the in-person notification attempt was unsuccessful, notification may be performed via telephone.

1103.4.1 CONTACTING NEXT-OF-KIN VIA MAIL OR ELECTRONIC COMMUNICATION

Occasionally, both in-person and telephone notification attempts are unsuccessful. In cases where both methods have been attempted, and the Deputy Coroner identifies an opportunity to contact the next-of-kin by mail or electronic communication, the Deputy Coroner may send the Coroner Division's approved message to the intended party, directing him/her to contact the Coroner Division reference the decedent.

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1103.5 IN-PERSON NOTIFICATIONS

Deputy Coroners shall request the assistance of a law enforcement officer or second Deputy Coroner when performing an in-person notification. Deputy Coroners shall also notify the on-duty Coroner Watch Commander and local law enforcement agency dispatch of their location and intent to make a death notification.

1103.6 ESTABLISHING NEXT-OF-KIN STATUS

Following the initial notification to potential next-of-kin, Deputy Coroners shall query their relationship to the decedent in order to establish their legal authority. Kin status shall be decided pursuant to Health and Safety Code section 7100.

- (a) A search for next-of-kin must continue until the highest priority surviving relative is located and notified.