

THE ARMED FORCES MEDICAL EXAMINER SYSTEM



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FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS ABOUT MEDICOLEGAL EXAMINATIONS

The Armed Forces Medical Examiner System (AFMES) offers you our deepest condolences on the loss of your loved one.

Q: Why is the AFMES involved?

A: The AFMES performs medicolegal examinations on service members and American citizens who die in a combat zone, certain individuals who die abroad, and individuals who die under exclusive federal jurisdiction within the United States.

Q: Under what circumstances would the AFMES conduct a medicolegal examination if an individual died within the United States?

A: The Armed Forces Medical Examiner, under federal law, has the authority to perform a medicolegal examination when a death occurs under federal jurisdiction. Cases typically involve a violent or unnatural death and/or may be suspicious in nature or possibly involve a threat to the health of the military community.

Q: Why is the AFMES performing a medicolegal examination?

A: The examination uses scientific means to determine the cause and manner of death, as well as confirm the identity of the deceased.

Q. What is the Armed Forces Medical Examiner's legal authority to perform medicolegal examinations?

A: Title 10 United States Code, Section 1471 (Forensic Pathology Investigations).

Q. What does the medicolegal examination entail?

A: A medicolegal examination entails reviewing the circumstances of the death, scientifically identifying the decedent, performing an examination which may include an autopsy, and writing a report. The circumstances of the death are provided to the AFMES by the local commanders or investigative agencies such as the U.S. Army Criminal Investigation Command, U.S. Naval Criminal Investigative Service, U.S. Air Force Office of Special Investigations, and the Federal Bureau of Investigation. Scientific identification is made by performing fingerprint, dental and/or DNA analyses. Personal effects and any evidence are collected, documented, and photographed before transfer to personal effects or investigative personnel. During the examination, photographs of the decedent are taken, physical characteristics are noted, and any natural disease or trauma is documented. Selected fluids, small sections of organs, and in certain circumstances whole organs are collected for microscopic, toxicological and/or DNA analyses.

Q: When will the AFMES perform the medicolegal examination?

A: Your casualty assistance officer (CAO), company representative, investigating agent, or AFMES representative will provide you with the date and location of the medicolegal examination.

Q: What are the qualifications of the physician performing the medicolegal examination?

A: All medical examiners working for the Armed Forces Medical Examiner System are physicians who are either board-certified in the field of forensic pathology by the American Board of Pathology or work directly under the supervision of a board-certified forensic pathologist.

Q: How long does a normal medicolegal examination take?

A: A typical examination usually takes 2-4 hours. Additional time may be needed to transport remains to a suitable facility and for the AFMES personnel to arrive. If identification is in question, it may take up to five days to complete DNA analysis, assuming a suitable reference is available.

Q: What happens after the autopsy is complete?

A: Once the examination is complete and the medical examiner signs a release, the remains are turned over to appropriate mortuary services or to the medical treatment facility who will subsequently turn over to mortuary services.

Q: When will I know the results of the medicolegal examination?

A: In most cases a final report will be issued in approximately 6 to 12 weeks.

Q: Will the final autopsy report contain pictures of the autopsy?

A: The final autopsy report will not contain pictures of the autopsy unless specifically requested.

Q: Are there any portions of the final autopsy report that are not provided to the family, if so why not?

A: All information generated by the AFME is provided to the family excluding any information that may compromise a medicolegal investigation or national security.

Q: How do I get a copy of the final report?

A: Attached is an autopsy request form. The form is under Forms and Resources, entitled "Request for Autopsy Report and Supplemental Information" at www.health.mil/afmes. You may submit your request via one of the following:

Email	dha.dover.afmes.mbx.operations@health.mil
Fax	(302) 346-8819
Mail	Armed Forces Medical Examiner System Attn: Forensic Pathology Investigations 115 Purple Heart Drive Dover AFB DE 19902

We value the privacy of you and your loved ones, so we ask that your request for the report be in writing and accompanied by a copy of a government-issued photo ID (e.g., driver's license, family member identification card) so that we may comply with the Privacy Act of 1974, as amended.

Q: Does AFMES issue a death certificate following completion of the autopsy?

A: AFMES issues a death certificate for cases in which the death occurred outside the United States. For all other AFMES cases in which the death occurred within the United States, the state or local authority is responsible for issuing the death certificate.

Q: May I talk to the medical examiner?

A: The staff of the Armed Forces Medical Examiner System is available to discuss the findings with you. If you would like to speak with a medical examiner, we may be reached at (302) 346-8648.

2 Attachments:

1. Autopsy request form
2. Frequently asked questions acknowledgement form

REQUEST FOR AUTOPSY REPORT AND SUPPLEMENTAL INFORMATION

DATA REQUIRED BY THE PRIVACY ACT OF 1974

AUTHORITY: Title 10 USC, Section 1471
PRINCIPAL PURPOSE: To obtain records/reports/photos of remains by persons legally authorized access to this information.
ROUTINE USES: By Department of Defense and other agencies to document and authorize actions necessary for the release of post-autopsy supplemental information.
DISCLOSURE: Disclosure of requested information is voluntary. Without disclosure your desires may not be recorded and accommodated.

NAME OF DECEASED (Last, First, Middle Initial)	IF HAND-WRITTEN, PLEASE USE BLACK OR BLUE INK	SERVICE/RANK OF DECEASED	SSN OF DECEASED OR DOD ID #
TYPED OR PRINTED NAME OF REQUESTOR		REQUESTOR DAYTIME PHONE NUMBER(S)	
RELATIONSHIP TO DECEASED/REASON FOR NEED TO KNOW		REQUESTOR EMAIL	
		FOR FPI USE: RECEIPT DATE/TIME	

I, the undersigned, am requesting to receive a copy of the official autopsy report written and maintained by Forensic Pathology Investigations (FPI), Armed Forces Medical Examiner System (AFMES) and/or the official photographs taken during autopsy.

I wish to receive the following (select one or both):

_____	I would like to receive a copy of the official autopsy report written by the FPI Medical Examiner.
Initials	
_____	I would like to receive the photographs taken by the FPI Medical Examiner documenting the autopsy.
Initials	

I understand official federal business requests will be sent via encrypted email and/or a secure DoD file sharing system (DoD SAFE) unless otherwise specified. I understand I may elect to receive materials requested for personal reasons at my home address or choose another individual (such as a casualty assistance officer, family member, counselor, etc.) to whom the requested information is sent on my behalf.

Please send the requested information to the following (select one):

Official Business Request. Send via encrypted email and/or DoD SAFE (unless otherwise specified):	
_____	OFFICIAL GOVERNMENT EMAIL (MANDATORY)
Initials	
Please deliver the requested material to my home address:	
_____	SHIPMENT ADDRESS (NOTE: FEDEX DOES NOT DELIVER TO P.O. BOXES)
Initials	RELATIONSHIP TO ADDRESSEE
Please deliver the requested material to the following individual on my behalf:	
_____	TYPED OR PRINTED NAME OF ADDRESSEE
Initials	ADDRESSEE DAYTIME PHONE NUMBER(S)
SHIPMENT ADDRESS (NOTE: FEDEX DOES NOT DELIVER TO P.O. BOXES)	
RELATIONSHIP TO ADDRESSEE	

SIGNATURE OF REQUESTOR	DATE
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PLEASE INCLUDE A PHOTOCOPY OF A CURRENT GOVERNMENT-ISSUED PHOTO ID WITH YOUR REQUEST.

We cannot process your request without verification of your identity and your legal right to this information, in accordance with the Privacy Act of 1974, as amended.

IF YOU ARE REQUESTING THIS INFORMATION FOR OFFICIAL BUSINESS, PLEASE INCLUDE A COPY OF YOUR APPOINTMENT LETTER OR A MEMORANDUM OF JUSTIFICATION ON FORMAL LETTERHEAD CITING YOUR NEED TO KNOW.

If you have questions, please contact the Armed Forces Medical Examiner at (302) 346-8648.

Submit this request form and a copy of your ID or letter of justification via one of the following modes:

Email: dha.dover.afmes.mbx.operations@health.mil

Mail: Armed Forces Medical Examiner System
 Attn: Autopsy Examination Report Request
 115 Purple Heart Drive
 Dover Air Force Base, DE 19902
 Fax: (302) 346-8819

Controlled by: AFMES
 Controlled by: Director, Forensic Pathology Investigations
 Category: DREC/INV/PRVCY
 LDC: FEDCON
 POC: 302-346-8648