

City Coroner
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1 of 2
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CORK CITY CORONER

Our Ref; MF/BD

31st January 2005

Dr. W. O'Brien,
Medical Officer,
Naval Base,
Haulbowline,
Cobh,
Co. Cork.

Re; Coroners protocol for death at sea.

Dear Dr. O'Brien,

I was approached by one of your staff at a recent lecture and asked to provide these guidelines. Apologies for the delay in responding.

1. JURISDICTION

The Coroner with jurisdiction over a body is that Coroner in whose jurisdiction the body comes to lie. The body in maritime deaths comes to "lie" in the mortuary where the post-mortem is to be carried out. If you are aware of the port to which the body will be returned you will ascertain from the local Gardai where the post-mortem is to be carried out and who the relevant Coroner will be.

2. PRESERVATION

In relation to preservation of the remains at sea the remains should not be interfered with cleaned or altered if possible and if there is a cold storage area this should be availed of while the vessel is returning to port.

3. CIRCUMSTANCES

Information in relation to the circumstances surrounding the death should be ascertained from the crew. This information can be conveyed to the Gardai and Coroner before the body returns to port if possible. This alerts the Coroner as to the possibility of a suspicious death and forensic services and scenes of crime members of An Garda Siochana can be made available.

In any event this information will be transmitted to the Gardai at the time the vessel comes to port. If it is anticipated that there will be any communication or language difficulties the authorities should be made aware of this as a translator can be provided and the cost can be borne by the Coroners Office in appropriate circumstances.

4. POSTMORTEM

The Coroners post-mortem is then carried out. A likely time of arrival to port should be indicated to the Coroners office. This is a legal requirement and therefore the consent of family members or others is not required. Opportunity can be given for a family member to travel to this jurisdiction to carry out formal identification. If this is impossible identification by a crew member or someone to whom the deceased is known is acceptable.


In the majority of circumstances the remains are released by the Coroner for removal out of state or burial within the state at the conclusion of the autopsy.

A Death Certificate will not become available in relation to the deceased until the conclusion of the Coroners Inquiry. The Coroners Inquiry concludes when the post-mortem reveals a natural cause of death or in the alternative if an unnatural cause of death is revealed an inquest will be required to be held prior to the provision of a Death Certificate through the Coroners Office.

An Interim Certificate of the fact of death can be obtained before the conclusion of the enquiry if necessary.

If there are any further queries please do not hesitate to contact us.

Yours Sincerely



Myra Cullinane