

**THE ARMED FORCES MEDICAL EXAMINER SYSTEM**



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## **THE ARMED FORCES MEDICAL EXAMINER SYSTEM**

### **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: U.S. Code Title 10 Federal law, mandates that AFMES perform medicolegal forensic investigations when a death occurs under federal jurisdiction. Federal jurisdiction includes but is not limited to Military installations and combat zones; in certain cases, AFMES may be called to support American citizens who die abroad.

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

A: U.S. Code Title 10 Federal law mandates that AFMES perform medicolegal forensic investigations when a death occurs under federal jurisdiction. Cases typically involve violent or unnatural deaths that 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: AFMES performs medicolegal examinations 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 medical examiner makes a positive identification and reviews the circumstances surrounding the death of your loved one. When unnatural causes are suspected, AFMES may conduct an autopsy to determine the cause and manner of death or if the investigation is requested to support the local commanders or one of the 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, or the Federal Bureau of Investigation. Scientific identifications are made by performing fingerprint, dental and/or DNA analysis. Personal effects and evidence are collected, documented, and photographed prior to being transferred to the Joint Personal Effects Depot or funeral home or investigative agencies. During the medicolegal examination, photographs of the decedent are taken, physical characteristics are noted, and any signs of natural disease or evidence of trauma documented. When required selected fluids and small sections of organs may be collected for microscopic, toxicological and DNA analyses. When required for further examination to determine the cause and manner of death, major organs are collected, fixed, and dissected by forensic specialists.

**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 board-certified in the field of forensic pathology by the American Board of Pathology or work under the direct 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 once the remains and AFMES staff arrive at a facility capable of supporting medicolegal investigations. Cases where the identification of remains is in question, require an additional five days to complete DNA analysis, assuming a suitable reference is available for comparison.

**Q: What happens after the autopsy is complete?**

A: Following a completed autopsy, the medical examiner signs documents that release the remains to the appropriate mortuary services or medical treatment facility for distribution to the servicing mortuary service.

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

A: In most cases the investigation will be complete and a final report issued within 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: Information that may compromise the medicolegal investigation or national security, will be omitted from the information AFMES is able to provide to the family.

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](http://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 your privacy, in an effort to minimize intrusion during your time of bereavement, we ask that you submit request for autopsy reports in writing. In compliance with the Privacy Act of 1974, all requests must be accompanied by a copy of a government-issued photo ID (e.g., driver's license, DoD family member identification card).

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

A: AFMES issues death certificates for cases in which the death occurred outside the United States. For cases in which the death occurred within the United States, state or local Medical Examiner Offices have the authority and requirement to issue death certificates.

**Q: May I talk to the medical examiner?**

A: The staff of the Armed Forces Medical Examiner System is available to answer any questions you may have and discuss autopsy findings with you. If you would like to speak with a medical examiner, please call us 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 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.

<b>NAME OF DECEASED (Last, First, Middle Initial)</b>	<b>SERVICE/RANK OF DECEASED</b>	<b>SSN OF DECEASED OR DOD ID #</b>
<b>TYPED OR PRINTED NAME OF REQUESTOR</b>	<b>REQUESTOR DAYTIME PHONE NUMBER(S)</b>	
<b>RELATIONSHIP TO DECEASED/REASON FOR NEED TO KNOW</b>	<b>REQUESTOR EMAIL</b>	
	<b>FOR FPI USE: RECEIPT DATE/TIME</b>	

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).

**I wish to receive the following:**

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

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

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

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

<b>SIGNATURE OF REQUESTOR</b>		<b>DATE</b>	
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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  
 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
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**ACKNOWLEDGMENT OF RECEIPT OF AFMES FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS DOCUMENT**

DATA REQUIRED BY THE PRIVACY ACT OF 1974

NAME OF DECEASED	RANK OF DECEASED	SSN OF DECEASED
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TYPED/PRINTED NAME OF PERSON AUTHORIZED TO DIRECT DISPOSITION (PADD) OR NEXT OF KIN (NOK)	RELATIONSHIP
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I, the undersigned, do hereby acknowledge receipt of the Armed Forces Medical Examiner System (AFMES) Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ) About Medicolegal Examinations document. I understand that should I have any questions about medicolegal investigations or my loved one's autopsy, I may obtain additional information via the AFMES website at [www.health.mil/afmes](http://www.health.mil/afmes) or I may contact AFMES directly via the contact information provided on the cover sheet and page 4.

ARMED FORCES MEDICAL EXAMINER SYSTEM

[www.health.mil/afmes](http://www.health.mil/afmes)

Main Office  
(302) 346-8648

Forensic Pathology Investigations  
[dha.dover.afmes.mbx.operations@health.mil](mailto:dha.dover.afmes.mbx.operations@health.mil)

24 hours a day, 7 days a week

**PADD/NOK ACKNOWLEDGMENT SIGNATURE**

TYPED/PRINTED NAME OF PADD OR NOK	SIGNATURE OF PADD OR NOK	DATE
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Controlled by: AFMES  
 Controlled by: Director, Forensic Pathology Investigations  
 Category: PRVCY  
 LDC: FEDCON  
 POC: 302-346-8648