

Q How can the results of the Coroner's investigation be accessed?

A The results of the investigation are released in a public document called a *Judgement of Inquiry*. This is available by request from the Regional Coroner's office or the Office of the Chief Coroner. The report incorporates information from all agencies involved in the death, including police, ambulance and hospitals. It also contains the findings of an autopsy, if conducted. The autopsy report itself is confidential and is released only to designated parties. Any recommendations arising from the Inquiry will be included in the *Judgement*.

Q What is a Coroner's Inquest?

A An inquest is a formal court proceeding held to publicly review the circumstances of a death. An inquest is mandatory if a death occurs in a police prison or lockup or while an individual is in the custody of a police officer. In all other cases, the decision to call an inquest is discretionary and is based on the particular circumstances of the death.

A five-person jury hears evidence from witnesses under subpoena in order to determine the facts of the death. The presiding Coroner is responsible to ensure the jury maintains the goal of fact finding, not fault finding. The jury can make recommendations to prevent a similar death in the future or any other recommendation in connection with the death. These are included in a public document, the *Verdict at Coroner's Inquest*. The majority of Coroners' and juries' recommendations are implemented.

The family of the deceased is not required to attend the inquest unless under subpoena. The family may apply for standing at the inquest and may be represented by legal counsel or by an agent.

*NOTE: This brochure is for general information only and must not be interpreted as a legal description of the Coroner's duties or the Coroner's Inquest. Reference should be made to the **Coroners Act** for complete information.*

B.C. Coroners Service

Chief Coroner's Office

604 660-7745 (Burnaby)

Interior Regional Coroner's Office

250 861-7429 (Kelowna)

Island Regional Coroner's Office

250 952-4150 (Victoria)

Fraser Regional Coroner's Office

604 930-7134 (Surrey)

Northern Regional Coroner's Office

250 565-6040 (Prince George)

Vancouver Metro Regional Coroner's Office

604 660-7708 (Vancouver)

The Role of the Coroner



**BRITISH
COLUMBIA**

Produced by

The British Columbia Coroners Service

**Ministry of
Public Safety
and Solicitor General**

Distributed by

**The Chief Coroner for the
Province of British Columbia
Metrotower II
4720 Kingsway, Suite 2035
Burnaby, B.C. V5H 4N2
Telephone: 604 660-7745
Fax: 604 660-7766**

Q What is the Coroners Service?

A The Coroners Service of British Columbia is responsible for the inquiry/investigation of all unnatural, unexpected, unexplained or unattended deaths. The Service, under the direction of the Chief Coroner, is managed from five regional offices located in the major cities in B.C.

Q What is a Coroner?

A A Coroner is a medical-legal death investigator appointed by the Lieutenant Governor in Council upon the recommendation of the Solicitor General.

The position is judicially independent. Coroners in B.C. come from a wide variety of backgrounds: medical, legal, investigative or social science.

There are 25 full-time Coroners and 120 appointed Community Coroners in the Province who provide services to their communities. Coroners are on duty and available 24 hours a day.

Q Who notifies the Coroner?

A Section 9 of the *Coroners Act* describes the types of death that must be reported, thereby initiating the investigative process. Any person who has reason to believe that a death has occurred under the circumstances outlined must immediately notify a Coroner. Although notification generally comes from police agencies, hospitals or physicians, anyone may report a death.

Q What is the Coroner's Role?

A The Coroner is responsible for ascertaining the facts surrounding a death and must determine:

- The identity of the deceased
- How, when, where and by what means he or she died.

The death is then classified as natural, accidental, suicide, homicide or undetermined. Coroners may make recommendations which may prevent similar loss of life in the future. The Coroner does not assign fault or blame but rather conducts a fact finding investigation. There is no reason to fear a Coroner's investigation.

Q How does the Coroner establish cause of death?

A The Coroner has the authority to collect information, conduct interviews, inspect and seize documents, secure the scene of death and take possession of the human remains. The Coroner is responsible for authorizing removal of the remains to the morgue. A careful examination of the circumstances leading up to the death is undertaken. Training and experience enable the Coroner to decide if the findings required by law can be determined without a post mortem examination. If such a procedure is deemed necessary, a medical-legal autopsy is performed by a qualified pathologist. This may include the collection of specimens for additional analysis.

Q Is family consent required for a medical-legal autopsy?

A The coroner is responsible for determining the cause of death in all cases where jurisdiction is accepted. In some cases, an autopsy will be required to assist the coroner in making his or her determinations, including cause of death. Although the coroner has the authority to proceed without family consent, all family considerations are reviewed.

Q What happens when the Coroner is notified of a natural death?

A If circumstances indicate the death is due to a natural disease process, the coroner will contact the deceased's personal physician to clarify the nature and extent of the medical history. If it is determined that the circumstances and medical history are consistent with death from natural disease, the death is deemed a "Non Coroner's Case". The Coroners Service does not have jurisdiction with respect to deaths from disease or sickness for which the deceased was treated by a medical practitioner and does not assume responsibility to evaluate the level of health care provided in those cases.

Q What is the procedure when the Coroner takes possession of the remains?

A Once necessary post mortem investigations are completed (normally within 48 hours) the Coroner will release his/her interest in the deceased's remains. Funeral arrangements the family has made can then proceed. Viewing can be arranged with the funeral home if desired.