

**THE ARMED FORCES MEDICAL EXAMINER SYSTEM**



**115 Purple Heart Drive  
Dover AFB DE 19902**

**TEL: (302) 346-8648  
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## THE ARMED FORCES MEDICAL EXAMINER SYSTEM

### FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS ABOUT MEDICAL-LEGAL 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 medical-legal examinations on service members and American citizens who die in a combat zone and certain individuals who are killed or die within the United States or abroad. The AFMES positively identifies decedents and issues death certificates that state the cause and manner of death.

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

A: The Armed Forces Medical Examiner, under federal law, has the authority to perform a medical-legal 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 medical-legal examination?**

A: The examination helps determine the cause and manner of death as well as confirm the identity of your loved one by scientific means. These investigations can assist in identifying potential public health issues. Please be assured that this examination will be carried out with the utmost dignity and respect.

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

A: The AFMES legal authority comes from Title 10 United States Code, Section 1471 (Forensic Pathology Investigations).

**Q. What does the medical-legal examination entail?**

A: A medical-legal examination entails reviewing the circumstances of the death, scientifically identifying the decedent, performing 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. During the autopsy, photographs of the

decedent are taken, physical characteristics are noted and any natural disease or trauma is documented. Selected fluids and small sections of organs are retained for microscopic, toxicological and/or DNA analyses. These body fluids and tissue samples are similar to those taken at a hospital laboratory for evaluation and are treated in the same manner. In rare instances, it is necessary to retain selected whole organs, such as the heart and/or brain, for expert consultation. If this is required, the person authorized to determine disposition (PADD) or next-of-kin (depending on the circumstance) is notified that these organs are being retained by the AFMES and disposition instructions are obtained.

**Q: When will the AFMES perform the medical-legal examination?**

A: Your casualty assistance officer (CAO), or casualty assistance calls officer (CACO), will obtain the date and location of the medical-legal examination and provide you this information.

**Q: What are the qualifications of the physician performing the medical-legal examination?**

A: All medical examiners working for the Office of the Armed Forces Medical Examiner 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 medical-legal examination take?**

A: For cases arriving from overseas, the medical-legal examination usually takes 24 hours from the time the remains arrive at Dover AFB, DE. For cases within the United States, the medical examiner team usually deploys within 24 hours of notification and the examination is usually complete within 24 hours of the arrival of the team at the local facility. 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: The AFMES will retain custody of the decedent until they are positively identified and all required paperwork has been received from the PADD or next-of-kin. Once the AFMES has released the decedent, mortuary services are initiated by the Dover AFB Port Mortuary, the respective casualty/mortuary offices, or contract funeral home, depending on the situation.

**Q: When will I know the results of the medical-legal examination?**

A: In most cases a final report will be issued in approximately 6 to 8 weeks. A copy of the final report is available upon request.

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

A: The photographs taken at the time of the autopsy are not normally included with the report. These photographs will be provided with the report if 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 Armed Forces Medical Examiner in connection with the medical-legal examination is available upon request, unless release of said information would compromise a continuing legal investigation into the fatal incident. The autopsy report summarizes all pertinent findings and answers most questions. Additional documents such as toxicology and DNA reports are summarized in the final autopsy report. If you would like copies of these additional documents they will be provided, but we ask for the opportunity to review them with you, either in person or over the telephone.

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

A: Attached is an autopsy request form. The form is also available at [www.health.mil/afmes](http://www.health.mil/afmes). You may submit your request via one of the following:

|       |   |
|-------|---|
| Email | <a href="mailto:usarmy.dover.medcom-afmes.mbx.operations@mail.mil">usarmy.dover.medcom-afmes.mbx.operations@mail.mil</a>                  |
| Fax   | (302) 346-8767  |
| Mail  | Armed Forces Medical Examiner System<br>Attn: Office of the Armed Forces Medical Examiner<br>115 Purple Heart Drive<br>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 Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA) of 1996.

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

A: The staff of the Armed Forces Medical Examiner System is available to discuss its findings with you. If you would like to speak with a medical examiner, we may be reached at (302) 346-8648. You may be asked for some personal information so that we may verify your identity, and that of your loved one, in order to protect your privacy and comply with HIPPA regulations.

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<br>Principal Purpose: To obtain records/reports/photos of remains by persons legally authorized access to this information.<br>Routine Uses: By Department of Defense and other agencies to document and authorize actions necessary obtain post-autopsy supplemental information.<br>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 |
| TYPED OR PRINTED NAME OF REQUESTOR  |   | REQUESTOR DAYTIME PHONE NUMBER(S)      |                 |
| RELATIONSHIP TO DECEASED / REASON FOR NEED TO KNOW  |   | REQUESTOR EMAIL                        |                 |
|   |   | FOR OAFME USE: RECEIPT DATE / INITIALS |                 |

I, the undersigned, am requesting to receive a copy of the official autopsy report written and maintained by the Office of the Armed Forces Medical Examiner and/or the official photographs taken during autopsy.

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

|                   |   |
|-------------------|---|
| _____<br>Initials | I would like to receive a copy of the official autopsy <b>report</b> written by the Office of the Armed Forces Medical Examiner System. |
| _____<br>Initials | I would like to receive the <b>photographs</b> taken by the Office of the Armed Forces Medical Examiner documenting the autopsy.        |

I understand official federal business requests will be sent via a secure DoD file sharing system 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):**

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

**IF YOU ARE A FAMILY MEMBER, 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 Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA) regulations. **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 Office of 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: usarmy.dover.medcom-afmes.mbx.opertions@mail.mil  
 Fax: (302) 346-8767  
 Mail: Office of the Armed Forces Medical Examiner  
 Attn: Autopsy Examination Report Request  
 115 Purple Heart Drive  
 Dover Air Force Base, DE 19902

# 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 |
| TYPED/PRINTED NAME OF PERSON AUTHORIZED TO DIRECT DISPOSITION (PADD) OR NEXT OF KIN (NOK) |                  | RELATIONSHIP    |

I, the undersigned, do hereby acknowledge receipt of the Armed Forces Medical Examiner System (AFMES) Frequently Asked Questions About Medical-Legal Examinations document. I understand that should I have any questions about medical-legal 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 the 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

Office of the Armed Forces Medical Examiner  
[usarmy.dover.medcom-afmes.mbx.operations@mail.mil](mailto:usarmy.dover.medcom-afmes.mbx.operations@mail.mil)

24 hours a day, 7 days a week

## PADD ACKNOWLEDGMENT SIGNATURE

|                                   |                          |      |
|-----------------------------------|--------------------------|------|
| TYPED/PRINTED NAME OF PADD or NOK | SIGNATURE OF PADD or NOK | DATE |
|-----------------------------------|--------------------------|------|