Introducing the redesigned Center for Health Statistics Web site!

We have overhauled the State of Oregon’s Public Health Web site to make it more user friendly. The new Web site is organized by public health topics so many of the Web pages you access regularly may have changed location. To get to the new Public Health Web site simply follow this link: http://public.health.oregon.gov

From the homepage of the new Web site, you can find information specific to vital records in the left menu under the heading of “Birth and Death Certificates.” The left menu organizes vital records information into the following categories:

- **Get Vital Records** - Information on ordering certified copies of vital records in Oregon.
- **Change Vital Records** - Information on amending vital records in Oregon.
- **Register Vital Records** - Information on registering vital records in Oregon. This link will direct you to archived copies of newsletters by topic and instructions for completion of vital records.
- **Vital Statistics** - Statistical information compiled from Oregon vital records.
- **Surveys** - Information on questions asked and statistical results of the behavior risk surveys conducted by CHS.

We encourage you to explore the new Web site and update any of your saved links to your favorite Web pages!
**Staff turnover? Let us know**

Are new staff members joining your team? Are staff members leaving your team? If so, it is important to notify the OVERS team in a timely fashion. It is especially important to end OVERS accounts for former employees because until you do, the former employee will still have access to your facility’s confidential death records and could potentially sign false records.

When an employee is leaving your facility, you can notify the OVERS team to close the employee’s OVERS account by calling the OVERS help desk, faxing, or by emailing one of the OVERS team members.

When a new employee needs access to OVERS, we must receive an OVERS enrollment form along with a letter authorizing access to your facility’s records. The form and letter can be mailed or faxed to the Center for Health Statistics. The form can be printed from the Center for Health Statistics Web site at [http://public.health.oregon.gov/BIRTHDEATHCERTIFICATES/REGISTERVITALRECORDS/OVERS/Pages/NewUsers.aspx](http://public.health.oregon.gov/BIRTHDEATHCERTIFICATES/REGISTERVITALRECORDS/OVERS/Pages/NewUsers.aspx).

**Abandoned records**

Vital records that will never be completed are assigned the status of ‘Abandoned’. This formal status indicates the record has been reviewed, will never be completed, and should be removed from all work queues. Always contact Vital Records when there is a record that needs to be abandoned.

Abandoned records never come out of the OVERS system, which is one of the reasons we do everything we can to correct the original record. However, there are valid reasons for some records to be abandoned. The record may be a duplicate, or there may be a technical issue that makes it impossible to register the original record. Having the correct status of ‘abandoned’ benefits the funeral home and Vital Records because:

- The status removes the record from funeral home queues (and from Medical Examiner/medical certifier queues for fully electronic records).
- The abandoned record is no longer accessible so there can be no mistake on which record to use. This can be very important for Medical Examiners and medical certifiers who do not want to waste time on the wrong record.
- The funeral home avoids calls from Vital Records staff when the record is not completed timely.

When you contact the State Vital Records office to abandon a record, we will ask why the record needs to be abandoned. This information serves two purposes. First, we can determine if any practical alternatives exist for use of the original record. Second, we can track the most common reasons for abandoning records and try to develop new alternatives for emerging issues.

We are always willing to work with you. Contacting us before a second record is started allows us to try to fix the original record. Call us at 971-673-0279.

(Continued on page 3)
Common reasons records are abandoned and potential solutions:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Situation</th>
<th>Resolution</th>
<th>How to accomplish</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Entered incorrect date of death when started record or reversed date of birth and date of death</td>
<td>Date of death can be changed by State office or by doctor in electronic record; Date of birth can be changed by the funeral home</td>
<td>Not yet to doctor – call OVERS help desk; Electronic record – Doctor can change; Paper record – Doctor signs amendment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Medical Examiner or medical certifier also started record</td>
<td>One of the records must be formally abandoned</td>
<td>Call the OVERS help desk</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Started record but must have misspelled name because record cannot be located</td>
<td>Use alternate method of searching, or State office can help you locate record</td>
<td>Locate case with limited information (e.g. date of birth or gender) or call OVERS help desk</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Started record at wrong funeral home</td>
<td>Transfer or relinquish and then search/accept ownership at correct funeral home</td>
<td>Other links in menu or call the OVERS help desk</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dropped to paper and now need to change several items</td>
<td>If date of death or place of death – State office can update; If in personal information section – paper amendment at county</td>
<td>Call the OVERS help desk to correct information and mark record to reprint</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Already signed electronic record and now need to change several items</td>
<td>Not dropped to paper and not registered – unsign; Registered – do OVERS amendment</td>
<td>Unsign by going to the Sign link – message will ask if want to unsign; Do OVERS amendment by going to Other links - Amendment</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Improving correction affidavits

Would you like correction affidavits processed more quickly? Here are several things you can do to help make it happen:

(1) First, when filling out a correction affidavit, the box titled “Original Record Now Shows” needs to match the information on the death record before the correction. The box titled “Corrected Item Should Show” must state the corrected information. If the affidavit does not exactly reference the information on the death record, a new affidavit is required.

(2) Who can sign the affidavit? Only licensed funeral directors, next of kin (usually the informant), or a person acting as a funeral director can sign affidavits to correct death records (OAR-333-011-0061). If apprentices sign correction affidavits, the affidavits will be rejected.

(3) Be careful with requests to change the name of the informant. Usually the name of the informant is changed only when the first informant is not a family member. The informant does not need to be changed to the executor of the will. The executor of the will can still purchase certified death records and complete estate business with another person listed as the informant.

(4) Make sure all instances of a name are corrected and changes are consistent – change date of birth and age at the same time. By submitting all corrections at the same time, footnotes can be shorter and less intrusive.

By making sure affidavits are filled out correctly and signed by a funeral director you can save up to two weeks of processing time. On average, amendments on registered records submitted electronically are completed in one day, and faxed affidavits for registered records are completed in seven to ten days. So, where possible, we recommend submitting electronic amendments.

Clarifying fetal death reporting and other requirements

Fetal death is a relatively rare occurrence in Oregon. There were 223 fetal deaths that occurred in Oregon in 2009 (the most recent year for which final data is available). Larger medical facilities may only see five to seven reportable fetal deaths a year, and small facilities are likely to average less than one a year.

Hospital staff who are not accustomed to fetal death are often unaware of the legal difference between a fetal death and the death of a newly born infant. Frequently they do not realize that it is their responsibility to complete the fetal death report and disposition paperwork, not the responsibility of the funeral director.

We are taking several steps to clarify the fetal death reporting requirements with hospital staff. We created a brochure that explains who should report, when they should report and how they should report. The brochure will be sent to each birthing...
hospital in Oregon. We have also created fetal death worksheets to help hospital staff collect the information needed on the fetal death report. In the near future, we will provide hospital staff with an online, self-paced training that explains fetal death reporting requirements and disposition permits. If you would like copies of the fetal death brochure to share with parents or hospital staff who contact you about a fetal death, you can order them by calling Linda Reynolds at 971-673-1173.

Informant on the death certificate
Recently it has been noticed that some funeral homes have confusion about what to enter for the informant’s name and their relationship to the decedent. Most often the name of an informant on a death certificate is an individual who personally knew the decedent. But, there are times when a personal informant cannot be identified.

It is important to have an informant’s name on a death certificate. The informant is the person to contact if there are questions regarding personal facts about the decedent. In cases where there is no informant who personally knew the decedent, the informant may be the police officer, medical examiner, or facility staff person who notifies the funeral home of the death. The informant cannot be listed as a “medical record”, or an assisted living, funeral home or funeral director.

The name of the informant and their relationship to the decedent is required on the death certificate. For example, if the informant were a police officer, the informant would be listed on the death certificate as follows:

- Line 25, Informant’s Name: enter the name of the police officer (“Joe Smith”).
- Line 27, Relationship to Decedent: enter “Police Officer”.
- Line 28, Mailing Address: enter the address of the police station.

Correctly listing the informant on the death certificate helps ensure faster processing of death records and means less time is spent fixing errors. If you have further questions please call Cynthia Roeser at 971-673-0478.

New law for veterans’ certificates
The suicide rate for veterans has had a great deal of publicity in the last few years. The 2011 Oregon Legislature recently passed House Bill 3611 which includes a provision to collect information on whether the decedent served in combat and if so, in what country, for all deaths to veterans where the manner of death was suicide.

The Veterans’ Affairs Committee in the House, led by Representative Esquivel,
promoted the bill that was sponsored by 42 representatives and 12 senators. These two questions will appear in the electronic death system, but will not appear on paper records, including certified copies. The new law takes effect January 1, 2012.

The Center for Health Statistics has decided to collect responses for these two additional questions on all death records when the decedent served in the U.S. armed forces. This decision is based on two considerations. First, the manner of death has not always been determined before the funeral director completes the personal information on the death certificate. Second, information on all veterans will be useful in studying the occurrence of suicides. It is important to have as complete information as possible on such a serious issue.

The Center for Health Statistics has several tasks to prepare for implementation of House Bill 3611. Instructions for completing the death record will be updated and new worksheets will be developed with the additional questions. We will work with our vendor to add the two questions to the electronic system. These will initially be a ‘soft-edit’ that assures the questions will not be inadvertently missed, but allows the funeral director to proceed without the information if the information cannot be obtained within the time period for filing the death certificate.

The questions will not be added to paper certificates, but the information will still need to be collected. Therefore, we will ask all funeral homes to complete records in OVERS for all deaths occurring to veterans. Completing records in OVERS supports the most complete and timely collection of information. If you are not currently using the OVERS system for death records and believe this would be a problem for your funeral home, please contact JoAnn Jackson, Registration Manager, to discuss alternatives.

**How many records will this affect?**
Fifty-five percent of male decedents served in the armed forces. Twenty-nine percent of all death certificates indicate the decedent served in the armed forces. Based on these percentages, more than 9,000 records annually will need the additional information. Providing this new information on death certificates is one small way we can support the men and women who served in our armed forces.

**Reducing death record errors**

We need your assistance to reduce the increasing number of errors found on death records submitted for registration. For example, registration usually corrects an average of 475 personal errors per month. This increased to an average of 610 personal errors per month starting in March, a 28% increase.

We are finding more items mistakenly left blank, as well as more errors in names, dates (Continued on page 7)
of death, addresses, and Social Security Numbers. Examples of errors we are seeing include, but are not limited to:

- Discrepancies in spelling of names that appear more than once on the record;
- Obvious misspellings of streets, towns, and counties;
- Dates that have the wrong format (correct format: June 30, 2011, not 6/30/11) or are mistyped;
- Listing actual company names instead of industries;

Correcting errors before records are submitted is more efficient and will allow us to process records faster. Families would prefer records without footnotes and to receive certificates sooner. Reducing errors will also save you time in requesting amendments and replacement certificates. Your assistance in improving error rates is appreciated.

Changes to SSA verification procedures

Over the past several months, we have heard from funeral directors who use OVERS that local Social Security Administration (SSA) offices are requesting 721 forms on death records that were already verified through OVERS. In May of this year, Oregon initiated a discussion with SSA representatives to determine why this was happening and to look for a solution that would work for all parties.

When a death certificate reaches personal valid status in OVERS, it is included in an electronic file sent by the State Vital Records office to SSA at the end of the day. The majority of the records in the SSA verification files are processed automatically and present no problem. However, some records are rejected from SSA’s system and must be resolved individually, sometimes with a substantial delay from the family’s perspective.

These delays occur for two reasons. First, SSA has not yet developed a process to quickly identify and process death notifications that do not match SSA records. Second, the SSA has separate databases for Social Security Number verifications and for payments. Records that pass verification still may not match the information in the payments system used by local SSA offices to stop benefits to the deceased and start benefits for surviving family members.

SSA is working to improve the processes to serve families more effectively. In the interim they have requested that you send a 721 form to the local SSA office only if you are contacted by a local office about an individual decedent or if you do not see a ‘Passed’ result after clicking on the verify SSN link in OVERS. This should be an infrequent occurrence. Sending a 721 form to the local SSA office in these instances is a courtesy to the family.

(Continued on page 8)
If you receive a result from the OVERS SSA verification process other than ‘Passed’, please continue completing the electronic death record. Do not delay the death certificate while waiting for the family to verify the accuracy of Social Security Number, legal name, date of birth and gender of the decedent.

Complete injury reporting is critical to improving public health
(Reprinted from the March 2011 edition of Matters of Record)

The medical certifier should complete injury information any time a fall and/or other injury is related to the chain of events that results in death. This includes falls by elderly persons either before or after going to a hospital, nursing home, or hospice. Injuries also include overdoses of over-the-counter or prescription medications, or alcohol poisoning. The medical certifier contacts the Medical Examiner’s office as soon as possible whenever an injury is known so the Medical Examiner can determine whether to take control of the case.

Death certificates are a very valuable source of information for improving public health practice because they are collected on all deaths in the United States. To create an accurate picture of the causes of mortality in the United States, Oregon and each county, it is important that death certificates include all available information on injuries that, in the medical opinion of the certifier, contributed to death.

A funeral director should never ask a medical certifier to omit or change information included in the cause of death to avoid a Medical Examiner referral. Medical certifiers should consider not just the age of the injury, but other factors as well. Injuries from auto accidents that occurred 20 years ago may be relevant to a complete description of the cause of death, as could a fall by an elderly person prior to contracting pneumonia.

Though Oregon law requires the Medical Examiner to investigate and certify deaths that occur under suspicious or unknown circumstances (ORS 146.090), the Medical Examiner decides whether to accept a case. When the Medical Examiner accepts a case, he or she completes the cause of death information and, if relevant, the injury information, and signs and dates the death certificate.

When the Medical Examiner declines to investigate a case and complete the death certificate, a medical certifier must complete the death certificate as fully as possible. This

(Continued on page 9)
must include any injury information in the cause of death section and on the injury page. The medical certifier should use their own judgment in reporting the chain of events that resulted in death.

If a Medical Examiner becomes aware of a death involving an injury and they want the death certificate to be changed, he or she should complete a replacement death certificate rather than requiring the medical certifier to change the original information.

Oregon law states that the Medical Examiner shall investigate deaths that are apparently accidental or follow an injury. However, if the Medical Examiner declines to accept the case, the injury information is still required and should be as complete as possible. If relevant to the chain of events that resulted in death, injury information should be included on the death certificate. Injury information must be completed anytime the manner is accidental.


Joe Carney
The Center for Health Statistics was recently informed that Joe Carney died on Tuesday, July 19th. Joe Carney was the State Registrar for Vital Records in Oregon from 1980 to 1987. He was also State Registrar in West Virginia and Colorado being the only person who has held that role in three separate states. Professionally, Joe contributed both nationally and internationally to the advancement of vital statistics. He served as a vital statistics improvement consultant in South America and assisted the National Center for Health Statistics and the states in obtaining significant additional funds from Congress to advance the Vital Statistics Cooperative Program. Joe had a great sense of humor and always had a joke ready for any occasion. He will be missed by colleagues and friends.
Wanted—Newsletter topics
Have a question or idea for a future newsletter article? Contact Judy Shioshi at 971-673-1166 or Judy.Shioshi@state.or.us. Judy collects ideas for articles and then shares them with the writing team.

Thank you to the contributors of this newsletter:
Alicia Parkman, Karen Hampton, Patty Thompson, Kerry Lionadh, Cynthia Roeser, Carol Sanders, Ember Talent, JoAnn Jackson, Joyce Grant-Worley, Karen Rangan, Patricia Stinson, Jennifer Woodward, and Lynda Jackson.

We’re just a phone call way
Our helpful team is happy to help when you have questions. The contact sheet that was delivered with this newsletter offers a complete listing of Center for Health Statistics employees who can assist you with any vital records question you may have.

Have a question? Try asking one of the helpful CHS staff listed below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Frequent Contacts</th>
<th>CHS Managers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Cause of Death</strong></td>
<td><strong>State Registrar</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Melissa Franklin</td>
<td>Jennifer Woodward 971-673-1185</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>971-673-1144</td>
<td><strong>Amendments/Certification Manager</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Death Corrections</strong></td>
<td>Carol Sanders 971-673-1178</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Patty Thompson</td>
<td><strong>Statistics Manager</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>971-673-1163</td>
<td>Joyce Grant-Worley 971-673-1156</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Field Liaison</strong></td>
<td><strong>Registration Manager</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Judy Shioshi</td>
<td>JoAnn Jackson 971-673-1160</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>971-673-1166</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The Center for Health Statistics’ office is located at:
800 N.E. Oregon St., Suite 225
Portland, OR  97232-2162
Mailing Address: P.O. Box 14050
Portland, OR  97293-0050
Telephone # 971-673-1190
