

Matters of Record

News from the Center for Health Statistics Concerning the Oregon Death Certificate

Winter 2006

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New Death Certificate Forms

Oregon has changed the death certificate form for 2006 to meet federal reporting requirements. The Federal requirements have been in place since 2003, but states were not required to adopt the new certificates until they changed systems (re-engineered). Since we are starting our new Electronic Death Registration System (EDRS) in 2006, we are also changing the death certificate at this time. New forms must be used for deaths that occur in 2006. Deaths that occurred in 2005 must be reported on the old form.



You should now have the new forms in your hands, along with instructions and work sheets. The new death certificate includes multiple-race reporting and the contact information for the informant. With space at a premium, the form will be more difficult to use with a typewriter. We recognize the difficulty and have created a fillable PDF that can be printed on specific paper and filed with the county vital records office.

The certified copies of the new EDRS death certificate will also look slightly different. Certified copies won't include all of the information reported, primarily due to space and font size needs. Certified copies will be produced from the electronic system, as EDRS is rolled out to the counties and the records are registered at the state office.

Fetal Deaths and Infant Deaths

There have been several questions recently about when a death certificate is needed for a baby. There is a very important distinction between an infant death and a fetal death. The legal definitions appear at the end of this article. Essentially, a baby who is born alive, even if the baby lives for a few seconds only, must have a birth certificate and a death certificate. This is an example of an infant death. Live born status is determined at the time of birth by medical professionals, based on the legal definition of birth. Both a birth certificate and a death certificate are required by law regardless of the birth weight or gestation of the baby.

Fetal Death Reports – When a fetal death occurs as defined by ORS 432.005(5), a fetal death report must be completed and filed. If the birth weight of the fetus is 350 grams or more, a fetal death report must be filed. Only if birth weight is unknown is the gestation of the fetus used to determine if a report must be filed. If gestation is 20 weeks or more, a fetal death report must be filed. The report should be sent to either the county vital records office, or to the State office.

If the birth weight is less than 350 grams or birth weight is unknown and gestation is less than 20 weeks, a fetal death report is optional. The birth attendant or medical facility is responsible for filing the fetal death report.

Transport of the fetus – Regardless of whether a fetal death report is required to be filed, the disposal-transit permit

must be completed for any fetus removed from the medical facility.

The disposal-transit permit is the second sheet of the fetal death report and is used by funeral directors, cemeteries, and crematoriums to document the receipt, transport and final disposition of the fetus.

A burial or cremation tag must also be used for fetal deaths if the fetus is removed from the delivery facility. The facility will need this information from the funeral director to complete the disposal-transit permit.

Definitions:

ORS 432.005 (5) “Fetal death” means death prior to the complete expulsion or extraction from its mother of a product of human conception, irrespective of the duration of pregnancy. The death is indicated by the fact that after such expulsion or extraction the fetus does not breathe or show any other evidence of life such as beating of the heart, pulsation of the umbilical cord or definite movement of the voluntary muscles.

ORS 432.005 (10) “Live birth” means the complete expulsion or extraction from its mother of a product of human conception, irrespective of the duration of pregnancy, that, after such expulsion or extraction, breathes or shows any other evidence of life such as beating of the heart, pulsation of the umbilical cord or definite movement of voluntary muscles, whether or not the umbilical cord has been cut or the placenta is attached.

“Infant death” is a death that occurs during a child’s first year, measured from a few seconds after birth through the 364th day of life.

Copies of the Death Certificate

According to ORS 432.121 (1) "it shall be unlawful for any person to permit inspection of, or to disclose information from vital records or vital reports in the custody of the State Registrar of the Center for Health Statistics or local registrar, or to copy or issue a copy of all or part of any such record or report unless authorized by this chapter."

Do not copy death certificates that have been registered by the state or county for your files. Once registered, the death certificate becomes an official vital record in the custody of the Center for Health Statistics or the local vital records office, and clearly falls under the above statute. If you need a copy for your records, the certificate must be copied before it is registered. And it should be clearly noted on the face of the copy that it is a 'working copy'.

Copying the death certificate for anyone – including the decedent's family members – is not permitted.

This also applies to faxing the death certificate to insurance companies or other businesses. This causes confusion about what is an official record and what can be used for legal needs. A funeral home may not copy and distribute the death certificate. In most cases, photocopying the intaglio paper used for the death certificate will yield a copy that says "VOID COPY".

New Field Liaison

We are very sorry to announce that Ami Keiffer, Vital Records Field Liaison, has left CHS. Ami had the opportunity to attend Washington State University's master's program in interior architecture. We appreciated her hard work and good humor. Although Ami was with us for less than a year, she visited many of you, traveling to twenty-three of our thirty-six counties in six months. She leaves for Spokane with our thanks and best wishes for her future.

Kelly Paige started as the new Field Liaison for Vital Records on November 1, 2005.



Kelly holds a Master's degree in business administration, and has extensive experience with the State of Oregon, having worked for public

health in Health Care Licensure & Certification, and with the WIC program. Most recently Kelly served as the executive director of the Board of Investigators, which was responsible for licensing and regulating private investigators in the state of Oregon. We are very pleased to have Kelly in this important role. Please join us in welcoming her when she visits you in the coming year.

Forms

A Death Certificate Fillable PDF is now available. This file is for funeral facilities responsible for filing death certificates. You must have Adobe Acrobat Reader 6.0 or higher to use this PDF. Page 1 is printed on form 45-2B; Pages 2 & 3 are printed on plain 8.5 x 11 or 8.5 x 14 paper. An order form for the PDF is enclosed.

To order additional copies or the most current version of any vital records form, please mail or fax DHS Form 45-43 (1/06) to Linda Reynolds at (971) 673-1201. Call Linda (971) 673-1173 with any questions about availability or the most current version of forms.

When ordering forms, please remember to list your street address, not a P.O. Box. All of our forms are shipped UPS, which requires a street address. If a mailing address is sent, the order will be delayed while we contact you for the appropriate street address.

Instructions on how to complete the new death certificate, a death certificate worksheet, an order form for the fillable PDF; and the race/education/marital status cards are on our website at:



<http://egov.oregon.gov/DHS/ph/chs/registration/instructions.shtml>

EDRS Update

There have been many things happening with the Electronic Death Registration System (EDRS) and the project team has been very busy. All of the hardware and software has been received and installed and is now online. Currently, user-acceptance testing is being performed to ensure the software meets Oregon's requirements and will be ready for pilot testing. At the same time, the project team have been reviewing and developing new internal workflows for use with the new system. They have also developed the project plans to determine the impact of

these changes, as well as the communication and training needed to make EDRS successful.

The next major event is pilot testing. CHS staff will be trained on the system near the end of January and begin using it in the first week of February.

The three pilot counties (Lane, Tillamook and Washington) will be trained and begin using the system at the end of February or the beginning of March and continue pilot testing until the end of April. The results of pilot testing will be evaluated and any necessary changes made to the system before statewide rollout begins in June.

The next edition of *OVERS News* will be coming out soon and contains much more information about the status of EDRS. For the latest about the project, you can also check out the OVERS website at: <http://www.oregon.gov/DHS/ph/overs/>

Injury Information on the Death Certificate

Injury information must be completed any time the cause of death is other than 'Natural'. In addition, a previous injury may be a contributing factor to a "natural" death. In some cases of natural manner, the injury information might be completed by either the Medical Examiner or a medical certifier. Medical certifiers should complete this information for a natural manner of death if connected to conditions reported in Item 51 ("other significant conditions contributing to death"). For example, a person may die from a staph infection contracted in a hospital, but the hospital stay itself might be the result of a fall in the home.

It is still acceptable for medical certifiers to report the manner of death as ‘Accident’ if the Medical Examiner was contacted and declined the case. Injury information should absolutely be reported in those instances.

The state vital records office has a query process to follow-up whenever further clarification is needed, including:

- When the manner of death is marked “Accident” and the Medical Examiner was not contacted;
- When the manner of death is marked “Natural” and specific conditions in Item 51 appear to be injury-related.
- When more specific information is needed for classification, such as the primary cancer site and type.

At this time we are asking funeral directors and county vital records’ staff to screen the death certificate for information that is facially invalid or missing. For example, if the medical certifier writes “I don’t know” for the cause of death, please follow-up with the medical certifier before filing the certificate.

Please do not ask medical certifiers to remove injury information from items 55 through 61 if it is included on the certificate, the cause of death is “natural”, and there is injury information in Item 51. The injury information is important for research and public health surveillance.

For more information, contact:
Karen Hampton (971) 673-1160);
Terrie Bollinger (971) 673-1144); or
Jennifer Woodward (971) 673-1185)

Frequently Asked Questions about the New Death Certificate:



Q: What if I don’t know the Date of Disposition?

A: This item (#39) may be left blank if the final disposition hasn’t occurred prior to filing the death certificate.

Q: How do I determine the decedent’s race, education, and marital status?

A: Use the double-sided cards that were included in your packet of materials, and ask a family member to choose the appropriate categories. [Extra cards are enclosed.]

Q: To what date does Item 66 (“Date Certified”) refer?

A: The date the death certificate was signed by the medical certifier.

Q: Why can’t I fill in the medical portion of the PDF version of the death certificate?

A: Legally, the medical certifier or Medical Examiner is responsible for completing these items. Only the name and address of the medical certifier may be filled in by the funeral director on the PDF version.

Q: What type of address should go in Item 62?

A: The office address; not a mailing or P.O. Box address.

Q: Why does the cause of death information appear on the second sheet (final disposition to county) and third sheet (final disposition to cemetery/crematory) of the new death certificate forms?

A: The forms were printed as NCR forms. We have requested that future printings exclude this portion of the certificate on the third (cemetery/cremation) sheet so that the cause of death information will not appear.

Q: What portion of the PDF form is the medical certifier required to fill out?

A: If using the PDF form, the medical certifiers must complete Item 62 and Items 64 through 66, and sign at Item 67 (or 68 if a medical examiner) on all three pages. Items 46 through 61 must be completed on the death certificate (purple striped sheet) only. Cause of death information does not need to be copied. Alternatively, carbon paper could be placed between final disposition for the county and sexton so that the medical certifier would only need to sign twice.

If alternative disposition has occurred, the medical certifier will only receive the death certificate (purple-striped sheet) to complete and sign. The funeral director will have already completed the additional information on both the final disposition for the county and for the sexton.

Q: What do I put in Item 30 if the Adult Foster Home does not have a “facility” name?

A: Adult Foster Homes do not generally have formal business names. If the decedent dies in a licensed AFH, Item 30

may be blank. The address in Items 31-34 will identify the specific facility.

Q: Why is the medical certifier’s license number necessary in Item 65?

A: We are now collecting the medical certifier’s professional license number. This is a national requirement that Oregon will use to speed data entry, and to ensure that slight differences in how a name is written (e.g., T.R. Nelson, Theodore Nelson, and Ted Nelson) don’t inadvertently create duplicate data providers within the system.

Q: Why is the informant now asked to give his or her mailing address and phone number?

A: The mailing address or phone number of the informant is used to contact the informant when inquiries must be made to correct or complete any items on the death certificate. This information is also useful for registration/certification processing and linkage/genealogical purposes.

The informant’s mailing address is a required field on the federal “Standard Form”. If an informant refuses to divulge his or her phone number (Item 26) or mailing address (Item 28), state “Refused” in those fields.

Q: What is the date of disposition when the body is removed from Oregon for burial or cremation?

A: Since removal from state is considered the final disposition in Oregon, the date the body was shipped should be listed in Item 39.

For example, if *place* of final disposition is a crematory in Washington, *method* of disposition should be removal from state.