

PACKET V: END OF LIFE

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Preplanning for my final resting place and services:

Pre-planning for your body. If you decide to donate an organ or give your whole body, your family will receive your remains, usually cremated, within about a month.

Consider becoming an organ donor: Organ donation begins with a person who recognizes an opportunity to help others, enrolls in a state donor registry and shares the decision to be a donor with family members and friends. All individuals can indicate their intent to donate (persons younger than 18 years of age must have a parent or guardian's consent). You should consider yourself a potential organ and tissue donor, indicate your intent to donate on your driver's license, donor card, or state donor registry and discuss your decision with family members.

Transplant professionals will evaluate the condition of your organs at the time of your death and determine if your organs are suitable for donation. The culmination of the process occurs when the person donates—and saves or enhances the lives of as many as eight people who need an organ transplant.

Costs related to donation are paid by the recipient, usually through insurance, Medicare or Medicaid. You or your family pays for your medical and funeral costs.

In the United States the Health Resources and Services Administration of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services has oversight of the Organ Procurement and Transplantation Network (OPTN).

optn.transplant.hrsa.gov

Consider donating your whole body to research: Physicians, researchers and educators rely on generous donors to conduct the most realistic research possible. Through their affiliation with Biogift and Science Care, the Cremation Society of Alaska offers clients the ability to contribute their whole body to science. The Society will direct the family to the program best suited for their wishes and with the highest probability of acceptance, given the person's medical and social history. There is no cost for this service. What is unused is cremated and the remains are returned to the family. <http://www.alaskacremation.com/>

You or your next of kin must give an informed consent to donate your body to science. If more than one legal next of kin exists (i.e. mother/father or siblings), all must be in agreement with the full body donation though only one of the legal next of kin are required to complete the official authorization.

If you have donated an organ you are no longer eligible for donating your whole body to research. You may wish to read: *Informed Consent: What You Should Know When Donating Your Body*, <http://www.funerals.org/>; BioGift, <http://www.biogift.org/>; or Science Care, <http://www.sciencecare.com/>

Preplanning your funeral: Unlike most other states, Alaska has no law giving citizens the right to expect their funeral or memorial wishes to be honored nor the right to appoint someone to act as their agent. However, there are many advantages to expressing your wishes for all or parts of your funeral or memorial. Preplanning can reduce the strain on family members and friends, but flexibility should be left in the planning for unforeseen circumstances and to allow family members or friends to partake in creating a meaningful ceremony.

If you want to be cremated, Alaska law requires that you complete a form authorizing cremation. The form can be obtained from a funeral home or the Cremation Society of Alaska at toll free, 877-283-1753.

Decisions you might like to make in advance:

- Do you want to be an organ donor? See the section Organ Donation in this packet.
- Do you want to donate your whole body to science? See the Preplanning for your body section in this packet.
- Do you want to make and pay for a reservation in the Valdez Cemetery for your body? Contact the Office of the Valdez Cemetery Manager, 907-835-2531.
- Do you want to make and pay for a reservation for inurnment in the columbarium? Contact the Office of the Valdez Cemetery Manager, 907-835-2531.
- Do you want to pay the fee for the installation of a headstone? Contact the Office of the Valdez Cemetery Manager, 907-835-2531.

- Do you want your ashes scattered some place special?
- Do you want your body or ashes to be buried at sea? See the Burial at Sea section in this packet.
- Do you want your ashes scattered from a plane? See Scattering cremated remains in this packet.
- Do you want a minister to conduct a funeral or memorial service for you? If so, you might speak with him in advance about your preferences for music, readings, eulogies, open mikes, refreshments afterwards, remembrances, etc. What are his guidelines and recommendations?
- Do you want to prepay for the funeral home or crematorium expenses? Prefunding your ceremony will allow family and friends to participate without the worry of financial obligations, such as flying the body to Anchorage and back. Most funeral homes have prepaid plans but check on the exceptions.
- Suppose you die elsewhere? For additional information see the article *Dangers of Prepaying* at <http://www.funerals.org/frequently-asked-questions/198-preneedpitfalls>.

Decisions you may wish to express your preferences on include:

- Do you prefer to be buried in Valdez within the 72 hour limit or embalmed and buried after a funeral or cremated? See the Burial and cremation section in this packet.
- If the majority of your family and friends are in another location, do you want your ashes or body shipped there for the funeral or dispersal?
- Do you want a funeral in one place and a memorial service somewhere else?
- Do you prefer a funeral ceremony with your body present, a brief graveside service, or scattering of the ashes?
- If cremated do you want your ashes to be present at the service then put in the Valdez Cemetery columbarium or scattered in some place special?
- Do you prefer a memorial service?
- Do you prefer a funeral?
- Who do you want to conduct the ceremony? A minister, friend, family member?
- If a minister is conducting the ceremony, speak to him as you begin planning your service. What scriptures, other readings and music would you like?
- Who would you like to invite to give a eulogy? A pastor, friends, family?
- Do you want an open-mike? A time limit? What is the minister's policy?
- Do you want the memorial ceremony in a church or somewhere else such as on a boat, at Thompson Pass, at the Civic Center, etc.?
- Do you want a reception afterwards? Potluck or catered?
- What types of remembrances would you like — flowers for the funeral, trees planted or a trail cleared, donations to the museum, food bank, Providence hospital, or some other charity? The list is virtually endless.

Suggestions to those who plan for me after I am gone:

1. Please notify my family and friends, who are as listed in the Personal Information packet, of my death.
2. All my personal and medical information that you might need is located in *Packet I: Personal Information*.
3. My lawyer is:

4. My funeral director is:

5. I have prepaid for the funeral home/cremation expenses. The receipt is located:

6. I have set up a Totten Trust at my bank _____ to make money available for my funeral. The trust beneficiary will be paid on my death prior to reading the will or probate. It is my intention that the trust money used is to cover any expenses associated with carrying out my preferences for final ceremonies.
(Name) _____ is my beneficiary.
7. I have indicated a preference with _____ that my body and/or organs be donated for medical research. Please contact _____ for information.
8. Unless in conflict with the legal rights of others, I desire that the preferences that I have expressed in writing are given special consideration. If I have not left written preferences, then I desire that the preferences of _____, my (relationship) _____, shall be given special consideration in connection with the ceremonial arrangements. If this is not possible, then I designate _____ (relationship) _____
9. My preferred clergyman is:

10. My preferred place for the funeral ___ or memorial ___ ceremony is:

11. I desire that final disposition shall be _____ burial in _____
Where I do _____, or _____ do not _____ have space.

12. Entombment _____ Where? _____

13. Cremation disposition: Columbarium at Valdez Cemetery

Where I do _____ do not _____ have space.

14. Burial at sea: _____

15. Ashes scattered preferably at: _____

16. I suggest that memorial gifts be made to: _____

Or _____

About my estate:

17. I have ____ or have not ____ prepared a Totten Trust at (bank)

_____ in lieu of a will.

(Name) _____ is the beneficiary.

18. I have ____ or I have not ____ executed a will. If "yes" it is dated:

_____ and will be found: _____

19. My executor is: _____

Phone: _____

20. I have safety deposit Box #: _____ in (bank) _____

21. Or located at: _____

22. It is held jointly with: _____

23. Valuable papers not in this box will probably be found:

In subscribing to all the foregoing, I state that I have set forth these suggestions only in a spirit of helpfulness. I recognize that it is impossible for me to anticipate accurately all the circumstances that might affect any ceremonies for me. Therefore, I specifically direct that the preferences of my preferred choice for ceremonial arrangements in consultation with my family shall prevail.

Date: _____ Signature: _____

If I have no surviving family. I specifically direct that the preferences of my preferred choice for ceremonial arrangements in consultation with the following friends shall prevail.

Date: _____ Signature: _____

Checklist for bereaved family members:

1. Important papers and contact information should be in *the Packet I: Personal Information* and this packet. Read through them to familiarize yourself with the information available. For example, you will need to know the spouse's mother's maiden name to fill-out the death certificate.

2. If the deceased was a veteran:

- Certificate of Honorable Discharge: If a Certificate of Honorable (or other than dishonorable) Discharge is not available in the important papers, call the Veteran's Administration, 1-800-827-1000.
- You may qualify for help with funeral and burial expenses as well as monthly payments. Check with the Anchorage Regional Office, 1201 North Muldoon Road, Anchorage, AK 99504; 1-800-827-1000.
<http://www2.va.gov/directory/guide/facility.asp?ID=233>

3. **Social Security survivor's benefits:** Check with the Social Security office in Anchorage to see if the deceased qualified for death benefit toward burial expenses or for survivor's benefits for the spouse or children, 1-800-772-1213, <http://www.ssa.gov/pgm/getservices-apply.htm>

You will need:

- Birth and death certificates of the deceased
- Marriage certificate of the spouse
- Social security numbers
- Copy of the deceased's most recent federal income tax return

4. **If the deceased was an Alaskan native:**

- If the deceased was a Chugach native, contact the Chugach Corporation Burial Assistance Program, 907-550-4161.
- If the deceased was an Alaskan native, burial assistance may be available from the Bureau of Indian Affairs General Assistance program. The program pays \$1,250 for basic burial services, which include preparation and embalming, the casket and funeral home services. In limited circumstances it pays for transportation.

5. **If the deceased was a senior with limited income** the Alaska General Relief Assistance may be able to provide funds. For an application, visit <http://www.hss.state.ak.us/dpa/programs/gra>. In Valdez they are also generally available at the Alaska Jobs Center in the State Office Building. The form is also available <http://www.bbna.com/applications-forms/General-Relief-Assistance-Cremation-Burial-App.pdf>

6. **Check to see if the deceased's employer and/or union have:**

- Pay check
- Accrued vacation or sick leave that can be added to the pay check
- Any death benefits
- Payments from a pension plan. It's a good idea to check with any past employers including local, state and federal governments to see if you are entitled to any payments from a pension plan.

7. **Reconstructing your life:**

- Read the will and/or Totten Trust. How do they affect you financially?
- Contact your accountant about taxes including federal estate, state estate and inheritance taxes and income taxes. Obtain a copy of the IRS booklet 559: Information for Survivors, Executors and Administrators.
- Cancel the deceased person's credit cards. Keep and pay joint credit cards to maintain your credit rating.
- Contact your stockbroker about the types of accounts the deceased held and how they will be handled for tax and inheritance purposes.
- Was medical insurance through the deceased? Check to see if this will continue or if you need to obtain your own policy.

- Check with your bank(s) to change title and signature card of accounts jointly owned with the deceased.
 - If the deceased was the sole owner of an account, then it will have to go through probate.
 - If the deceased was the sole designee of a safe deposit box, then a court order is necessary to open the box.
- Check with the Alaska State Department of Motor Vehicles, 835-2443, to check if the title of a car owned fully or jointly with you needs to be changed.
- Check the list of payments due on mortgages, utilities, phone bills, insurance, etc. and make sure to pay them on time. If there is an estate executor and these were paid out of the deceased's accounts, then ask to have funds to pay for these.
- Cancel all memberships, magazines, cell phones, etc. that was solely in the deceased's name, if they are no longer needed.
- Modify your living will, financial power of attorney and will if necessary.
- Fill in or update your own Personal Information Packet.

When passing of a loved one occurs in Valdez:

- The body is placed in the Providence Valdez Medical Center morgue
- Physician signs the Death Certificate or reports to the Medical Examiner's Office if autopsy is necessary. See section on SME in this packet.
- Next of kin, or designated agent, completes and signs death certificate. The death certificate is filed with the local register within three days and prior to disposition of the body.
- Next of kin contacts a funeral home and makes arrangements (see information in this packet) or makes arrangements for local burial within 72 hours. Contact the City of Valdez, Parks Department, Office of the Cemetery, 907-835-2531. Leave a message at 835-2531 to meet the required 48 hours advance notice before burial and 72 hours from time of death.
- Next of kin makes arrangements for burial at sea. This is generally best done within 72 hours. See information in this packet.
- Family must notify the hospital of selected funeral home or if other burial arrangements have been made. The hospital will communicate with the funeral home.
- Funeral home or next of kin obtain Burial Transit Permit at Providence Valdez Medical Center.
- Death Certificate and Burial Transit Permit must accompany the body to the funeral home via air (air casket on loan from hospital), or:
 - with next of kin (or designee) to funeral home by car
 - to cemetery in Valdez (burial notification must be given at least 48 hours in advance and completed within 72 hours of death)
 - to boat for burial at sea
- Funeral home returns body or urn to family in Valdez for funeral in church, burial, scattering of ashes and funeral/or memorial service
- Or body goes to Medical Examiner's Office for autopsy then to either the next of kin or funeral home. This may take two weeks or longer.
- By state law, Life Alaska will be contacting family regarding donation possibilities. If the loved one has already signed the organ donor or whole body donor paperwork, then the hospital will send the body to the appropriate authority.

When death occurs – burial and cremation:

Organ donation: If your loved one has chosen to participate in the state organ transplant program, Providence Valdez Medical Center will make the appropriate arrangements. The body or ashes will be returned to the family in about a month. Costs related to donation are paid by the recipient, usually through insurance, Medicare or Medicaid. You or your family pay for your medical and funeral costs.

Whole body donation: If your loved one has donated their whole body contact the appropriate organization. This is generally the Cremation Society of Alaska, 877-283-1753. If a suitable recipient is found, the ashes will be returned to the family in

about a month. There is no cost for this service. What is unused is cremated and the remains are returned to the family.

Memorial service (local burial without embalming): No Alaska law requires the use of a funeral director for the deposition of a body. You can save thousands of dollars by immediately burying your loved one in the Valdez Cemetery or by a burial at sea. The Valdez Cemetery requires 48-hour notice. The body must be buried within 72 hours of death.

You can use a casket or sturdy body bag. It is best to have a casket made in advance, although skilled woodworkers can make a casket in three to four hours. A graveside service can be held and a memorial service held later.

Information on prices and burial arrangements for the Valdez Cemetery and Columbarium: Immediate burial in Valdez: Burial in the Valdez Cemetery without embalming must occur within 72 hours of death. The Office of the Valdez Cemetery Manager, 907-835-2531 or 835-4440, must be notified 48 hours in advance of burial.

Arrange for transportation of the deceased to the cemetery and for the appropriate number of pallbearers to move the casket or body bag from the transportation vehicle to the lowering site on the plot.

Contact the Office of the Valdez Cemetery Manager, 907-835-2531 for information about prices and the form for reserving a gravesite, headstone or marker specifications for an inurnment of an urn in a plot, columbarium inurnment reservation deposit schedule, inurnment requirements for plaques, niche and required brass plaque: companion niche, headstone installation fee, etc. This is best taken care of in advance.

Body bags and unionalls: Body bags and unionalls can be used in place of a casket. A unionall is like a snowsuit but the head is exposed with the unionall secured firmly around the neck. The hands and feet are enclosed. The state medical examiner's office generally uses unionalls in returning a body to the family. Body bags are usually used in burials at sea with weights inside or attached. Both can be purchased online from funeral or mortuary supply stores. They are considerably lighter and less expensive than caskets.

Funeral home—embalming and cremation: Alaska's laws permit disposing of a body without embalming (AS.08.42.020). However, if death is from a highly communicable disease, ask a physician about appropriate precautionary measures. Embalming is also necessary if the body is to be kept in a casket for a period of time prior to burial. Usually embalming is used if the body is to be kept longer than 72 hours prior to a funeral service (embalmed body present in casket). If a memorial service (no body) is going to be held, then the body can be buried within 72 hours and embalming serves no useful purpose.

Alaska’s law require crematoriums to be under a funeral director’s administration. A local medical examiner or magistrate must grant permission for cremation.

If the deceased has not pre-authorized cremation on the appropriate form (see how to get form under Preplanning for your funeral section), then authorization by the next of kin is required. Next of kin is determined in the following order: 1) surviving spouse, 2) adult children, 3) parents, 4) adult siblings, 5) guardian or person in charge. If there is no surviving spouse some crematories require the consent of all adult children, whereas others such as the Cremation Society of Alaska only require one signature. If the next of kin live out-of-state, it will be more convenient if this is obtained prior to the loved one’s death to reduce the cost of the funeral home holding the body while awaiting the completion of paperwork.

Crematories insist that a pacemaker be removed, which they can do. Most crematories remove and keep all gold fillings. They consider this part of their reimbursement. Cremated remains may be disposed of as you wish. No Alaskan laws govern their disposal.

Funeral homes:

Alaska Casket and Monuments	888-860-7890
Alaska Cremation Center (also Evergreen Memorial Chapel) Contact: Debbie (Janssen Funeral Home)	907-279-3741 888-268-5477
Alaska Heritage Memorial Chapel and Crematory Contact: Bob	907-336-3338
Anchorage Funeral Home Contact: David	800-478-3353 907-345-2244
Chapel of Chimes Funeral Home (Fairbanks)	907-456-5566
Cook Inlet Funeral Home and Cremation Contact: Devone, Dominick	907-277-2777 907-770-3705
Cremation Society of Alaska (toll free) Contact: Devone	877-283-1753 907-277-2777
Eagle River Funeral Home	907-696-3741
Jewish Funeral Society Contact: Rabbi	907-279-1200
Kehl’s Forest Lawn Mortuary and Crematory	907-344-1497

Contact: David

Kehl's Palmer Mortuary and Cremation	907-745-3580
Valley Funeral Home and Crematory	907-373-3344
Witzelben Family Funeral Homes	907-277-1682

Selecting a funeral home: We know that someday we will die. It is best to discuss your wishes for a funeral or memorial service with family members ahead of time and to consider making prior arrangements. By exploring your options and preferences with your family you can help them in their grief and let them know what would be most meaningful to you.

Price shopping can save thousands of dollars. Legally, funeral homes are required to give you prices over the phone or hand you a *General Price List*. The *General Price List* should show their least expensive casket. If you visit the funeral home and the least expensive casket is not on display, ask about it. Alternative containers are not normally on display. The *General Price List* must also state that alternative containers, such as those made of cardboard, are available for cremation. The *General Price List* gives itemized prices and package prices. They are required to list the basic service fee, embalming charge, cost of picking up the body, the price of viewing, the price of funeral or memorial services, the cost of funeral vehicles and other goods and services. If you are not planning to have a funeral or memorial service at the funeral home, then be sure it is not included in a package deal.

If you shop for funeral services after death occurs, consider asking a friend to help you to avoid purchasing expensive items in a hurry or out of guilt. Remember, you can make your own casket or buy one on line.

Funeral home expenses: Funeral directors are business people who deserve to be paid for their work. However, costs vary considerably between the funeral homes. For example, the Cremation Society of Alaska's prices for cremation are about half of some of the others. When possible it is best to compare prices and select a service prior to death.

Prepaying: In some cases one can prepay for funeral or cremation arrangements. If you do this, be sure to leave a record of the funeral home's name and contact information, receipt for payment and any other important information for your relatives. You should ask to have in writing what happens if the funeral home goes out of business or if you die in another state. Leave this information in your important papers.

For additional information see the articles, *The Pitfalls of Preneed*, <http://www.funerals.org/faq/198-preneedpitfalls>

Totten Trust: A safer way to provide for funeral expenses is to set up a Totten Trust or pay-on-death account. This is a trust you set up at a bank. You choose the beneficiary and deposit any amount of money you wish. You can add to, subtract, or close the account at any time. You do not need to notify the beneficiary. The beneficiary has no rights to the money until you die. When you die the money is immediately released to the beneficiary rather than being tied up waiting for a will to be read or in probate. Totten Trusts remain in your name, they are portable and the interest accrues in your account. Some people use them in place of wills. For more information you may wish to contact an estate attorney.

Crematorium casket requirements are a wooden casket or alternative cremation container of sealed cardboard. The *General Price List*, which the Federal Trade Commission requires that funeral directors give you a copy to keep, must list alternative containers. They do not need to be displayed. Caskets cannot be made of steel, synthetic materials, plastic, fiberglass, etc. Caskets or alternative containers must be:

- Composed of materials suitable for cremation
- Able to be closed to provide a complete covering for the body
- Resistant to leakage or spillage (check on handles)
- Sufficient for handling with ease
- Able to provide protection for the health and safety of crematory personnel

Custom made caskets: If you decide to bury your loved one without embalment you will still need a casket or a burial body bag. Caskets can be made by purchasing wood and supplies locally. Some wooden caskets can be used as chests, coffee tables, etc. until needed. See online sites with instructions or plans (some to be purchased) for making a wood casket. Caskets for a body being shipped to a crematorium must be resistant to leakage.

- Wood casket plans, (plans for sale), <http://casketgallery.com/caskets/Wood+Casket+Plans.html#viewproduct>
- *Homemade Caskets: You can Make a Coffin* (free), <http://www.motherearthnews.com/Do-It-Yourself/Build-Coffin.aspx>
- *How to Build A Coffin* (free, good instructions), <http://diycoffin.com/>
- Coffin and casket plans. References to five sites with plans. Three are free, two must be purchased, <http://diycoffin.com/plans.html>

Scattering cremated remains:

Scattering from the air: Cremation flights in Palmer offers scattering of ashes by airplane. Their usual places of scattering are the Chugach Mountains, Prince William Sound and Denali National Park. Family members can accompany the flight. There is a form on their website for additional information, <http://www.cremationflights.com/>

Scattering on land: Although there is no Alaska laws governing the disposal of ashes, it is best to scatter ashes 100 feet from roads and trails in such a way that no obvious amounts of the ashes remain in evidence. Be sure to stand with your back to the wind, as the wind can blow the ashes over you.

Burial at sea:

The tradition of burial at sea is an ancient practice and has been conducted for as long as people have gone to sea. Requirements for burying remains at sea are listed below. Burials in inland waters are regulated according to the Clean Water Act. For inland waters burial, a permit is required from the appropriate state agency.

Please note there is a requirement that the United States Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) be notified within 30 days after burial.

According to the regulations burial at sea of human remains that are not cremated shall take place at least three nautical miles from land and in water at least 600 feet deep. All necessary measures shall be taken to ensure that the remains sink to the bottom rapidly and permanently. Cremated remains shall be buried in ocean waters without regard to the depth limitations provided that such burial takes place at least three nautical miles from land. Flowers and wreaths consisting of materials that are readily decomposable in the marine environment may be placed at the burial site.

All burials conducted must be reported within 30 days to the EPA in writing. The following information should be included and mailed or faxed to the Region 10 contact at the bottom of this page.

Name of deceased:

Date of burial/scatter: _____ Cremated: _____

Non-cremated: _____

Location of burial/scatter:

Latitude: _____ Longitude: _____

Distance from shore (three mile minimum):

Depth of water: _____

Vessel name: _____

Owner: _____

Phone: _____

Port of departure: _____

For non-cremated remains:

Did the remains appear to rapidly sink to the ocean floor? Yes ___ No ___

Person(s) responsible for burial arrangements:

Name: _____ Phone: _____

Mail to:

Chris Meade, AK Ocean Dumping Coordinator

U.S. EPA Region 10

Regional Administrator's Office, RA-140

1200 Sixth Ave, Suite 900

Seattle, WA 98101

Phone: 907-586-7622 or (206) 553-1761, FAX: (206) 553-1775

Burial transit permit:

In Valdez Burial Transit Permits are obtained at Providence Valdez Medical Center.

The burial transit permit is used for notifying the Bureau of Vital Statistics that a death has occurred. The Bureau uses the permit as a tracking device to make sure that a death record is filed for each death that occurs in Alaska. A burial transit permit is also used to help assure that the death was from natural causes and that there is no condition that would require notifying the state medical examiner.

When is a burial transit permit needed?

Alaska regulations require a burial transit permit for any of the following conditions:

- The final disposition (burial/cremation) of the body or fetus
- moving the body within Alaska
- Shipping the body out of Alaska provided that all requirements as to embalming and casket or other container have been fulfilled
- Storing or holding the body for a period beyond 72 hours after death
- Transportation by common carrier
- Holding a public funeral

A burial transit permit issued in Alaska, or a burial transit permit issued in another state or Canada, and accompanying a dead body or fetus shipped into Alaska authorizes any of the above conditions.

A burial transit permit is not required:

- To transport a body to the state medical examiner or the state medical examiner's designee.
- For fetal deaths of less than twenty weeks gestation.
- When a burial transit permit has been issued in another state, or Canada, and is accompanying a dead body or fetus shipped into Alaska.

Insert copy of the burial transit permit.

State Medical Examiner Office

<http://www.hss.state.ak.us/dph/sme/>

The State Medical Examiner Office is responsible for conducting the medical/legal investigative work related to unanticipated, sudden or violent deaths. This includes determining cause and manner of death, providing consultation to law enforcement and the court, and providing information about non-lethal injuries to children specific to child abuse and neglect. The State Medical Examiner Office conducts autopsies, provides court testimony when necessary and assists with the review of all child deaths through the Child Fatality Review Team.

A special message to family members:

The State Medical Examiner Office is required by law to be involved in the investigations described in the above website. It is important you realize our agency has made a commitment to you to assist in whatever way we can during the difficult times following the death of your loved one. Our primary mission is to provide you with accurate and timely information about the conditions of death, in order for you to understand what happened.

On behalf of the Alaska Medical Examiner Office, may we offer our deepest sympathy to you and your family during this time. We hope the 'Frequently Asked Questions' section will answer some of the questions and concerns you may have.

Frequently asked questions:

Why is the medical examiner's office involved?

Alaska State law requires the State Medical Examiner to investigate the circumstances and determine the cause and manner of death in all deaths that are:

- Sudden, when a person is in apparent good health
- Not under the care of a physician
- Suspicious, unusual or unexplained
- All deaths that are not due to a natural cause (accidents, homicides, suicides etc.)

Where will my relative/friend be taken?

The deceased will be taken to the State Medical Examiner's Office, 5455 Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Ave, Anchorage, AK. They will remain there until examination of the body is complete. Upon completion, the deceased will be released by the State Medical Examiner Office to the funeral home selected by the next of kin. The body will not be released until a signed Release Authorization is received from the next of kin. An investigation may continue after the release of the body to the funeral home.

Will an autopsy be performed?

When a body is brought into the State Medical Examiner Office, either an external examination or an autopsy will be performed. An autopsy is a medical examination

that includes removal of the internal organs; an external examination is a medical examination that does not include removal of the organs. Both autopsies and external examinations are routinely performed to determine the cause and manner of death. Final determination as to the level of examination is determined by the assigned pathologist.

Can I refuse an autopsy?

The State Medical Examiner Office has the right and authority to determine whether or not an autopsy is necessary. The next of kin has the right to make their wishes known and every consideration will be given to religious and cultural concerns. However, the final determination as to whether or not an autopsy is to be performed rests with the State Medical Examiner Office.

Will I still be able to have an open casket service if an autopsy is performed?

Yes. Autopsies are performed in a professional manner that does not interfere with the viewing of the deceased.

Do I have to pay for an autopsy?

No. There is no charge to families for an autopsy or transportation to Anchorage and return to the community nearest the place of death. However, the family is responsible for all funeral home charges.

Am I required to use a funeral home?

There is no legal requirement in the State of Alaska requiring the use of a funeral home. The State Medical Examiner Office can release directly to the family. However, the State Medical Examiner Office strongly recommends the use of a funeral home (at the family's expense) for proper disposition of the body after an autopsy. The State Medical Examiner Office does not prepare or embalm individuals.

Who pays for funeral services (embalming, casket, etc.)?

The family is responsible for all costs associated with a funeral and preparing the body for burial and or viewing, including embalming. The State Medical Examiner Office is only responsible to pay for transportation to Anchorage for examination and return to the community nearest the place of death. The Division of Public Assistance, 400 Gambell St., Anchorage, AK 99501, 907-269-6599, may be able to assist with other expenses if the decedent qualifies.

Who contacts the funeral home?

The family or legal representative is responsible to select and contact the funeral home. Once you have selected a funeral home, please let them know that the body is under the jurisdiction of the State Medical Examiner Office. They can assist you in completing a Release Authorization authorizing the State Medical Examiner

Office to release the deceased to the selected funeral home. You may also obtain the release form on the State Medical Examiner Office website, or it can be emailed or faxed, 907-334-2216, directly to you if you call 907 334-2200. Once a completed release form is received, the medical examiner's office will contact the funeral home when the body is ready for release.

How long will it take before the deceased is released from the medical examiner's office?

The State Medical Examiner Office attempts to release the deceased as soon as possible after the examination is complete. This usually occurs the same day or next day after completion of the examination, as long as a funeral home has been selected by the family. In cases where a funeral home is not being used, every attempt is made to have shipping arrangements made as quickly as possible.

Is it necessary for me to come to the medical examiner's office to view the body? No. In the majority of cases, visual identification is not required. If visual identification is required, you will be notified by the State Medical Examiner Office.

Is viewing or visitation allowed while the body is under the State Medical Examiner Office jurisdiction?

No. The State Medical Examiner Office is not designed to handle viewings for bereaved relatives. Arrangements for viewing should be made with your funeral director.

Can a medical examiner's case still be an organ or tissue donor?

Yes. The State Medical Examiner Office works closely with local tissue and organ procurement agencies. The medical examiner determines the appropriateness of the organ/tissue recovery and can deny the request, but every effort is made to allow for donation.

How do I obtain a certified copy of the death certificate?

The State Medical Examiner Office does not issue copies of the death certificate. Copies can be requested from the funeral home when arrangements are made. Additionally, copies can be obtained from the Bureau of Vital Statistics, 907-269-0991.

When will the autopsy report be ready and how do I obtain a copy?

Autopsy reports are available to the next of kin upon written request as soon as the case is closed. This may take anywhere from a few days to a few weeks but on rare occasions more complicated cases or cases requiring additional testing can take longer. Please submit your request in writing using the State Medical Examiner Office Request for Documents form available on the State Medical Examiner web page or by calling 907-334-2200. A legible copy of photo identification must be received for the request to be processed.

Who do I contact for further questions or additional information?

If you have further questions or did not find the information you need, contact the State Medical Examiner Office at 907 334-2200.

Conversation with James Jones of the State Medical Examiner Office, Nov. 6, 2011:

In the chapter on Alaska in the book "Final Rights: Reclaiming the American Way of Death, the authors state:

"The rate of autopsied deaths is high in Alaska. According to the Health Department regulations now being considered, a medical examiner is not required (to make the head, face, and hands of the deceased presentable. . .) after autopsy. Indeed, according to a funeral director Carlson [one of the authors] spoke with, the body may not even be closed after autopsy. Any family choosing to handle a death personally under such circumstances may wish to ask for the assistance of a funeral director to at least place the body in a covered container."

Mr. Jones said the Medical Examiner Office in Anchorage has two policies depending upon whether the body is being sent to a funeral home or being picked up by a family or sent directly to a family. "Culturally, many people in Alaska prefer to personally take care of the final clothing and preparation of their loved ones."

If a body is going to a funeral home to be embalmed, then the fewer holes in it, the better it retains the fluids. Funeral homes prefer to receive the body with the y-body insertion simply tacked together as suturing increases the number of holes. However, if the body is not going to be embalmed, then the cut is sutured.

During the autopsy all care is given not to impact the head, face or hands unless there is an injury that requires examination.

When the family picks up the body or has it shipped, the body is placed in a unionalls, a plastic garment that covers all but the face and hands. It is zipped up the front. This garment retains all body fluids that might leak. Clothes are then put on over the unionall. The body is then shipped in a container. The family may bring their own or the Medical Examiner office provides one.

Insert copy of the death certificate.

Obituary guideline:

Newspapers:

Anchorage Daily News (fee)	Peninsula Clarion
Eagle River Star	Seward Phoenix Log
Homer News	Homer Tribune
Cordova Times	Valdez Star
Delta Junction Wind	Kodiak Daily Mirror (Fee)
Juneau Empire	Ketchikan Daily News
Tundra Drums	Bristol Bay Times
Dutch Harbor Fisherman	

Please return this paperwork to the funeral home and not to the newspapers.

Most obituaries are published as a free public service in newspapers in Alaska for current and former residents of the cities within Alaska. However, some charge for obituaries. Anchorage Daily News starts at \$10. Fairbanks News Miner obituaries start at \$75. A funeral or memorial service notice can be placed in the Anchorage Daily News at no cost.

All obituaries must contain a minimum of the following information to be published:

- Full name and courtesy title
- Age
- Date, place and city of death
- Date and place of birth
- Length and dates of residency in Alaska
- Employment, if applicable
- Survivors names and relationship, place of residency optional
- Name and phone number of someone that can be contacted if more information is needed.

Missing or incomplete information may result in delayed publication.

The newspapers reserve the right to edit obituaries for length, clarity and news style.

If families desire a different style than what is standard for the newspapers, or if an obituary is to be published in newspapers outside of Alaska, there may be a fee

charged by the newspapers. These fees vary.

The funeral home will inform families of fees prior to publication for their approval of the charge.

If you would like a photo published with the obituary, please bring it with this guideline and it will be returned to you. A good focus that shows the person up close usually works the best.

Please proofread your information carefully

Families making arrangements with a funeral home must consult the funeral home for obituary placement. Funeral homes are linked electronically with the newspapers. Obituaries dropped off to the newspapers may be faxed to the funeral homes to be typed before being published. Newspapers make exceptions for families providing obituaries on disk or via e-mail. These obituaries must be completely typed and ready for publication, not just answers to the guideline questions.

Please type or print:

1. Full name of deceased: _____
2. Age: _____
3. Date of death: _____ / _____ / _____
4. Place of death: _____
5. City and state of death: _____
6. Cause of death, if desired: _____
7. Time and date of service: _____
8. Place of service (including city/state): _____
9. Time/place of viewing: _____
10. Officiating at service: _____
11. Additional services: _____
12. Pallbearers: _____
13. Date of birth: _____ / _____ / _____

14. Place of birth: _____

15. Education: _____

16. Military service: _____

17. Resident of Alaska beginning when: _____

18. City of residence in Alaska: _____

19. Places and dates of other places lived in Alaska: _____

20. If a former resident, when did they leave Alaska: _____

21. Employment (please include places and dates if possible):

22. Retired (please list from where and when): _____

23. Church/organization affiliation: _____

24. Community service/special awards: _____

25. Hobbies/special interests: _____

26. Family statement (these include special qualities/memories of the person that died). It will be published in quotes.

27. Survivors:

Relationship	Name	City/State

28. Preceded in death by:

29. Memorial donations (include mailing address):

30. Does family want flowers at service: Yes____ No____

31. Name of cemetery or where ashes will be scattered:

32. Family contact if there may be any questions (include phone number):

33. Publication deadline is 12 p.m. for the following day.

Valdez churches:

Different churches and pastors have their own policies regarding funerals. If you are a member of a church, or your loved one was a church member and you want a funeral service in the church, you should talk directly to the priest or minister about arrangements and guidelines.

If your loved one was not a member of a church and did not leave after-death wishes you may want to have a church service. Some ministers will conduct services for people they do not know, others will not. Some ministers will discuss the person's life (including a person's failures) and refer to scripture, while others will focus their remarks on helping the survivors understand and cope with their grief.

Some ministers will make their churches available to other ministers to conduct a service. While still other ministers will travel to other towns in Alaska to perform a service.

Some churches charge for a service, others will not even accept donations. Some will provide refreshments for after the service, others will make space available for you to arrange for refreshments. And still others do not have the facilities for refreshments.

Valdez Apostolic Church, 324 Dylen	835-2538
Valdez Assembly of God, 151 Eklutna Parsonage	835-2728 835-4542
First Baptist Church, 360 Klutina	835-4898
Valdez Bible Baptist Church, 3066 Bering St.	835-2986
Catholic Church-Saint Francis Xavier, 341 Pioneer	835-4556
Church of Christ, 310 Egan	835-8306
Church of Jesus Christ Of Latter Day Saints	835-5010, 835-3827
Church of the Nazarene, 1392 Rich. Hwy.	835-2440
Epiphany (Episcopal, Lutheran), 309 Pioneer Parsonage	835-454 835-2126
Faith Harbor Fellowship, 300 Galena	835-2361

Jehovah's Witnesses, 515 Meals	835-2727
Bayside Community Church, 321 Egan	835-4274
Seventh Day Adventist, 341 Klutina	835-2489

Additional resources:

Funerals: A Consumer Guide, by Federal Trade Commission. Good, basic legal information. <http://www.ftc.gov/bcp/edu/pubs/consumer/products/pro19.shtm>, or at <http://publications.usa.gov/USAPubs.php?PubID=3028>

Carlson, Lisa. *Caring for the Dead: Your Final Act of Love*. Upper Access. 1997, 640 pages. This is a complete guide by the executive director of the Funeral and Memorial Societies of America for those making funeral arrangements, with or without, a funeral director. Families, friends and support groups who want to say goodbye in a meaningful way—not just write a big check to a funeral director—will find detailed and practical legal information in this unique guide. By taking an active role in funeral and memorial arrangements families can save thousands of dollars while better serving the emotional needs of loved ones. *Caring for the Dead* gives the legal requirements of each state, how to obtain and file permits and death certificates, explanations of cremation and embalming, burial procedures and other necessary information. Readers learn how to shop for the best services at the most reasonable prices, while avoiding fraudulent and deceptive mortuary practices. This landmark book helps readers take control of one of life's most intimate experiences—the final act of love for a friend or relative.

Morgan, Ernest. *Dealing Creatively with Death: A Manual of Death Education and Simple Burial*, Upper Access, 2000, 14th edition, 160 pages, covers funeral arrangements, cremation, body and organ donation, advice on procedures at the time of death, suggestions for memorial services and more.

Funeral Consumers Alliance, *10 Tips for Saving Funeral Dollars*, <http://www.funerals.org>.

Funeral Consumers Alliance, *How to Read a General Price List*, <http://www.funerals.org>.

Funeral Consumers Alliance, *Before I go, You should know*, <http://www.funerals.org>.

This is a kit with a 16 page fill-in-the-blanks booklet and state specific advance medical directives. Price \$12. Call 802-865-8300.

Final Rights: Reclaiming the American Way of Death, by Joshua Slocum and Lisa Carlson.

Funerals, A Consumer's Guide to Understanding Why they Are Important and How to Make Them Meaningful, by Alan D. Wolfelt, Ph. D. <http://www.meaningfulfunerals.net/images/info/.../consumersGuide.pdf>

Funerals — A Consumer Guide to Planning, <http://www.funeralplan.com/funerals.html>

The Good Funeral Guide, <http://www.goodfuneralguide.co.uk/2011/09/an-alaskan-funeral/>

Funeral Customs—Other Religious Customs. A very general site.
<http://www.funeralwise.com/customs>

Green Funerals and Burials, <http://www.funeralwise.com/learn/green>

The Funeral Consumers Alliance has many free articles on a wide variety of subjects.
<http://www.funerals.org>.