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## News from the Center for Health Statistics concerning the Oregon death certificate

Issue: August 2012

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### Legislative House Bill 3611 - Supplemental Report on Veteran's Status

In June 2011, Governor Kitzhaber signed Legislative House Bill 3611 which took effect January 1, 2012. House Bill 3611 requires the collection of a decedent's status as a veteran, whether the decedent served in a combat zone and the location of the combat zone. The decedent's family or informant should be asked these questions. The data will be analyzed by the Injury Prevention Program and the Center for Health Statistics (CHS), to determine if certain factors put veterans at higher risk of suicide and how veteran suicides might be prevented.

We have updated our Oregon Vital Events Registration System (OVERS) to collect this data. However, combat questions do not appear on the death certificate. When a death record is not started in OVERS, a Supplemental Report on Veteran's Status needs to be completed. This report should be submitted with the death record to the Vital Records office of the county of death or to CHS. The report is available to download from our website at <http://public.health.oregon.gov/BirthDeathCertificates/RegisterVitalRecords/Documents/Death/45-26V.pdf>. You may also contact Carolyn Hogg to order the form via email at [carolyn.hogg@state.or.us](mailto:carolyn.hogg@state.or.us), or at 971-673-1154.



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Remember, when amending the veteran status from “No” to “Yes” by paper affidavit, you must also submit the Supplemental Report on Veteran’s Status to CHS. If you are submitting an electronic amendment in OVERS, you will also need to answer the combat questions.

Additionally, to avoid delay in registering a

## Veteran’s combat status update

CHS would like to remind all funeral homes of the importance of reporting veteran combat status for all veteran deaths. It is important to

answer the combat status question with a “Yes”, “No”, or “Unknown” for each veteran death. An

analysis of data collected as of June 28, 2012 shows that most funeral homes are reporting veteran status as required. Of the 203 funeral homes with registered veteran death records, 172 (85%) have answered the combat status question for all of their veteran deaths.

It is also important to answer “Unknown” if the veteran’s combat status is not known or cannot be determined with the family or personal informant of the deceased. Only 26 funeral homes (13%) have answered “Unknown” to combat status on more than 75% of their veteran deaths. This figure drops to 15 funeral homes (11%) when funeral homes with fewer than five veteran deaths are removed from the count. Funeral homes with high percentages of veteran deaths with blank or unknown combat status, as well as with blank or unknown status on suicides as the *cause of death* will be contacted for follow-up.

*It is important to answer the combat status question with a “Yes”, “No”, or “Unknown” for each veteran death.*

death record, please take a moment to carefully review the entire electronic or paper record making sure all of the boxes are answered and correctly filled out.

If you have questions, please contact JoAnn Jackson, Registration manager at 971-673-1160 or via email at

[joann.jackson@state.or.us](mailto:joann.jackson@state.or.us). ❖

In addition, when listing multiple combat locations, be sure to separate each combat location with a semi-colon (;). This ensures the correct entry of multiple combat locations into our database and their availability for analysis. We have found that nearly all records with multiple combat locations listed are correctly separated with semi-colons.

Since January, most veteran death certificates have been completed in OVERS.

In fact, 87% of funeral homes have filed at least 1 record electronically (or hybrid) in 2011 and

*87% of funeral homes have filed at least 1 record electronically (or hybrid) in 2011.*

75% of funeral homes have filed at least half of their records electronically (or hybrid) in 2011.

We appreciate that a majority of funeral homes are using OVERS, and hope others will also begin using OVERS to complete death certificates. By using OVERS to

complete death certificates, funeral directors can avoid the extra step of submitting supplemental forms to CHS.

*75% of funeral homes have filed at least half of their records electronically (or hybrid) in 2011.*

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*Veteran's combat status update (Continued from page 2)*

We would like to thank all funeral homes for working with the families of deceased veterans to obtain combat information, and for reporting this information on death certificates. We also want to thank funeral homes for understanding the importance of asking the families these questions and providing the families' responses to the questions.

Provision of this data helps us meet the requirements of House Bill 3611.

Furthermore, the veteran status data will be analyzed by the Injury Prevention Program and CHS, to determine if certain factors



## Disposition and transit permits

The disposition is a pivotal emotional point that allows families to move forward in their grieving process following a death or fetal death. The Authorization for Final Disposition form must be provided to the crematory or cemetery before final disposition can occur. It is the only vital records form the crematory or cemetery may receive.

### Disposition permit for decedents

For deaths, the funeral director usually completes the disposition authorization after obtaining permission by telephone for alternative authorization for final disposition. In the Oregon Vital Events Registration System (OVERS), the funeral director must have completed and signed the death certificate before the final disposition form is available with the record. In situations where final disposition needs to occur before the death certificate is signed, there is a fillable pdf form available through

put veterans at higher risk of suicide and how veteran suicides might be prevented.

If you would like more information on House Bill 3611 and how to properly report veteran combat status, you can find it on our website here: <http://1.usa.gov/ORDeathRegistration>. You may also contact JoAnn Jackson, Registration manager at 971-673-1160 or via email at [joann.jackson@state.or.us](mailto:joann.jackson@state.or.us).

If you are interested in getting signed-up to use OVERS, please contact Kerry Lionadh, OVERS Training Coordinator at 971-673-1197 or via email at [kerry.l.lionadh@state.or.us](mailto:kerry.l.lionadh@state.or.us).

Thank you, again, for your help in collecting this very important information. ❖

the OVERS Main Menu > Forms > Print forms link. This form can also be used when the record will remain electronic and verbal approval for disposition is given before the medical certifier or Medical Examiner certifies the record.

For paper death certificates, the Authorization for Final Disposition is at the bottom of the second and third pages of form 45-2. The third page is intended for the place of final disposition and does not include the cause of death information.

The cemetery or crematory should **never** receive a copy of the completed death certificate. The Center for Health Statistics worked closely with the Mortuary and Cemetery Board to ensure the disposition form for both electronic and paper records meets all legal requirements for vital records. Any questions on the content or limitations of the disposition permit can be

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*Disposition and transit permits (Continued from page 3)*

directed to Karen Hampton, OVERS manager at 971-673-1191 or via email at [karen.r.hampton@state.or.us](mailto:karen.r.hampton@state.or.us).

### Disposition permit for fetal deaths

For fetal deaths, the report and disposition form is completed through the OVERS system by hospital staff where the delivery occurred. For fetal deaths delivered outside of a facility, the doctor attending must complete the Report of Fetal Death and the disposition form. If no doctor was present, the Medical Examiner must complete the Report of Fetal Death and the disposition form. Funeral directors do not complete these forms. The final disposition form must be provided to the funeral home by hospital staff.

### **Unknown city limits**

Center for Health Statistics (CHS) staff have noticed an increase in the number of death certificates received where “Unknown” city limits was chosen from the drop down menu on the “Resident Address” screen in the Oregon Vital Events Registration System (OVERS). In 2006, unknown city limits was chosen for 1.6% of Oregon decedents. This percentage has increased over the years and has been at or above 2% every year since 2007, peaking at 2.7% in 2010. In 2011, the unknown percentage declined to 2%. However, this is still double the national standard of 1%.



The city limits data you collect is used by state agencies and other public sector organizations. Death rate and population estimate calculations depend upon accurate

Since fetal deaths occur infrequently, we are continuing to work with hospital staff on fetal death reporting and final disposition permits. If there is any confusion in obtaining the fetal death disposition permit, please contact JoAnn Jackson, Registration manager at 971-673-1160 or via email at [joann.jackson@state.or.us](mailto:joann.jackson@state.or.us).

We understand how important a smooth process for final disposition is for families that have just had a loss, and we are here to help. If you have any concerns about the disposition permit process, please contact either JoAnn or Karen. If you would like to receive the Fetal Death brochure, contact Carolyn Hogg to have a copy sent to you. She can be reached at [carolyn.hogg@state.or.us](mailto:carolyn.hogg@state.or.us), or at 971-673-1154. ❖

residence information. Researchers at the Oregon Center for Health Statistics use city limits data in our annual report. An example is Table 6-48 which you can see at: <http://public.health.oregon.gov/BirthDeathCertificates/VitalStatistics/annualreports/09V2/Documents/Chapter6/table648.pdf>.

Without accurate city residence data, death events cannot be assigned to specific cities, which could artificially increase or decrease a city's death rates from a specific cause, such as cancer. The use of Oregon's city limits data also extend beyond our state's borders. The National Center for Health Statistics uses data from all states including Oregon for national reports.

The city limits drop down menu in OVERS does not fill automatically once the

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decedents residence address is entered; funeral directors must choose “Yes,” “No,” or “Unknown.” The question of whether or not a decedent resided within city limits can be challenging. Sometimes a decedent’s street address may include the closest city or town with a post office, but the decedent may have resided in the city limits of a smaller or different town.

“Unknown” should not be selected without first investigating the correct answer.

“Unknown” should not be selected without first investigating the correct answer. When completing the death certificate, you should ask the decedent’s family about whether or not the decedent

resided within city limits as well as confirm the state, county and place of residence. This is the easiest and most reliable way to get clarification.

Staff at CHS created a tool to assist you with completing the death certificate; it is the death certificate worksheet. For increased accuracy, we recommend using the worksheet. It can be found at <http://public.health.oregon.gov/BirthDeathCertificates/RegisterVitalRecords/Documents/Death/deathcertworksheet.pdf>.

Questions about coding a decedent’s residence should be directed to JoAnn Jackson, Registration manager at 971-673-1160 or via email at [joann.jackson@state.or.us](mailto:joann.jackson@state.or.us). ❖

### Medical certifiers from bordering states – an update

In 2011, the Center for Health Statistics recognized that accepting death certificates signed by out-of-state medical certifiers did not comply with Oregon law. As a result, we announced a change in our procedures, which is outlined in a March 2011 newsletter article, “Medical Certifiers from Bordering States” found at <http://public.health.oregon.gov/BirthDeathCertificates/RegisterVitalRecords/Documents/Death%20Newsletter/March%20Death%20Newsletter%203-17-11.pdf>. This procedural change has supported meeting the practical needs of decedents’ families.

We follow a three-step process when the medical certifier is located in a *contiguous state* (Washington, California, or Idaho):

1. Does the certifier practicing in another state have an Oregon active medical license? If so, that license number should be reported on the death certificate. If not, proceed to step two.

2. Does the certifier have a colleague who is willing to sign the death certificate and has an Oregon active medical license? If so, that certifier can complete the death certificate based on the medical record. If not, proceed to step three.
3. Contact JoAnn Jackson, Registration manager at 971-673-1160 or via email at [joann.jackson@state.or.us](mailto:joann.jackson@state.or.us) for individual problem solving.

In the beginning, JoAnn received several calls per week from funeral home directors, but the number of calls has significantly declined to one or two per month. Situations are generally resolved quickly, and every death certificate has been able to be registered.

Sometimes records are not identified as having out of state certifiers until received in our office. This means funeral homes are submitting records to the county for registration and issuance without following

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the 3-step process established over a year ago. To address this issue, we encourage funeral directors to speak with JoAnn *before* sending the death certificate to the out-of-state medical certifier. This will provide the best opportunity to follow the required procedure without rework by the funeral home or medical certifier.

The only exception to this law is when the medical certifier is signing on behalf of the U.S. Veterans Health Administration or Indian Health Services offices. These certifiers may sign the Oregon Certificate of Death regardless of the state in which their active license is held. ❖



### Requesting death certificates and corrections by fax

The Center for Health Statistics no longer accepts orders from the public by fax, but *does* accept death certificate orders from funeral homes when there is an established billing account. The fax number that funeral home staff should use is 971-673-1203. Using this number for orders will ensure that they are routed to the appropriate staff in the Certification Unit.



The fax number for Affidavits to Correct a Death Certificate (form 45-27) is 971-673-1201. Using this number for correction affidavits will ensure that Amendment Unit staff receive them in a timely manner for processing. ❖

## Wanted—Newsletter topics

Have a question or idea for a future newsletter article? Contact JoAnn Jackson, Registration manager at 971-673-1160 or [joann.jackson@state.or.us](mailto:joann.jackson@state.or.us). JoAnn collects ideas for articles and then shares them with the writing team.

**Thank you** to the contributors of this newsletter:

JoAnn Jackson, Steven Baird, Karen Hampton, Patty Thompson, Alicia Parkman, James Burke, Linda Reynolds, Joyce Grant-Worley, Cynthia Roeser, Echo Townsend, Carol Sanders, Lynda Jackson, and Jennifer Woodward.

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

### Frequent Contacts

**Cause of Death**  
Melissa Franklin  
971-673-1144

**Death Corrections**  
Patty Thompson  
971-673-1163

**OVERS Helpdesk**  
971-673-0279

### CHS Managers

**State Registrar**  
Jennifer Woodward  
971-673-1185

**Amendments/Certification Manager**  
Carol Sanders  
971-673-1178

**Statistics Manager**  
Joyce Grant-Worley  
971-673-1156

**Registration Manager**  
JoAnn Jackson  
971-673-1160

**OVERS Manager**  
Karen Hampton  
971-673-1191

**Data Processing Supervisor**  
Cynthia Roeser  
971-673-0478

**Certification Supervisor**  
Karen Rangan  
971-673-1182

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Portland, OR 97232-2162

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Portland, OR 97293-0050

**General info:** 971-673-1180

**Order vital records:** 971-673-1190

Website: <http://public.health.oregon.gov/PHD/ODPE/CHS>

**OVERS website:** <http://healthoregon.org/overs>

