



“Arlington National Cemetery, Apr 2010—18 by Ed Yourdon, Flickr gallery <http://www.flickr.com/photos/yourdon/4496265315/>”

# *Matters of Record*

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

**Issue: March 2012**

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### **Do not share copies of death certificates**

From time to time, funeral home directors have called the Center for Health Statistics (CHS) staff to ask if it is OK to provide a “working copy” of a death certificate to the cemetery handling the burial of a decedent. In addition, cemetery staff and genealogists have called CHS and/or funeral directors to ask for copies of recently filed death certificates. In each of these situations, the answer is “no;” they may not receive a copy of a death certificate. Why not? Death certificates do not become public records until 50 years following the date of death. During the first 50 years they can only be requested by eligible recipients.

Eligible recipients are defined as family members (spouse, child, parent, sibling or other family member) or legal representatives of the decedent. Eligible recipients may also be persons or organizations with a personal or property right. Cemeteries and genealogists are not eligible recipients unless they have a notarized permission note from an eligible person. Therefore, they should not receive copies of death certificates, not even a “working copy”.

Additional information regarding disclosure and authorization of copies of death certificates may be found in Oregon Revised Statutes 432.121 and on the Vital Records ordering information page at [www.healthoregon.org/chs](http://www.healthoregon.org/chs) ❖



## OVERS help desk

The Center for Health Statistics (CHS) has offered help desk services to OVERS users since the Electronic Death Registration System began in 2006. We think it is a very useful method of contacting OVERS and other CHS staff with questions on the system. The help desk number appears in the dark blue bar at the upper left of every OVERS page, including the initial log in page. The phone number is 971-673-0279.

Some may be wondering what the OVERS “help desk” actually is. Our help desk is a single office telephone that sits on a small



table in the OVERS unit of CHS. The telephone has the ability to transfer calls to a single line. The system does

not have a rollover sequence where the caller is directed to another CHS staff person. If the person assigned to the help desk is already on a call or has stepped away from their desk for another task, the call will go to voicemail.

### *Who answers the help desk line?*

In the morning, Carolyn Hogg (left) has primary responsibility for the help line, and will assist you or forward your call to someone who can assist. Lynda Jackson (right) is Carolyn’s backup for vacations and other times when Carolyn is away from the office.



In the afternoon, OVERS staff rotate primary responsibility for answering help desk calls and resolving issues or moving calls to someone who can assist the caller. This includes (left to right) Carlos Herrera, Kerry Lionadh, Karen Cooper, Ember Talent, and Karen Hampton.



Although the capacity of our help desk system is

limited, all staff pick up messages and return calls as soon as they can. Please leave a message with information about your question or need, and include your name and telephone number so we can return your call effectively. If the OVERS case ID is available, please provide it. The case ID can be very useful for answering questions about specific records.

People often call the help desk line and ask to be transferred to someone in Registration, Amendments, or Certification. The OVERS help desk is available for that purpose. However, calling the person directly might be faster. The CHS has a telephone reference guide that is helpful for determining who to call and is useful as a telephone number reference. Let us know if you would like to receive a copy of the reference guide. We also have managers’ and frequent contacts’ telephone numbers at the end of this newsletter.

The OVERS help desk is available Monday through Friday, 8 a.m. to noon, and 1 p.m. to 5 p.m., except holidays and state furlough days. ❖

## Two new registration timelines for death

New rules for death records went into effect January 1, 2012.

Oregon law requires death records to be registered within five days of the date of death. As always, funeral directors are encouraged to submit completed death records to county vital records offices as soon as possible. Once a certificate has been registered with the county, a new Oregon administrative rule requires the County Registrar to forward the death record to the State Registrar within three business days of the date the county registered the record. You can find the precise language in Oregon Administrative Rule (OAR) 333-011-0101 (7). Consequently, there will be less time to have the county make any amendments to the record. However, the record will reach the state office and be registered in the

system more quickly.

Additionally, the new rule—(OAR) 333-011-0101(8)—authorizes a County Registrar to issue certified copies of completed death records registered by the county from a copy of the record held at the county, but only until the records have been registered in the state vital records system, or fourteen calendar days, whichever is sooner. A County Registrar may issue certified copies of death records from the state vital records system for up to six months from the date of death.



Any questions about these new rules should be directed to JoAnn Jackson, Registration Manager, at 971-673-1160. ❖

## Who to call at the Center for Health Statistics

Here is a handy guide for general telephone numbers at the Center for Health Statistics (CHS):

- If ordering a vital record, call our Vital Records Order hotline at **971-673-1190**. Feel free to provide this number to your customers who want to order a record.
- Any questions unrelated to orders may be directed to our general line at **971-673-1180**. This is a public line, so you

may share this number with customers. You may also call this number if you need to speak to a specific CHS employee and you do not know their direct number.

- If you have questions using OVERS, please call our Helpdesk at **971-673-0279**. This number is **not** a public line and is intended only for our funeral homes and medical partners. ❖

## Veteran's combat status update

During the 2011 legislative session, House Bill 3611 was passed. It has been almost three months since we began collecting veteran's combat status in OVERS in support of this bill. We appreciate the work you do with the deceased veteran's family to collect this data. The data you collect will be analyzed by the Injury Prevention Program, which works in cooperation with the Oregon

Department of Veterans' Affairs (ODVA) to aid in discovering which factors put veterans at high risk for suicide and how such tragedies can be prevented.

CHS staff has analyzed the first six weeks of data. The data show you understand the importance of providing thorough answers

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“Photo by U.S. Army, Flickr gallery <http://www.flickr.com/photos/yourdon/4496265315/>”

to the questions about our veterans' experiences. While “unknown” is an acceptable answer, it does not aid the programs using the data to discover ways to help our veterans. Of the 163 funeral homes that reported deaths, more than half are reporting combat status as required. Of those, 61 percent are reporting all the information necessary. These numbers are good, but we recognize that continued followup on this data collection is still needed. We will be contacting all funeral homes with an additional notification by mail and fax . We want to make sure everyone stays informed and continues to put forth a good effort in helping support veterans health and well-being. When reporting the location of combat, separating multiple locations by using a semi-colon is recommended. This ensures the data remain properly separated for analysis. We have found that almost all reports of multiple locations of combat are being entered correctly with semi-colons to separate them.

## Disposition in Oregon

Every now and then, the Center for Health Statistics (CHS) staff like to bring you newsletter articles demonstrating how death certificate data are used. In this article, we decided to present a trend we thought you

Thank you for taking the time to do this.

In the months the data on veteran's combat status has been collected, we have seen a majority of funeral directors take the initiative to use OVERS in reporting all veteran deaths. Many of you signed up to use the system in support of this bill. We appreciate this supportive and cooperative response. We recognize the steps funeral directors are taking in collecting this data through use of OVERS to ensure it is gathered in the most affective and fiscally conservative manner. We hope to continue seeing more of your associates take this same initiative to report veteran deaths in OVERS as well. By using OVERS to enter the personal data, funeral directors eliminate the extra step of submitting supplemental forms to the Center for Health Statistics.

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

Thank you again for your cooperative effort in collecting this very important information! ❖

would find interesting—how the method of disposition has changed in Oregon over the past 22 years. Due to space considerations, this article focuses primarily on cremation.

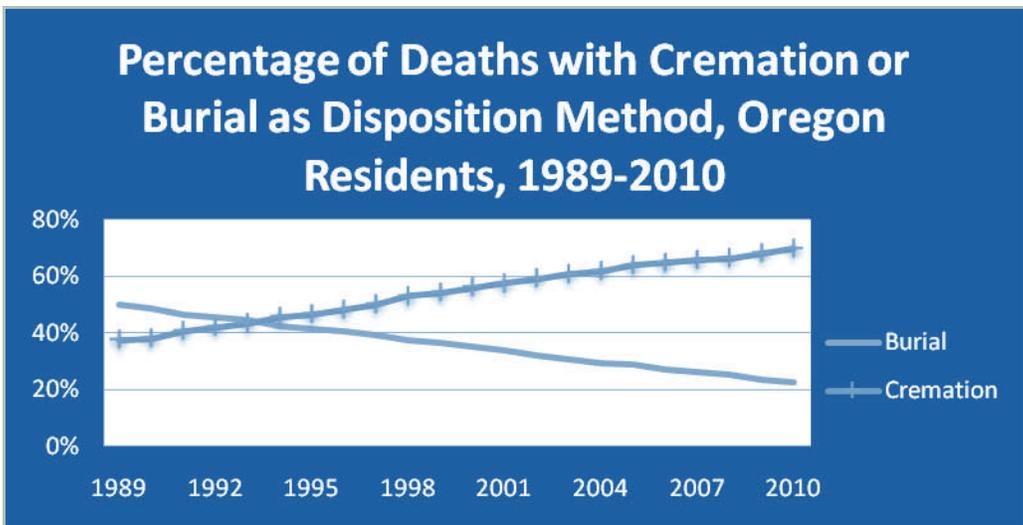
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In 1989, the percentage of cremations in Oregon was 37.5 percent. In 2001 the Cremation Association of North America (CANA) predicted the percentage of Oregonians whose remains would be cremated would reach over 65 percent by 2010. The (CANA) report can be found here: <http://www.cremationinfo.com/cremationinfo/PDF/Web01Confirmed.pdf> Their projection was slightly lower than what occurred. Oregon’s percentage of cremations reached 69.6 percent in 2010.

Who was cremated in 2010? To answer this question, we looked at the geographical region where cremations are highest and the age, sex, and education of decedents.

We divided Oregon counties into four geographical regions: Portland metropolitan, coastal, other western, and east of the Cascades. The highest percentage of cremations occurred in coastal counties (79.2%) The lowest percent of cremation occurred in counties east of the Cascade Mountains (63.2 %).

Excluding groups with fewer than 51 deaths, the lowest cremation rate per 100 deaths was among females over the age of 84 with a grade school education (42.9%). The highest percentage of cremations was among females aged-35-to-44 who graduated from high school or had between 9<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> grade education (88.4%). ❖



**Medical section should be completed by the medical certifier**

Death certificates include important medical information in the bottom portion of the record that must be provided by a trained medical professional in order to comply with state law and national death reporting standards.

A Medical Certifier is defined as a Medical Doctor, Doctor of Osteopathy, Medical Examiner, Naturopathic Doctor, Nurse Practitioner, or Physician’s Assistant. It is

the responsibility of the medical certifier to provide the medical information in lines 46-67 on the paper death certificate. Under law it is not legal for the funeral home to fill out the medical portion of the death certificate behalf of the medical certifier. See ORS 432.307(3).

The medical certifier may ask you questions, such as “What was the time of death?” As the funeral director, you may have been

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asked by the medical certifier to provide a time of death or to complete the name and address section (line 62). While it is acceptable to communicate a time of death

## Funeral home billing process

Oregon law requires the Oregon Health Authority to collect a fee of \$20 for each certificate of death (ORS 432.312). The fee is divided between the Oregon Mortuary and Cemetery Boards for operating expenses (\$14) and the indigent burial fund (\$6). The indigent burial fund is authorized under ORS 97.170 to reimburse funeral service practitioners for expenses incurred in the disposition of indigent persons. A decedent is indigent when:

1. The decedent does not have death or final expense benefits or insurance policy or other means to pay for the disposition; and
2. There is no relative or other person with the legal right to direct disposition and the means to pay for the disposition.

### *How the invoices are created*

Each month the Center for Health Statistics (CHS) sends a file that includes all death records registered in OVERS during the previous month to the Office of Financial Services (OFS). That file is used as the source information to create invoices for the month. Since inclusion in the file is based on the date the death certificate was registered at the state and not the date of death, some 'older' records may be included on the invoice if there was a problem with the record and registration was delayed. The OFS creates invoices for each funeral home based on the license number reported for each record. The license numbers used are those issued by the Oregon Mortuary and

to the medical certifier, it is not appropriate for the funeral home to fill out this information for the medical certifier. ❖

Cemetery Board. The invoice package includes a cover letter, the invoice, a separate page that lists the decedent and the date of death, and a remittance form to send with payment.

This process is completely separate from the invoicing for certified copies of records ordered from the Center for Health Statistics.

### *Who to call if there are problems*

Each letter and invoice includes contact information for OFS. Please contact OFS with any concerns regarding the invoice amount or decedents listed. Their phone number is 503-947-5126 and their fax number is 541-947-5120. OFS will contact CHS for clarification or additional information on the death records. Examples of situations that will require additional information include:

- Decedent's death certificate was not submitted by your funeral home. OFS is creating invoices using a MS Excel file and it is possible the funeral home will be mislabeled. Notify OFS as early as possible after receiving the invoice if your funeral home did not process the death certificate for the decedent listed.
- Billing includes duplicates or previously billed records.

OFS can also update addresses and funeral home names. All requests for name and address updates will likely be confirmed as the legal name and address with the Oregon

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Mortuary and Cemetery Board.

### ***How CHS can help***

*CHS can clarify the funeral home that appears on the legal record.* The funeral home shown on the record is considered to have submitted it for legal registration and is responsible for the filing fee. We do not have access to additional information, such as a trade call relationship, that might be relevant to the funeral home. Therefore, the funeral home that appears on the record is billed for the death certificate filing fee.

*CHS can confirm if a duplicate record was included in the file.* Occasionally we will

### **Funeral home numeric report**

The Center for Health Statistics produces a report on the number of death records filed by each funeral home by county and month of occurrence. This report is available online at <http://public.health.oregon.gov/BirthDeathCertificates/RegisterVitalRecords/Pages/FuneralHomeBilling.aspx> in Microsoft

have replacement records (usually a Medical Examiner replacement) included in the file.

We can check our records for an earlier registered record for the decedent and inform

OFS. We do not have information on whether a record was previously billed, although we can track whether the record was included in a previous file. ❖

**C**oncerns! Contact Oregon Health Authority, Office of Financial Services. Their phone number is 503-947-5126.

Excel format. The information is updated quarterly. While not directly comparable to the funeral home billing invoices, the information might be useful to funeral homes as an overview of deaths registered through their funeral home. ❖

## 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).

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

Joyce Grant-Worley, Carol Sanders, Karen Hampton, JoAnn Jackson, Linda Reynolds, Kerry Lionadh, Carolyn Hogg, James Burke, Alicia Parkman, Echo Townsend, Ember Talent, Cynthia Roeser, Lynda Jackson, Jennifer Woodward.

## We're just a phone call way

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

### Frequent Contacts

<b>Cause of Death</b> Melissa Franklin 971-673-1144	<b>OVERS Helpdesk</b> 971-673-0279
<b>Death Corrections</b> Patty Thompson 971-673-1163	

### CHS Managers

<b>State Registrar</b> Jennifer Woodward 971-673-1185	<b>OVERS Manager</b> Karen Hampton 971-673-1191
<b>Amendments/Certification Manager</b> Carol Sanders 971-673-1178	<b>Data Processing Supervisor</b> Cynthia Roeser 971-673-0478
<b>Statistics Manager</b> Joyce Grant-Worley 971-673-1156	<b>Certification Supervisor</b> Karen Rangan 971-673-1182
<b>Registration Manager</b> JoAnn Jackson 971-673-1160	

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 Portland, OR 97293-0050

Telephone # 971-673-1190

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

OVERS website: <http://public.health.oregon.gov/BirthDeathCertificates/RegisterVitalRecords/overs/Pages/index.aspx>

