



Mountains double exposure, by Thomas R. Koll, [flickr gallery](#)

# Matters of Record

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

Issue: August 2014

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### How the ODVA can help families

The Oregon Department of Veterans' Affairs (ODVA) is an advocacy organization that assists veterans and their families in obtaining a wide range of benefits. In an interview, Mitch Sparks, Training and Outreach Manager for ODVA, explained that the agency uses its close ties with the United States Department of Veteran's Affairs (USDVA) to educate veterans and their families about the benefits that are available. ODVA helps families complete applications and file appeals upon the family's request. ODVA's specialists (Veteran Service Officers or VSOs) are trained and certified by the USDVA to provide advocacy through their 54 Oregon VA county offices. Every county has at least one VSO office to assist veterans and families.

Many people either do not know what benefits exist or do not think that they will qualify. "In my experience, over seven years with the ODVA," said Sparks, "many people think that there is nothing that they will qualify for, and that is not the case. Even if a veteran never applied for benefits while they were living, their families can still qualify." According to Sparks, the benefit that is used the least is the one that allows burial at a national cemetery with an honor ceremony and gravestone at no charge to the veteran's family. Oregon is home to three of these revered sites (Portland, Roseburg, and Eagle Point) and the benefit allows for a veteran's spouse to be buried with them at no additional charge, even if they predecease the veteran. If a veteran's cause of death is related to an injury during military service, their spouse might be entitled to health care and monthly payments of up to \$1,200. Similar benefits are available to veteran's survivors; however, families just do not know where to start.

*(Continued on page 2)*



*How the ODVA can help families (Continued from page 1)*

The ODVA recognizes that Oregon's funeral homes and their directors play a significant role in assisting the families of veterans.

"Our respect for what they do and their professionalism is forefront. I have the utmost respect for them . . . They know exactly what they are doing," said Sparks, as he discussed how the

ODVA and Oregon's funeral homes share the common value of caring for veterans and their families.

When asked how funeral homes could better serve families and help them access VA benefits beyond those related to

burial, Sparks said that they should

direct families to their local VA office to speak with a VSO. "People are afraid to waste our time," Sparks said, ". . . [But] it is our job! We can go through every possible way to get a benefit."



Funeral homes have a unique opportunity to educate and assist veterans' families by directing them to the right place, and their local county VA office is the best place to send them. Although the veteran's death record would be helpful, nothing is required of the families to meet with a VSO and get information about benefits that could help them greatly.

A few things to remember:

- VSOs can directly order and receive [veterans'-use-only](#) certified copies at no charge.
- Veterans'-use-only certified copies should include cause of death

information; some causes are presumed service-related and may increase benefits available to the family.

- VSOs need authorization from the family to act on their behalf. Make sure families contact VSOs before you request death certificates be sent by the Vital Records offices.
- Share information to veterans of all ages. It is possible that a parent is not a veteran, but the son or daughter making funeral arrangements is. We want every veteran to know what benefits are available at every stage of life.

Center for Health Statistics continues to work with ODVA to develop how Vital Records and VSOs can best work together for families.

***Interested in learning more about ODVA?***

ODVA Website:

<http://www.oregon.gov/ODVA/Pages/index.aspx>

VA County Service Office Locator:

<http://www.oregon.gov/ODVA/VSODIRECT/pages/locator.aspx>

ODVA Veteran Benefits Magazine: [http://issuu.com/odva/docs/oregon\\_veteran\\_benefit\\_magazine\\_201](http://issuu.com/odva/docs/oregon_veteran_benefit_magazine_201)

Print copies can be ordered at: <https://www.surveymonkey.com/s/VeteransBenefitMagazine>

ODVA Blog, Quarterly E-Newsletter Sign-up, and Social Media Links: <http://www.oregondva.com/> ❖

## Importance of properly completing the veterans' combat status and combat zone questions

### **BACKGROUND**

The Oregon legislature passed House Bill 3611 in 2011, which mandates the collection of additional veterans-related information on the death certificate beginning January 1, 2012. The two new questions are built upon the “Ever in U.S. Armed Forces?” question from the U.S. standard certificate. If the decedent served in the U.S. armed forces, a follow up question is asked to determine whether the decedent served in combat. If the decedent did serve in combat, a third question collects information on the location of the combat zones in which the decedent served.

The Center for Health Statistics (CHS) has noticed a high percentage of unknown/missing responses to the new combat questions based on the first two years of collected data. In 2012, 34.4% of the responses to the combat status question for veterans were unknown or missing. This percentage decreased to 29.8% in 2013; however, CHS generally strives for a significantly lower percent such as ten. CHS conducted follow-up inquiries on a sample of records with unknown combat status, finding only about one-third of these cases were actually unknown. The combat status of the remaining cases were known by informants but simply not collected by the funeral home.

### **IMPORTANCE OF COMPLETING THE NEW QUESTIONS**

Collecting the veterans' combat status and location of combat zones information is important in several ways. First, these data provide valuable information for public health studies focusing on veterans' health. There are concerns about the long term

impact of military service and multiple deployments on veterans' risk of engaging in behaviors that may lead to suicide, homicide or unintentional deaths. The information helps researchers identify factors associated with suicide and other risky behaviors. The findings may be useful for the development of future public health intervention programs. Second, completing the death certificate properly and minimizing the number of unknown/missing responses saves time and hassle for funeral home staff. Collecting the combat information appropriately will reduce the number of cases with unknown or missing combat status, thus minimizing both the need for funeral homes to re-contact informants and make amendments, as well as the need for follow-up by CHS staff.

### **RESOURCES**

CHS has a number of resources available on our Web site (<http://1.usa.gov/ORDeathRegistration>), including the death certificate worksheet, a list of combat zones, an 8-minute instructional video about the new questions (<http://1.usa.gov/SUIEFU>), updated instructions in registering a death record, and a supplemental report (for paper filing only).

As a reminder, when working on the death certificate for a veteran decedent, please ask the informant: a) whether decedent served in combat, and if yes, b) the location of combat zones. If you have questions, please do not hesitate to contact JoAnn Jackson, Registration Manager, at 971-673-1160 or via email at [joann.jackson@state.or.us](mailto:joann.jackson@state.or.us). ❖

## Submitting a death record with unknown information

When filing a death record, two important factors that can conflict are accuracy and speed. Families need correct information for settling their affairs, and they want to avoid delays due to amendments. At the same time, records cannot be issued until they are registered with the county, and Oregon law requires all death records be registered within five days of death.

In order to balance these needs, please do not hold a record any longer than five days, even to wait for information from the family. This means you may need to put unknowns on the death record. Common unknown items are social security numbers, names of parents, or disposition details. If an item is still unknown after five days, please list it as unknown on

the record and continue with the filing process. In OVERS, text items like names should have the word “Unknown” typed into the field. For number fields like SSN, fill the spaces in with nines. Call our OVERS Help Desk at 971-673-0279 if you ever have questions about a particular field.

Once the unknown item(s) are learned, a correction is easy to make. There is no fee for informants to supply missing information to a record within a year of the death, using our [Supplemental Report to Add Omitted Data \(Form 45-26\)](#) form. If you would like copies of this form to provide to families, contact Eddy Conrad-Wiggins at 971-673-1180. ❖

## Efficient electronic amendments

With your help, we can decrease the amount of time it takes for a family to receive a death certificate. By including all corrections for a death record in a single amendment request, you can help us process electronic amendments faster.

1. Before starting an amendment, identify all the items that need correction in the non-medical section of the record.
2. Once you select and save the personal

amendment, open each page to amend, make changes and save.

3. Repeat previous step until all the corrections for the record have been entered.
4. Once keyed and saved, review the list of amendments for accuracy and completeness before affirming the amendment and submitting it for approval.

Amendment Page

Type: Personal  
Year: 2014  
Order Number: [ ]  
Amendment Status: Keyed (Requires Affirmation)

Page to Amend: [ ]

Item In Error	Item as it Appears	Item as it Should be	Edit	Delete
Decedent-Last Name	Reeve	Reeves	Edit	Delete
Informant-Last Name	Reeve	Reeves	Edit	Delete

Two corrections, one amendment request

Cancel Amendment Save Clear Return

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*Efficient electronic amendments (Continued from page 4)*

Submitting one amendment instead of multiple amendments will be quicker for you to enter and quicker for our office to approve. It will also reduce the number of duplicate amendments that must be canceled later since you will be able to see all of the items that are being corrected at one time. It

## **Burial tags**

The Center for Health Statistics recently discontinued the use of stainless-steel cremation tags, and only aluminum burial tags are now available. OAR 830-030-0040 (6) instructs that “the identifying metal disc must be attached to the outside of the cremation chamber, where it must remain until the cremation process is complete.” Therefore, tags are not subjected to heat, and the heat resistant stainless-steel tags are no longer necessary. The cost for the aluminum burial tags is \$.09 each, or \$4.50 for a roll of 50 tags, which can be used for both burial and cremation.

Burial tags are available from our office by

also saves time if we only have to review and edit the footnote that prints on the record once, instead of multiple times.

If you need assistance, you may contact the OVERS help desk or request assistance from Patty Thompson at 971-673-1163. ❖

sending in a [\*Request for Vital Records Forms and Tags \(Form 45-43\)\*](#) form. The address for mail orders is provided at the bottom of the form, as is the fax number. All funeral establishments registered with the Oregon Mortuary and Cemetery Board now have the option to pay for tags via an invoice from the Center for Health Statistics; however, payment may be sent in with the order form.

If you have questions, please contact Linda Reynolds at 971-673-1173 or via email at [linda.i.reynolds@state.or.us](mailto:linda.i.reynolds@state.or.us). ❖

## Wanted—Newsletter topics

Have a question or idea for a future newsletter article? Contact Judy Shioishi, at 971-673-1166 or [judy.shioishi@state.or.us](mailto:judy.shioishi@state.or.us). Judy collects ideas for articles and then shares them with the writing team.

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

Chris Bass, Carolyn Hogg, JoAnn Jackson, Karen Hampton, Carol Sanders, Patty Thompson, Linda Reynolds, Steven Baird, Vivian Siu, Craig New, Kelly Stacey, Jennifer Woodward, Krista Markwardt, Cynthia Roeser.

## We're just a phone call away

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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 Order Vital Records: 1-888-896-4988

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

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

