

KERN COUNTY SHERIFF'S OFFICE

1350 Norris Road, Bakersfield, CA 93308
661.391.7500 - www.kernsheriff.org

DONNY YOUNGBLOOD
Sheriff - Coroner - Public Administrator



Issue: 25-47

TRAINING BULLETIN

DATE: October 2, 2025

Coroner Jurisdiction and Collaboration with Law Enforcement

The purpose of this bulletin outlines the legal jurisdiction of the Kern County Sheriff's Office Coroner Division and emphasizes the importance of interagency collaboration during death investigations.

As first responders, your actions are critical to ensuring these death investigations are conducted with legal integrity, professionalism, and respect for the decedent.

Legal Authority – California Law Government Code 27491

The Coroner is legally mandated to investigate and determine the cause, manner, and circumstances of death in cases involving but not limited to the following:

- All violent, sudden, or unusual deaths
- Known or suspected homicides
- Suicides or accidental deaths
- Deaths without medical attendance within the past 20 days
- In-custody deaths
- Deaths under suspicious or unknown circumstances
- Where the suspected cause of death is sudden infant death syndrome
- No known next of kin or family

Health & Safety Code 102850

Only the Coroner may authorize and sign the medical portion of the death certificate for any death under Coroner jurisdiction.

Penal Code 832.5 and 832.6

These statutes support joint responsibilities and interagency training, emphasizing the importance of coordinated investigations and proper procedural handling of deaths involving law enforcement. They reinforce the expectation that peace officers and the Coroner, work together to ensure compliance with law, agency policy, and investigative standards.

When to Notify the Coroner

Law enforcement must notify the Coroner Division immediately in the following situations:

- Homicides, suicides, or accidental deaths
- Traffic-related fatalities
- In-custody or law enforcement-involved deaths
- Deaths without recent medical care (within the past 20 days)
- Decomposed, skeletonized, or unidentified remains
- Any suspicious or unexplained death
- Industrial or occupational-related deaths

If there is uncertainty about Coroner jurisdiction, contact the Coroner Division without delay. Over-reporting is always preferable to missing a reportable death.

Law Enforcement Responsibilities at the Scene

While awaiting the arrival of the Deputy Coroner:

1. Secure and preserve the scene – Maintain integrity of the scene and prevent contamination.
2. Do not move, handle, or disturb the decedent. Any physical contact with the body is restricted and must be authorized by the Coroner, who holds legal jurisdiction over its removal and examination.
3. Document observations and gather relevant details to brief the Deputy Coroner.
4. Protect and preserve evidence that may be relevant to determining the cause and manner of death.
5. Identify and interview witnesses, and gather contextual information to support the investigation.

Collaboration is Key

Effective and lawful death investigations depend on a strong working relationship between law enforcement and the Coroner Division. Each agency brings unique expertise and responsibilities to these cases.

- Law enforcement's initial response, scene management, and factual documentation are vital to the overall investigation.
- The Coroner's role is to conduct a medico-legal investigation to determine cause and manner of death, often supporting law enforcement's investigative needs.
- Open communication, professionalism, and respect for one another's roles ensure that both legal and investigative standards are upheld, and that families receive accurate, timely information.

Jurisdiction Reminders

- Once a case is under Coroner jurisdiction, the body may not be moved or handled without Coroner authorization. The only exception is when the decedent is a victim of a traffic accident, and you are attempting to determine a registered donor.
- Unauthorized removal or disturbance of the body may result in criminal or civil consequences.
- Law enforcement personnel must defer to the Coroner's authority in all matters involving the decedent.

Questions or Clarifications

If you have questions about a death scene, jurisdiction, or related procedures, contact the Kern County Coroner Division immediately at:

(661) 392-6700

By acknowledging this training bulletin, you are indicating you have read the established document. All personnel in the Deputy Sheriff, Detentions Deputy, Park Ranger, Coroner, and Community Service Technician ranks are required to review and acknowledge this training bulletin no later than **Friday, October 31, 2025**.