

26-4-9 Custody of dead body and personal effects -- Examination of scene of death -- Preservation of body -- Autopsies.

- (1) Upon notification of a death under Section 26-4-8, the medical examiner shall assume custody of the deceased body, clothing on the body, biological samples taken, and any article on or near the body which may aid the medical examiner in determining the cause of death except those articles which will assist the investigative agency to proceed without delay with the investigation. In all cases the scene of the event may not be disturbed until authorization is given by the senior ranking peace officer from the law enforcement agency having jurisdiction of the case and conducting the investigation. Where death appears to have occurred under circumstances listed in Section 26-4-7, the person or persons finding or having custody of the body, or jurisdiction over the investigation of the death, shall take reasonable precautions to preserve the body and body fluids so that minimum deterioration takes place. The body may not be moved without permission of the medical examiner, district attorney, or county attorney having criminal jurisdiction, or his authorized deputy except in cases of affront to public decency or circumstances where it is not practical to leave the body where found, or in such cases where the cause of death is clearly due to natural causes. The body can under direction of a licensed physician or the medical examiner or his designated representative be moved to a place specified by a funeral director, the attending physician, the medical examiner, or his representative.
- (2) In the event the body, where referred to the medical examiner, is moved, no cleansing or embalming of the body shall occur without the permission of the medical examiner. An intentional or knowing violation of this Subsection (2) is a class B misdemeanor.
- (3) When the medical examiner assumes lawful custody of a body under Subsection 26-4-7(3) solely because the death was unattended, an autopsy may not be performed unless requested by the district attorney, county attorney having criminal jurisdiction, or law enforcement agency having jurisdiction of the place where the body is found, or a licensed physician, or a spouse, child, parent or guardian of the deceased, and a licensed physician. The county attorney or district attorney and law enforcement agency having jurisdiction shall consult with the medical examiner to determine the need for an autopsy. In any such case concerning unattended deaths qualifying as exempt from autopsy, a death certificate may be certified by a licensed physician. In this case the physician may be established as the medical examiner's designated representative. Requested autopsies may not be performed when the medical examiner or the medical examiner's designated representative determines the autopsy to be unnecessary, provided that an autopsy requested by a district or county attorney or law enforcement agency may only be determined to be unnecessary if the cause of death can be ascertained without an autopsy being performed.

Amended by Chapter 297, 2011 General Session