

REQUEST FOR BOARD ACTION

HENDERSON COUNTY BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS

MEETING DATE: February 6, 2012

SUBJECT: Designation of County Morgue

PRESENTER: Amy Brantley

ATTACHMENTS: Yes
1. Letter from Chief Medical Examiner

SUMMARY OF REQUEST:

Henderson County recently received correspondence from the state's Chief Medical Examiner, in reference to a 2007 addition to the medical examiner statutes which states that "Each County shall provide or contract for an appropriate facility for the examination and storage of bodies under Medical Examiner (ME) jurisdiction." The letter also notes that there are many instances when a death clearly does not fall under ME jurisdiction, and encourages counties to have similar facility arrangements for those cases.

Henderson County has a lead Medical Examiner, who is located at Pardee Hospital. To meet the request from the State to designate a facility, the Board is requested to designate Pardee Hospital as Henderson County's morgue facility.

BOARD ACTION REQUESTED:

The Board is requested to designate Pardee Hospital as Henderson County's morgue facility.

Suggested Motion:

I move the Board designate Pardee Hospital as Henderson County's morgue facility.




North Carolina Department of Health and Human Services
Division of Public Health Epidemiology
Office of the Chief Medical Examiner
Campus Box 7580 Chapel Hill, North Carolina 27599-7580
Courier 17-61-02 Tel (919) 966-2253 Fax (919) 962-6263

Beverly Eaves Perdue, Governor
Lanier M. Cansler, Secretary

Jeffrey P. Engel, MD, State Health Director
Deborah L. Radisch, MD, MPH, Chief Medical Examiner

December 15, 2011

To: County Managers

From: Deborah L. Radisch, MD, MPH 
Chief Medical Examiner

Re: Body storage

In 2007, an addition to the medical examiner (ME) statutes was made (see below, in bold):

§ 130A381. Additional services and facilities.

In order to provide proper facilities for investigating deaths as authorized in this Part, the Chief Medical Examiner may arrange for the use of existing public or private laboratory facilities. **Each county shall provide or contract for an appropriate facility for the examination and storage of bodies under Medical Examiner jurisdiction.** The Chief Medical Examiner may contract with qualified persons to perform or to provide support services for autopsies and other studies and investigations. (1967, c. 1154, s. 1; 1973, c. 476, s. 128; 1983, c. 891, s. 2; 2007187, s. 5.)

The technical change to the statute was intended to clarify the role the county shares with the state in death investigation. Historically, under the coroner system that preceded the medical examiner system, the county provided a facility suitable for temporary storage of bodies. The county's responsibility for such a facility continued as the state transitioned to the medical examiner system. Each county through its governmental structure and local health department was and is expected to provide a facility where bodies can be stored pending a decision on death investigation, examination by the medical examiner, transportation to an autopsy facility, notification of next of kin, or arrangements for final disposition. The facility would be used for deaths under ME jurisdiction as well as natural deaths that do not fall under ME jurisdiction.

Based on interactions with many different agencies over the past year, few counties are aware of this. The objective of this letter is to bring this legislation to your attention and urge your compliance with it.

In many counties, hospitals have served as the place where ME bodies can be taken and held until they are examined by the ME and then released to the next of kin. ME rules permit hospitals to assess the state a fee of \$40.00 when a county medical examiner orders a body taken to the hospital and later examines the body in that facility.

10A NCAC 44 .0204 Hospital Fee

A fee of forty dollars (\$40.00) is paid by the state to a hospital when a county medical examiner orders a body taken to the hospital and later examines the body in that facility. No payment is due a hospital when an autopsy is performed in that facility. No payment is due when the county medical examiner utilizes a hospital emergency room or other hospital facility for examination of a body transported to the hospital for examination.

However, many counties do not have a hospital, or the hospital is not willing or able to provide this space. In these counties, a funeral home with a cooler might be an appropriate option, with the county contracting with the funeral home to compensate that establishment for the short-term use of their facility. In the rest of the counties, none of these may be an option and other arrangements must be made.

In addition, there are many cases when a death clearly or most probably does not fall under ME jurisdiction; however, the next of kin is not immediately available to instruct where the body is to be transported. These cases cannot be covered under ME jurisdiction. In some of these counties, EMS and/or law enforcement is often detained at the scene of death, waiting for next of kin or the attending physician to be identified and contacted, wasting valuable county emergency resources. Even though this is not a ME system responsibility, I would encourage you to make similar facility and payment arrangements for these cases--in other words, establish a county morgue for all deaths.

I propose a deadline of June 1, 2012 for all counties to have this in place. Please contact Patricia Barnes at pat.barnes@dhhs.nc.gov with your designated facility so that we can quickly and correctly provide the appropriate information to callers requesting it.