



Maricopa County

**Department of
Public Health**

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Dear Colleagues,

There has been a major statewide change in death certificates in Arizona, and they're already in effect.

While those of you who have already handled a death in 2010 may have seen an official communication about this from the Arizona Department of Health Services, it has come to my attention that many of you may still be unaware of this change. On the theory that it should be a lot easier for you to know about this *before* you complete your next death registration, I'm forwarding you this summary info.

ARIZONA DEATH CERTIFICATE CHANGES EFFECTIVE ON JANUARY 1, 2010

- The previous death certificate document is now obsolete
- Funeral homes must use a new death certificate worksheet to gather information from the informant and to obtain the medical certification from physicians and nurse practitioners
- There are new data items while some others have been dropped
- Not all the information gathered on the worksheet will be printed on the death certificate
- The disposition transit permit has been changed
- Notably, funeral directors now collect information by fax, using a "Certification of Cause of Death" and a fax cover sheet titled "Electronic Death Registry System Fax Cover Sheet"

Already we have seen significant confusion and errors that result in wasting your time as we must call you to complete data collection. If you deal with death certification at all, it's worth your time to review the new system.

First a little background: The Arizona Department of Health Services (ADHS), Office of Vital Records (OVR) initiated a new electronic death registration system (EDRS) in 2007, implementing it in stages. The Maricopa County Department of Public Health (MCDPH), Office of Vital Registration (OVR) began using the system in July 2008, and the Maricopa County Office of the Medical Examiner began in January 2009. Additionally, some funeral homes began using the statewide system in April 2009 and continue to come on board throughout the state. To date, thirteen County Vital Records Offices and Medical Examiners Offices are using the ADHS OVR EDRS.

On January 1, 2010, the ADHS OVR made the next major change to Arizona's death registration system by adopting the 2003 National Center for Health Statistics (NCHS) Standard Death Certificate for all deaths where the date of death is January 1 or later. This revision differs significantly from the one that has been used for the last 15-20 years. There are new data items to report and others that will no longer be collected. Among these, you may notice that there are new

questions regarding tobacco use and pregnancy history. There is also a new Line D in Part 1 of the cause of death statement, and two questions concerning autopsies.

A critical change is the manner that funeral directors using the EDRS now obtain the cause of death medical certification from a physician. This is accomplished by fax with a document titled "Certification of Cause of Death" and a fax cover sheet titled "Electronic Death Registry System Fax Cover Sheet," which includes brief instruction for the receiving physician. The ADHS OVR is aware that this is a very significant change for physicians and that some may have concerns when contacted to sign a faxed certification document. The ADHS OVR assures us that this is both legal and legitimate. If a physician receives such a faxed document, they are asked to fax the completed document back to the number provided at the top of that form without a cover sheet. The confidentiality statement on the bottom of the form is in compliance with HIPAA.

Additionally, funeral homes that are not yet using the EDRS will be required to begin using a new worksheet to collect the demographics and obtain the physician's certification. In this instance, a funeral home representative would deliver a four-page document titled "Arizona Department of Health Services, Office of Vital Records, Death Registration Worksheet," to the physician, who completes and signs page 4 of that document. Funeral Homes will then submit the completed four-page worksheet to the appropriate county vital records office.

We have posted all of the important forms and instructions on our website at www.WeArePublicHealth.org . Just click on the link on the left, near the top, of our homepage that says, "Birth & Death Certificates."

For questions, comments or concerns regarding the medical certification of a Maricopa County vital event, please feel free to call the following MCDPH Office of Vital Registration Staff at 602-372-0535. You may ask to speak to any of the following supervisors, who can assist you: Paula Bonell, Training Supervisor, Elizabeth Rabusa, Quality Assurance Supervisor, Amy Radeka, Death Registration Supervisor, or Michele Castaneda-Martinez, Program Manager.

I know that this will require extra effort on your part to learn a new system. But once we all get used to it and the glitches are worked out, its many anticipated benefits will have been worth the change.

Sincerely,



Bob England, MD, MPH
Director
Maricopa County Dept of Public Health