

Perry County Coroner



2018 Annual Report

I was elected Perry County Coroner in November 2017, and took Office January 1, 2018. I am a certified Police Officer in Cumberland County with over 30 years Law Enforcement and Military Police experience. Prior to taking Office as Coroner, I completed the Coroner's Education Course sponsored by *Office of Attorney General* Coroners' Education Board and took the certifying exam. I also have experience serving as Deputy Coroner in Cumberland County.

As a Police Officer and Coroner, I have investigated numerous deaths during my career, as well as testifying in District Court and Court of Common Pleas, Cumberland County

As with any science, Forensics' is an ever-changing field, in which continual Education is needed to keep abreast of all the current trends. I have attended the International Association of the Coroners & Medical Examiners Annual Training Symposium for the past two years, where I completed the Basic Medicolegal Death Investigation Course and the Advanced Medicolegal General Course. Many Forensic Training Opportunities sponsored by the State Attorney General's office and Pennsylvania Coroners Association are held each year, has added to a well-rounded continuing education. I sent two Deputies to the Coroner Training School 2018, held at Hershey, Pa. The Pennsylvania Coroner Training School was not offered in 2019, but will again be offered in 2020, to train additional Deputies.

On January 1, 2018, upon taking Office, I implemented the following initiatives;

- Two Deputies would respond to every scene. This assures for security of the scene, accountability of property, and accurate reporting. There is no replacement for a good investigation. Investigation is the most important part of understanding how a person died.
- Acquired a computerized case management software system that electronically and securely manages coroner records and information. This not only electronically preserves the records but allows me to quickly access data needed to report to the County and State.
- All expired forensic equipment was replaced.
- Personal Protective Equipment was purchased for all Deputies.

I now retain a DNA card on all "Coroner Cases", which has a dual purpose:

- Creates a permanent record of the individual, since Cremations have become more commonplace,
- Assist Law Enforcement in any criminal prosecutions.

The Families with whom we touch, have all suffered great loss. I am always amazed by their strength during these times of tragedy. My compassion and concern for the grieving families, led me to obtain the "Caring for You" booklet, that is given to the next of kin, of the deceased. The booklet includes topics such as; Survivor's Guide, For Your Safety, Your Appointment at the Funeral Home, When People Ask, "How can I help", Managing the Deceased's Finances, About Grief, Children and Loss, and Resources

Available for You. This booklet has proved helpful for the families, as they struggle to go forward and heal after the death of a loved one

By exemplifying a 'Team member' attitude, I have established a respectful working relationship with Fire, EMS and Law Enforcement. The Coroner's Office is staffed 24x7 to allow for a timely response and arrival to the scene. This helps to ensure the first responders can be available for other 911 dispatches.

I have been privileged to participate in Community Outreach projects in Perry and Cumberland Counties, held in an ongoing effort to reduce traumatic and accidental deaths, which include drugs, alcohol and suicides. Some of these were, Susquenita Mock Crash 2018, Carlisle High School Mock Crash 2018, Drugs 101 sponsored by Hershey Medical Center, held at West Perry High School and the West Perry High School Forensic class with whom I have a privilege of meeting with during the Fall and Spring Semesters.

The following table shows excerpts from the 2017 and 2018 Statistical Reports.

	2017	2018
Suicides	10	15
Motor Vehicle Crashes	6	7
Fire Deaths	3	2
Drug Overdoses	12	15
Toxicology	2	21
Accidental Deaths	0	3
Drownings	1	0
Autopsies	16	19
Cremation Authorizations	153	178

These Yearly Statistical Reports in their entirety are shown below. As you review the figures, you will see that the Coroner's involvement in the County deaths continue to rise.

I have been fiscally responsible with the budget the County has allotted me. I maintain a staff of 7 part-time Deputies. There has been on occasion, times where I have had 4 Deputies responding to multiple calls at the same time. Even with appointing 7

Deputies to my staff, my staff expenditures have been cut 50%. I have then used this 'extra' money to update Forensic Equipment.

In closing, I want to thank all those who have worked with my Office, this past year, to assist me and my Deputies in providing services to our community and conducting our investigations.

I am honored to serve our community. I am committed to do the right thing, at the right time, for every family I encounter, with empathy and compassion.

Robert Ressler

Perry County Coroner

To the living we owe respect, but to the dead we owe Only the truth.

Voltaire

FAQ's

Where will the body of my loved one be taken? The body will be taken to the Perry County Morgue.

Will an Autopsy be performed? Autopsies are not performed on all Coroner's Cases. The Coroner will obtain information concerning the circumstances surrounding the death, obtain medical records, and social history. If there is **no** evidence of suspicious circumstances, then an Autopsy will NOT be conducted.

If a death is suspicious, or if the death is unusual, an Autopsy will be done to determine cause and manner of death.

Can the family request an Autopsy? If the Coroner has released the case, the family may contact a private Pathologist for an Autopsy. However there will be a fee charged by the Pathologist and payment of the autopsy is the responsibility of the requesting Family.

If the Coroner has requested the autopsy, *in the course of his Investigation*, there is no charge to the family.

May I come to the Morgue to view my loved one? Viewing is generally not allowed at the Morgue. Due to biohazard and public health concerns as well as insurance regulations, the general public is not permitted to enter the morgue facility. Once the Forensic Examination is completed, your loved one is released to the Funeral Home of your choosing.

When will I know the Cause of Death? The Coroner will conduct a Forensic Examination and review of Medical Records. When the Coroner concludes his investigation, the Cause of Death will generally be known within 24-48 hours. However, if further testing and investigation is required, it may take several months to determine cause of death.

Who May Request a Death Certificate?

- Legal representative of the decedent's estate
- Immediate family member
- Extended family member who indicates a direct relationship to the decedent

How Do I Obtain a Death Certificate? Initially through the funeral home, and then subsequently through the Division of Vital Records, which maintains records of deaths that occurred from 1906 to the present. Certified copies of death certificates (with a

raised seal) are issued and acceptable for various uses, such as: Estate Settlement, Insurance Policies, Pension/Retirement, Property Transfer, Social Security, Stocks/Bonds.

Contact

Division of Vital Records
P.O. Box 1528
New Castle, PA 16103
Phone: (724) 656-3100

Are all deaths in Perry County reported to the Coroner?

No. In Perry County, the following deaths are NOT reportable:

- Generally, natural deaths occurring in a medical facility, skilled nursing facility and/or under a hospice physician's care are not Coroner cases.

RESOURCES AVAILABLE

Suicide Hotline Help

Prevent Suicide PA - Cumberland-Perry Counties
www.preventsuicidepa.org
1-800-273 TALK (8255)
717-763-2222
717-243-6005

Substance Abuse

Cumberland-Perry Alcohol Commission
16 West High St.
Suite 302
Carlisle, PA 17013
717-240-6300
1-800-662-HELP (4357)

Treatment & Care Provider Substance Abuse.

Perry Human Services, Inc.
8391 Spring Rd,
PO Box 436
New Bloomfield, PA 17068
717-582-8703

Diakon Child, Family and Community Ministries
25 East McClure St.
New Bloomfield, PA 17068
717-795-0330

PA Get Help Now
Drug and Alcohol Treatment Services
1-800-662-HELP (4357)