

ISO 17020

5.2 Organization and management

5.2.1: The independence of the Spokane County Medical Examiner's Office safeguards impartiality. The office is autonomous in all decisions involving case selection, case management, and determination of cause and manner of death. The structure and management excludes any opportunities for monetary or political influence.

5.2.2: Organization and management that enables the office to maintain the capability to perform its inspection activities:

1. The office has four organizational units: administrative, investigative, autopsy, and forensic pathologists. The Forensic Pathologists utilize the other three units, and oversee them.
2. As a public entity, the Medical Examiner Office is adequately funded by Spokane County, and partly by Washington State using tax revenue.
3. As a NAME accredited office, the Spokane County Medical Examiner's Office meets caseload limits, and case completion parameters.
4. The office has access to county departments that aide in management: Budget Office, Information Technology, Human Resources, Risk Management, Payroll, Employee assistance, Prosecutor's Office (Civil Division).
5. In Washington, Medical Examiners are required by law to be certified by the American Board of Pathology in forensic pathology.
6. All medical examiner investigators are required to attain registry with the American Board of Medicolegal Death Investigators (ABMDI) within 2 years of employment.

To maintain capability and competence to perform its technical functions the office and staff stay informed by:

1. Technical: Forensic Pathologists meet or exceed all state requirements for continuing medical education. Forensic Pathologists board certified after 2008, maintain continuing certification through the American Board of Pathology. All investigators meet continuing education requirements through ABMDI
2. Legislative: The National Association of Medical Examiners is a member of the Consortium of Forensic Science Organizations (CSFO), and keeps members informed of national legislative issues. In Washington State, the Washington Association of Coroners and Medical Examiners (WACME) develops and promotes legislation of concern to members. Spokane County employs a lobbyist, who is accessible to the ME.

5.2.2 The Medical Examiner defines and documents its responsibilities and reporting structure as follows:

- Many of the Medical Examiner responsibilities are defined by Washington State Law. Statutes define the broad authority of the Medical Examiner to investigate deaths that are unexpected and/or unnatural. (RCW 68.50.010 Coroner's Jurisdiction over remains) Medical Examiner Policies, and Washington State law specify which deaths are to be reported to the Medical

Examiner. (Policies: Definition of Deaths Reportable to the Medical Examiner's Office, and Assuming Jurisdiction of Remains) The office investigates deaths, performs autopsies when indicated, arranges for ancillary testing based on investigation and autopsy, determines the cause and manner of death in deaths that fall under medical examiner jurisdiction, communicates with family in accordance with the law, collects and preserves evidence, identifies decedents with a high level of certainty, recognizes public health risks, and provides expert legal testimony. (See 5.1)

- **Reporting Structure:** The two forensic pathologist medical examiners report directly to the Chief Executive Officer(CEO), who is appointed by the Board of County Commissioners (BOCC). The BOCC has budgetary authority for Spokane County, and serve as direct supervisors to the CEO and medical examiners. However; Washington State Law regarding release of records, excludes the CEO and BOCC from access to any medical examiner files. The Medical Examiner's Office also has an advisory board specified by resolution of the BOCC. The advisory group includes members of law enforcement, public defenders, prosecution, BOCC, among others. The Advisory group can make recommendations, but the BOCC has final decision responsibility.

5.2.3 Organizational Chart: The Spokane County Medical Examiner's Office maintains a current organizational chart clearly showing the functions and lines of authority. It is attached.

5.2.4 Spokane County has multiple departments that perform a multitude of statutory functions for the county including road maintenance, Sheriff, courts, building permits, animal control, etc. The Medical Examiner's Office is an independent department under direction of the Board of County Commissioners. The office has no authority over any of the other county departments and works at the will of the BOCC.

The Spokane County Medical Examiner's Office provides no testing services such as DNA, or toxicology. The office provides fee for service autopsies to surrounding county coroners. These agreements are entered into with surrounding coroners. The Spokane County Medical Examiner's Office has no authority over the referral counties, and the referral counties have no authority over the Medical Examiner's Office.

5.2.5 Technical Manager: The Chief Medical Examiner serves as technical manager in the Spokane County Medical Examiner's Office, because of the comparatively small size of the office. The Chief Medical Examiner has overall responsibility to ensure that autopsies are carried out in accordance with ISO 17020. The Chief Medical Examiner is Board Certified by the American Board of Pathology in Forensic Pathology, and has performed thousands of autopsies, thus is technically competent and experienced.

5.2.6 In the absence of the Chief Medical Examiner, the other Forensic Pathologist-Medical Examiner serves as technical manager responsible for ongoing inspection activities.

5.2.7 The Spokane County Medical Examiner's Office, through Human Resources at Spokane County, has a detailed job description for each position category in the office. These job descriptions detail the duties, responsibilities, and authorities for each position.

The Chief Autopsy assistant is the office Health and Safety Manager, and is responsible for maintaining the health and safety of the office. (Medical Examiner Policy: Safety and Safety Committee)

5.2 Organization and Management (to include 5.2.1 through 5.2.7)

5.2.1, 5.2.4 The Knox County Regional Forensic Center (KCRFC) is an independent County agency as provided under TCA § 38-7-104, § 38-7-108, and § 38-7-109. The KCRFC is a free-standing county agency, and is not a unit of another agency that provides forensic services. The attached organizational chart demonstrates the relationship of the KCRFC with Knox County Government. The KCRFC is an independent agency and is structured to safeguard impartiality and protect against undue influence from outside agencies. All employees of the KCRFC are employees of Knox County government.

The Knox County Government Employee Handbook (pgs. 8-11) establishes a code of ethics for all county employees, which allows for impartiality in functions of the KCRFC. Employees are required to sign documentation that the Employee Handbook has been reviewed at hiring and on an annual basis thereafter. The Knox County Government's policy is "to uphold, promote, and demand the highest standards of ethics from all employees and officials, whether elected or appointed. Accordingly, all County employees should maintain the utmost standards of personal integrity, truthfulness, honesty, and fairness in carrying out their public duties; avoid any improprieties in their roles as public servants; and never use their County position or powers for improper personal gain." In addition, the Employee Handbook clarified a code of ethical conduct, a duty to report any direct or indirect knowledge of any suspected illegal, improper, wasteful or fraudulent activity, an admonition against conflicts of interest, and rules for secondary employment. In addition, the Knox County Forensic Center policy 2.4 addresses the issue of employees with outside employment and expectations for maintaining impartiality in outside employment.

5.2.2-5.2.3 This organization's responsibilities include investigation of deaths due to suspicious, unnatural, or unusual circumstances TCA § 38-7-108. It is the duty of the county medical examiner to immediately make an investigation of the circumstances of the death, record and store the findings, and transmit copies of the findings to the Tennessee medical advisory council. The county medical examiner may perform an autopsy or shall designate and authorize a pathologist to perform the autopsy. The attached organizational chart establishes the management and administration that allows the KCRFC to perform its forensic activities of death investigation and forensic pathology.

5.2.5-5.2.7 The KCRFC maintains job descriptions for all position categories within the organization. The table of organization and job descriptions include a technical manager who has the overall responsibility to ensure that the inspection activities are carried out in accordance with ISO/IEC 17020. The job descriptions, including specific authorities, are attached.