

Frequently Asked Questions About Death Certificates

What is a death certificate?

A death certificate is a document, officially recorded with the Florida State Office of Vital Statistics (in Jacksonville), which registers the death of an individual within the state of Florida. The death certificate serves many important purposes. It provides proof of death for life insurance claims, survivor's Social Security benefits, veteran's benefits and many other business transactions requiring proof of death.

What information is recorded on a death certificate?

A death certificate is divided into two sections:

1. The decedent's personal information, gathered by the funeral director at the initial arrangement conference with the family and
2. The "medical portion," completed by the certifying physician (or medical examiner as appropriate), listing the primary cause of death and any contributing causes.

Some of the information required on the death certificate seems a bit strange. Why is this information necessary?

Not only does a death certificate serve to officially register the death of someone within the state, but the information is also used by state officials in compiling statistical analysis of death trends and causes for public health planning.

Who's responsible for completing the death certificate?

The funeral director who first assumes custody of the decedent must obtain the required personal and statistical information and present the certificate to the attending physician (or medical examiner) for signature and medical certification of the cause of death.

I was told there are two different types of death certificates available in the state of Florida. What's the difference?

Because of our privacy laws, the state of Florida issues two different types of death certificates – one lists cause of death information, the other does not. Since cause of death information is considered confidential and protected by statute,

most Florida businesses are not allowed to accept a death certificate with cause of death information for their transactions. Life insurance companies do, however, require cause of death information on the certificate sent to them.

Who needs death certificates and how many should I request?

The number of death certificates (also referred to as “certified copies”) varies from family to family, depending on the number of business transactions they must attend to requiring a death certificate. On average, most families initially request five to ten death certificates. You will need a death certificate for:

- Life insurance (with cause of death)
- Veterans Administration (with cause of death)
- To sell or transfer title of a car, boat or airplane (without cause of death)
- To sell or transfer title of real property (without cause of death)
- Social Security, if there is a surviving spouse or eligible minor child (without cause of death)
- Pensions (without cause of death)
- Banks, for accounts held by the decedent, whether solely or jointly (without cause of death)
- Stocks, bonds and annuities (without cause of death)