

Fremont County Coroner – Assistance Information Handout
Resources for Funding Funerals and Burials

In the case of the death of an individual, next of kin generally have three options:

- A. **Claimed** – the deceased’s family or friends will arrange for disposition through a local or other funeral home, or plan for a ‘home burial’ as allowed by law. In a Coroner’s case, family will authorize the coroner’s office to release the body to a particular funeral home once the investigation is completed, or at a point where the body is no longer needed for the investigation. For specifics on what is required for a home burial, consult with the Coroner’s Office. All options, choices, arrangements and costs are the responsibility of the family or friends taking charge of the remains. Thorough research should be done on their part to determine if the deceased left a will and executor designating funeral wishes and disposition, and determine assets available for funding both immediate and pending. Some individuals complete pre-arrangements with a particular funeral home, and have prepaid for their services. Keep in mind that each situation is different, and some resources such as accounts or insurance payments may not be immediately available. Arrangements for payment are made directly with the funeral home involved if their services are utilized.
- B. **Indigent** – Indigence means that family or friends wish to claim the remains, but do not feel that they have the means or resources to pay for basic disposition services for the body. This status is independent of whether it is a coroner case or not. While by law the County can and may assist, keep in mind that this is only for such basic things as cremation cost, and not for any other funerary arrangements. Prior to applying for County assistance, individuals should investigate the following resources:
1. Collect and gather all information on life insurance, bank accounts, personal property, land ownership, and any other possessions that may be converted immediately or at a later date to fund the disposition. Often employers, ex-employers, pension plans such as railroad retirement or unions, provide death benefits. The same would apply to any public employee or government retirement plans, or memberships in fraternal organizations, benevolences, or lodges. Only individuals that have none of these possible resources can be considered indigent, and if applying for County assistance, you will need to document a lack of resources.
 2. For those who were receiving Social Security benefits at the time of death, Social Security provides a \$255.00 death benefit that must be applied for by the next of kin.
 3. Any deceased that was receiving POWER (Personal Opportunities with Employment Responsibilities) assistance, SSI (Supplemental Security Income), or Wyoming Medicaid, must apply to the WY Department of Family Services for burial assistance. The amount you can receive is set by Statute at \$1,000.00, and per WS 42-2-103, the County cannot provide additional assistance in these cases.
 4. Honorably discharged veterans: application must be made to the Veterans Administration for death benefits. A document called a DD214 will be needed to verify veteran status. Amounts are variable, but may be up to \$1045.00 for a non-service related death, \$2000.00 for a service related death, and the VA will provide a marker for the grave. A veteran may also be buried in an established veterans’ cemetery at no charge, with the closest being the Oregon Trail State Veterans’ Cemetery in Casper, WY.
 5. If a death occurs within Fremont County, a local State Registrar must provide the death certificate, but there is no limitation that you must deal with a local funeral home. Any funeral home, in or outside of the county, will be happy to provide you with costs and pricing for services. Should friends or family choose an out of county provider, keep in mind that the

Coroner's Office will not transport to an out of county facility – but most other funeral homes are aware of that and will include that in pricing options. There is no Wyoming law prohibiting family transport of the deceased to another location, as long as a transit permit is obtained from a local Registrar. A Registrar is a local person appointed by the Wyoming Department of Health, Vital Statistics Services who will provide legal documentation of deaths on behalf of the State. This appointment is independent of a business that may perform the services. In most areas (and in Fremont County), local funeral home directors are appointed Registrars, and will provide documents such as transit permits, whether their services are used or not.

6. Enrolled members of a Native American Tribe: locally, both the Eastern Shoshone and Northern Arapaho Tribes provide funeral and burial assistance in an amount that usually covers most if not all of the expenses. Tribal members from other areas should check with their own Tribal Offices.
7. Any and all of the applicable above options must be pursued prior to applying for County assistance, and documentation of those efforts will be required as part of the process.
8. Keep in mind that there are also many non-profit organizations, church or religious groups, or groups of friends of the deceased that may assist with funding. Often these groups, in addition to the options listed above, may provide sufficient funding for at least the basic disposition and arrangements.

C. Unclaimed – The main Wyoming Statute governing unclaimed remains is as follows:

§7-4-207(a). Disposition of body and effects of deceased. When the coroner investigates the death of a person whose body is not claimed by a friend or relative within five (5) days of the date of discovery and whose death does not require further investigation, he shall cause the body to be decently buried. The expense of the burial shall be paid from any property found with the body. If no property is found, the expense of the burial shall be paid by the county in which the investigation occurs.

1. W.S. § 7-4-104(a)(i)(K) also determines that any body that is unclaimed, becomes a Coroner's case, regardless of circumstances, and whether or not it was originally a coroner case or not.
2. A body may be unclaimed due to there being no next of kin, or no friends or family that choose to take responsibility for the remains.
3. If unclaimed, the county takes possession of the body and determines the disposition of its choice, either cremation or direct burial, in an area established as a "commons" location for the unclaimed. No graveside services, memorials, individualized markers, obituary or any other special arrangements will be made by the county. Common grave numbering and plotting will be used to define the location, and recorded at the Coroner Office. All property on or with the body becomes County property and is disposed of in an established procedure. Should friends or family choose to claim the remains once the County has completed disposition, those individuals are responsible for any associated costs of disinterring or transferring the remains. It should be noted that Statute requires the County Coroner to complete disposition after 5 days of discovery or completion of the investigation, if the remains have not been claimed during that period.
4. Unclaimed veterans disposition is covered by a separate set of statutes and they are taken care of in a particular procedure established by law and the County Coroner, out of respect for their service.