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# Death Investigations

**Judge J.R. Woolley**  
Justice of the Peace, Precinct 2  
Waller County

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## Why Do We Do Death Investigations (Inquests)?

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Code of Criminal Procedure, Article 49

To determine the cause and circumstances of a death and determine if the death was caused by an unlawful act or omission.

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## Why Else Do We Do Death Investigations (Inquests)?

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Completion of the Death Certificate.

Checks and Balances

Determine what happened

Recordkeeping

Voice of deceased

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## How Do We Do Inquests?

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Justly

Totally

Absolutely

**THOROUGHLY**

Completely

Fully

Entirely

Exhaustively

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## How Do We Do Inquests?

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1. Preparation
2. Notification
3. Go to Scene
4. Examine the Scene
5. Examine the Body
6. Make a Determination on Autopsy
7. Make a Determination on Requiring a Formal Inquest Hearing
8. Determine Cause, Manner, and Time of Death
9. Complete All Necessary Paperwork
10. Complete Death Certificate

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## How Do We Do Inquests?

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### Determination of time of death

#### Steps and tools to assist in time of death

- The scene
- Family and witnesses
- 911 Calls
- Body Condition

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## How Do We Do Inquests?

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Determination of time of death

Always work backwards on time

Actual

Presumed

Estimated

Found

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## How Do We Do Inquests?

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Open discussion about performing inquests

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## Testing Blood

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SB 760 (88<sup>th</sup>) allows for the taking of a specimen of blood from a decedent to help determine cause and manner of death.

So how do you do that?

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## Criminal Investigations & Autopsies

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An inquest is separate from any law enforcement investigation.

But, they must be in harmony to ensure quality and effectiveness

So, who determines whether or not an autopsy is necessary?

- A. The investigating Law Enforcement Agency
- B. The Justice of the Peace
- C. The District Attorney
- D. The decedent's family

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## Autopsies

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How do you decide when to order an autopsy?

Homicide

Suicide

Fire Fatality

Car Crashes

Apparent natural death with no medical history

Inconsistencies in investigation.

Something doesn't seem right.

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## Mental Health and Death

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**We are almost done, but  
this is the important  
stuff**

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**J.R. Woolley**

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