

CLIENT BULLETIN

STEPS TO BE TAKEN AFTER A DEATH

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This is a short list of the steps to be taken by the surviving spouse, the Executor and/or the Successor Trustee. *This is not intended as a complete or comprehensive list of all actions necessary to be taken by family members, the executor and the trustee.* It is intended only as a **guideline** checklist to help the decedent's representatives step in and handle as quickly as possible those items which require immediate attention.

A. Recommended steps for family members to consider upon a death:

- 1. Contact children and other close relatives.
- 2. Call a funeral director and clergy, and make an appointment to discuss funeral arrangements. Request several certified copies of decedent's death certificates.
- 3. Contact by phone and notify the immediate close friends, business colleagues and employer.
- 4. Arrange for the care of minors and elderly members of the family.
- 5. Locate the family's important papers and gather into one file. Gather as many of the decedent's papers as possible, and continue to do so for the next few weeks.
- 6. **Notify your attorney.** Make an appointment to review decedent's estate planning documents and discuss taxes that may be due. If no revocable living trust, The need for probate and the appropriate form of probate should also be discussed.
- 7. Notify decedent's financial counselor or tax advisor or other appropriate professionals.

- 8. Telephone decedent's employee benefits office, if applicable, with the following information: name, Social Security number, date of death; whether the death was due to accident or illness; and your name and address. This will allow the company to begin processing benefits immediately.
- 9. If decedent was eligible for Medicare, notify the local program office and provide the same information as in number 8.
- 10. Notify life or accident insurers of decedent's death. Give the same information as in number 8.
- 11. Notify your Social Security office of the death if this has not already been done. Claims may be expedited if you go in person to the nearest office to sign a claim for survivors benefits. Look for the address under U.S. Government in the phone book.
- 12. If decedent was ever in the service, notify the Veterans' Administration. You may be eligible for death or disability benefits.
- 13. Record in a notebook or in a computerized financial software program all money you or any other immediate family member spends in connection with the estate.

B. The executor's or other estate representative's specific responsibilities generally include the following:

- 1. Begin making a list of all assets of the estate in which the decedent had any interest. In addition to the value of the assets on the list, include how title is held.
- 2. Obtain originals of all documents relative to the estate - such as wills, trusts, insurance policies, beneficiary designations of life insurance or retirement plans, buy-sell agreements, any other contractual agreements, and so on.
- 3. Make a listing of the names, addresses, and phone numbers of all beneficiaries of the will and any other heirs who might be entitled to estate assets if any will is contested. Even if a revocable living trust has been prepared to avoid probate, the list will prove helpful.
- 4. Make a preliminary estimate of the estate tax liability with the assistance of a qualified estate planning attorney. If you contact our office, we will be glad to help.

5. Arrange a meeting with all beneficiaries of the estate, and all appropriate professionals related to the estate.
6. Open a checking account for the estate and any trusts. It is important that receipts and disbursements are funneled through the proper accounts and that accurate records are kept because later unscrambling can be time-consuming and costly.
7. Obtain a number of certified death certificates.
8. Obtain tax ID numbers for the estate and any trusts. (Our office can assist with this.)
9. If no revocable living trust, open probate estate and have letters of office issued to begin claim period for creditors and for filing of any will contest.
10. Effectuate transfer of title to assets to estate or other appropriate party, making certain that tax ID numbers are changed.
11. Examine contents of any safety deposit boxes.
12. Begin gathering data for the preparation of estate tax return, decedent's final income tax return, and any fiduciary income tax return, if appropriate.
13. Contact insurance companies and holders of retirement accounts to begin collection process.
14. Begin preparation of estate's inventory.
15. Arrange appointment of guardians for minor beneficiaries.

The foregoing short list of steps to be taken after a death is meant as a general informational guide, not as legal advice. Particular circumstances may require alternate approaches. Please contact our office to discuss any specific questions you may have.

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