



To: Vermont Town Clerks

Department of Health
Division of Health Surveillance

From: Dawn Anderson, EDRS Outreach and Training Coordinator

Re: Changes to Death Reporting and the Electronic Death Registration System

Date: August, 2007

October 2007: NOTE REVISIONS IN RED!

I want to let you know about two important changes to death reporting in Vermont that will impact business practices for town clerks. First, the Vermont Department of Health will implement Phase I of Vermont's Electronic Death Registration System (EDRS). In addition, the Department will introduce a new death certificate that will be printed from the EDRS. Both of these changes will take place **during the summer of 2008**.

I have been hired by the Vital Records Unit of the Vermont Department of Health (VDH) to provide training and resources to assist you with these changes. I'm here to respond to your questions and concerns, so feel free to contact me any time. For your convenience, we'll also be maintaining a web site containing updates on the process and helpful information about death reporting in our state, at healthvermont.gov/research.

Implementing a Vermont EDRS

The EDRS is a web-based system for reporting deaths and producing death certificates. Users of the system will include town and city clerks, funeral directors, physicians, the Office of the Chief Medical Examiner, and VDH Vital Records staff. The system is currently being developed and will be tested later this year, with initial implementation (Phase I) planned for **Summer, 2008**. Roll-out will continue in phases throughout 2008 and 2009, until most users are enrolled and active. When the EDRS is fully implemented, it will bring improvements to the death reporting process, as well as result in more accurate and timely information about deaths in Vermont.

Beginning with Phase I of the EDRS roll-out, *all new death certificates will be produced from the electronic system*. Eventually, the reporting of information necessary to produce a certificate will also be done on-line. However, particularly in the early phases of the project, we will continue to rely on a paper process in some circumstances. The paper process will be very close to the current process of death reporting, with a few important differences.

Here's an overview of how the process will typically work during Phase 1:

- Initially, most funeral directors and physicians will continue to use a paper process to report deaths.
- The funeral director will gather necessary information and signatures using a new Preliminary Report of Death form and fax the completed paperwork directly to VDH Vital Records.
- Vital Records staff will enter the data into the EDRS.
- Depending on your town's EDRS enrollment status, you, the town or city clerk, will receive death certificates in one of the following ways:
 - If you are enrolled as a user of the EDRS, Vital Records will notify you when a record has been registered for your town so you can print your file copy and certified copies directly from the EDRS.
 - If you are not enrolled, Vital Records will mail the file copy to you (on four-hole paper) from which you can produce certified copies.

New Form: Preliminary Report of Death

Information and signatures necessary for death reporting will be gathered using a new Preliminary Report of Death form instead of on the actual death certificate.

- The two-sided Preliminary Report contains all of the fields on a death certificate.
 - Page 1 - Demographic information, completed by funeral director or other authorized person.
 - Page 2 - Medical information, completed by medical certifier.
- The Preliminary Report of Death will be acceptable as documentation for issuing burial-transit permits.
- Town Clerks may not issue certified copies of Preliminary Reports.
- VDH Vital Records will keep the official copy of the Report on file for six months.

In 2008, we will distribute copies of the Preliminary Report, and will provide support and guidance as we transition to the new death certificate and reporting process.

New Burial-Transit Permit Processes

- Instead of presenting a completed death certificate, a funeral director or other authorized person will present a Preliminary Report of Death to obtain a burial-transit permit.
 - Both sides must be completed and signed, and presented to Town Clerk, Deputy Registrar or Law Enforcement for burial-transit permits
 - In a future release of the EDRS, we hope to allow enrolled funeral directors to print burial-transit permits directly from the EDRS once a death has been entered. However, burial-transit permits **will not** be available through the EDRS in the first release.

New Registration Processes

- Funeral Director/Authorized Person
 - Will fax the completed Preliminary Report to VDH Vital Records (VR).
 - A request for certified copies of the death certificate to be issued by the town clerk may be included with the Report.
- VR Staff
 - Will enter the record into the EDRS, and register it.
 - Will notify the town clerk in the town of occurrence and in the town of residence (if enrolled in EDRS) when the record is available for printing.
 - Will indicate number of certified copies requested by funeral director/authorized person.
 - Will mail a file copy to the towns of occurrence and residence, if not enrolled in EDRS.
- Town Clerk
 - Will prepare the certified copies for pick up by funeral director/authorized person.
 - If enrolled as an EDRS user, the clerk will be able to print certified copies as soon as he/she receives notification from VR.
 - If not enrolled, the clerk will have to wait for the certificate to arrive in the mail.
 - Will file a hard copy in appropriate binder.
 - If enrolled as user, will print future certified copies directly from the EDRS, to ensure that any corrections or amendments are reflected.
 - Will no longer be responsible for sending the death certificate to VR, or to the town of residence.

New Death Certificate

The death certificate has been updated based on the 2003 revision of the *U.S. Standard Certificate of Death*.

New Content

- The revised death certificate includes four new questions, along with modifications to some existing questions. Because death certificates are a critical source of information for public health programs, these changes were designed to elicit more specific data to better serve public health planning needs.

New Look

- Death Certificates issued from the EDRS will be in a report format. This report format has been laid out to fit both the engraved security paper used for issuing certified copies and the four-hole paper used for maintaining file copies.

New Corrections Process for Death Certificates produced in EDRS

- EDRS Edits
 - The EDRS application will include a number of edits that should reduce the occurrence of some common errors that require corrections. For example, certain fields will only allow a fixed set of responses, physicians will be queried if they report a cause of death that required Medical Examiner review, and there will be checks for completeness of required fields before the record is registered.
- VR Staff
 - Will make all corrections to a death certificate, and then mail the corrected certificate to the town clerk in the town of occurrence and in the town of residence.
 - Application for corrections must come from the certifying physician, medical examiner, hospital, nursing home or funeral director.
- Town Clerk
 - Will not be making corrections to death certificates produced from the EDRS. [Note: certificates for deaths that occurred prior to **the implementation of the EDRS** will continue to be corrected under current business processes.]
 - If errors are discovered, the town clerk must direct funeral director to contact Vital Records to request corrections.
 - Death certificates produced from the EDRS should not be corrected by hand as is currently done with death certificates (cross outs).

For town clerks enrolled in EDRS:

- Corrected certificates will be available for printing certified copies from the EDRS as soon as the corrections are made.
- A paper copy of the corrected certificate should be filed in the appropriate binder.
- Certified copies should be printed directly from the EDRS and not from the paper copy on file (to ensure that the most current version of the certificate is being used).

If you would like information about enrolling for the EDRS, to learn more about the expected benefits of the system, or to discuss any of the changes in death reporting, please contact me at EDRS@vdh.state.vt.us or 802-652-2070. I welcome your questions and comments.