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CHECKLIST · RECORDS AFTER A DEATH

WRONGFUL DEATH DOCUMENTS CHECKLIST
WHO HOLDS EACH DOCUMENT, AND HOW YOU ASK.

After a death, these are the records a family may need: certified death certificates, the Medical Examiner or Sheriff-Coroner report, the collision report, and proof of who may act for the person who died. For Los Angeles, Orange and Ventura counties, this checklist names who holds each one, who may ask, how, and the fee and timing.

DOCUMENTS TO GATHER

- [ ] **Certified death certificates, several copies**

  Order several authorized certified copies. The Registrar-Recorder/County Clerk lists who may get one, including a parent or legal guardian, a child, grandparent, grandchild, sibling, spouse or domestic partner, an attorney for the person who died or the estate, a person appointed by a court to act for the person who died, and a funeral director acting for one of them. Anyone else receives an informational copy that is not valid to establish identity. The county offices we checked charge $26 a copy. If the final cause of death is still pending, the certificate can read "Deferred"; it can be ordered now, and the final cause is added to the record later. Find your county: Los Angeles County, Orange County, Ventura County.

- [ ] **The Medical Examiner or Sheriff-Coroner case number and report**

  Not every death is a Medical Examiner case, so ask whether there is a case number. In Los Angeles County, the report includes the autopsy report and the investigation report; the Department of Medical Examiner (formerly the Coroner) charges $32 a report, and toxicology results return in two to four months on average. In Orange County, the Sheriff-Coroner releases records only after a case is closed, free by email, and pending deaths are generally finalized in about 4 to 6 months. Neither office's pages say who may request a report, so call first. Find your county: Los Angeles County, Orange County, Ventura County.

- [ ] **The traffic collision report**

  Ask first which agency investigated the crash: the CHP, a city police department or the Sheriff. Each has its own rules. The CHP's request form has a box for a family member. LAPD releases a report involving a fatality only by mail, for $19, and asks you to allow at least 45 days. The Orange County Sheriff's release list does not name the family of a person who died, so a family will usually need its attorney or the estate's representative to request it. Find your county: Los Angeles County, Orange County, Ventura County.

- [ ] **The Cal/OSHA inspection file, after a death at work**

  Employers must report a work death to Cal/OSHA within 8 hours. Cal/OSHA's manual says families should be contacted early and can receive a free copy of the investigation file. The file can also be requested as a public record from the Department of Industrial Relations (DIR): online, by email, mail, phone or fax, or at any Cal/OSHA District Office. DIR takes up to 10 days to say whether it has the records, and sometimes 14 more. If DIR makes copies, the first 10 pages are free and each additional page costs 19 cents. Our guide to workplace deaths explains the claims.

- [ ] **Proof of authority to act for the person who died**

  Two documents can show it. Letters from the probate court (Judicial Council form DE-150) are what a personal representative appointed by the court uses to prove the appointment; they come from the probate division of the Superior Court in the county where the probate case is opened. A successor in interest declaration under Code of Civil Procedure 377.32 is the other route, and the family prepares it. In California, only the people named in Code of Civil Procedure section 377.60 can bring a wrongful death claim. They can file it themselves, or the personal representative of the estate can file it on their behalf. Our guides on who can file and how a wrongful death case works explain the rest.

- [ ] **Your family's insurance papers**

  Find the declarations page of each auto policy that covered the person who died or your household, any life insurance, and employer benefits. Your family holds these. A California auto policy with bodily injury liability coverage includes uninsured and underinsured motorist coverage unless the policyholder deleted or reduced it in writing. The uninsured motorist claim has its own deadline: within two years of the crash, not the death, you must sue the uninsured driver, reach a written agreement with your insurer, or start arbitration by certified mail. The first 48 hours checklist covers employer and life insurance, and our guide to insurance after a fatal crash explains who pays.

- [ ] **Funeral, burial and travel receipts**

  Keep every one; your family holds them. Funeral and burial expenses are among the economic losses California's jury instructions list for a wrongful death claim (CACI Nos. 3921 and 3922), and our guide to damages explains the rest. In Orange County, the Sheriff-Coroner's $318 transportation fee is included by the mortuary or cremation service in the funeral expenses. In Los Angeles County, next of kin are not charged the Medical Examiner's $400 transportation and storage fees.

- [ ] **A CalVCB application, if the death came from a crime**

  The California Victim Compensation Board can help a family after a death caused by a drunk or drugged driver, a hit-and-run driver, a vehicle used on purpose, or certain vehicular manslaughter. It can pay up to $12,818 toward funeral and burial costs, after other sources. Apply within seven years. If the family later recovers money for the same costs, the board must be repaid, and it must be told of a lawsuit within 30 days of filing. It also covers support loss for dependents, for expenses no other source pays. The person responsible for paying for the funeral may apply; the board does not accept applications filed by a mortuary. See what CalVCB covers.

- [ ] **The government claim deadline, if a public agency was involved**

  Write down any city or county vehicle, bus, road condition or other public agency involved. If a public entity may be responsible, a written claim is due within six months after the claim accrues, usually the date of death (Government Code section 911.2), and the lawsuit deadline then follows Government Code section 945.6. Our guide to claims against a city or county explains where the claim goes.

LOS ANGELES COUNTY RECORDS

RECORD AND AGENCY	WHO MAY ASK AND HOW	FEE AND TIMING	AGENCY PAGE
Death certificate, Los Angeles County Public Health (a death this year or last year) **Who holds it:** The Department of Public Health Vital Records office, for deaths in Los Angeles County this year or last year, except deaths in Pasadena and Long Beach.	**Who may ask:** For an authorized copy, the people the Registrar-Recorder/County Clerk lists, such as a parent, child, grandparent, grandchild, sibling, spouse or domestic partner, an attorney for the person who died or the estate, and a court-appointed representative. Anyone else receives an informational copy. **How:** In person or by mail at 313 N. Figueroa Street, Room Lobby-1, Los Angeles, CA 90012, or online through VitalChek. A mailed request includes a notarized Certificate of Identity.	$26 a certified copy, plus a $10.50 processing fee online. Copies are available 10 days after the original certificate is registered.	Public Health death certificates. Checked November 8, 2026.
Death certificate, Los Angeles County Registrar-Recorder/County Clerk (older deaths) **Who holds it:** The Registrar-Recorder/County Clerk, for Los Angeles County deaths from before last year.	**Who may ask:** The county's list includes a parent or legal guardian; a child, grandparent, grandchild, sibling, spouse or domestic partner; an attorney representing the person who died or the estate; a person or agency appointed by a court or empowered by statute to act for the person who died; and a funeral director acting for one of them. Anyone else receives a copy marked "INFORMATIONAL, NOT A VALID DOCUMENT TO ESTABLISH IDENTITY." **How:** By mail to Registrar-Recorder/County Clerk, Birth, Death and Marriage Records Section, PO Box 489, Norwalk, CA 90651-0489, with a notarized Certificate of Identity. A Certificate of Identity that is not notarized delays the request.	$26 an authorized certified copy. The record is mailed within 20 working days after the request is received.	Registrar-Recorder death records. Mail requests. Checked November 8, 2026.
Death certificate, Pasadena or Long Beach health department **Who holds it:** Deaths in the cities of Pasadena and Long Beach are recorded by each city's own health department, not by the county's Public Health office.	Call the city's health department. We have not verified its rules, so we list no fee or timing. The county Public Health page lists both phone numbers.	Call the agency for the fee and timing.	Public Health death certificates. Checked November 8, 2026.
Medical Examiner report, Los Angeles County Department of Medical Examiner **Who holds it:** The County of Los Angeles Department of Medical Examiner, called the Medical Examiner-Coroner until 2023. Its report includes the autopsy report and the investigation report, and may include others. Not every death is a Medical Examiner case: its online case search covers only its own cases, and does not show cases where next of kin have not been notified or that are on a security hold.	**Who may ask:** Not stated on the Department's pages. Call Medical Examiner Public Services at (323) 343-0695. Photographs are released to the legal next of kin only under a court order. **How:** Buy the report, or a Proof of Death Letter, online through the case search page, or call Public Services. For your lawyer: an Extended Evidence Retention Request costs $397 for five years, and approval does not guarantee the evidence will be kept for any set period. Next of kin are not charged the Department's $400 transportation and storage fees.	$32 a report; $94 for an older, archived case. Toxicology results return in two to four months on average, and some take longer.	Medical Examiner case search. Medical Examiner questions. Checked November 8, 2026.

RECORD AND AGENCY	WHO MAY ASK AND HOW	FEE AND TIMING	AGENCY PAGE
Collision report, California Highway Patrol (CHP) **Covers:** Crashes the CHP investigated, such as on freeways and state highways. The CHP can only obtain copies of collision reports it investigates.	**Who may ask:** A proper "Party of Interest," such as a driver, passenger, vehicle owner, parent of a minor or legal guardian. Form CHP 190 has a box for a family member and one for a legal representative. Any CHP Area office can tell you whether you qualify. **How:** Complete form CHP 190 and submit it in person or by mail to the nearest CHP Area office, with a photocopy of your driver license or photo ID, or have the form notarized. Any CHP office can get a copy of a CHP report or arrange for one to be mailed.	The CHP's page says to submit "applicable fees" and states no amount or timing. The copy is mailed once payment is received.	CHP collision report requests. Checked November 8, 2026.
Collision report, Los Angeles Police Department (LAPD) **Covers:** Crashes on City of Los Angeles streets, including neighborhoods such as Woodland Hills.	**Who may ask:** Authorized persons, which LAPD describes as "victims, representative(s) of the victim, or such individuals as provided in Section 20012 of the Vehicle Code." The request states your interest in the report and includes proof of relationship for parents and guardians. **How:** A report involving a fatality cannot be released online. Mail the request to Los Angeles Police Department, Records and Identification Division, Document Processing Unit, P.O. Box 30158, Los Angeles, CA 90030. LAPD's recorded line: (213) 486-8130.	$19, by check or money order payable to the LAPD. LAPD asks you to allow at least 45 days from the date of the collision for the report to be reviewed and approved for release.	LAPD collision reports. Checked November 8, 2026.
Collision report, Los Angeles County Sheriff's Department **Covers:** Crashes the Sheriff's Department investigated, such as in Calabasas and other cities that contract with it.	**Who may ask:** Involved parties. **How:** Contact the Traffic Bureau of the Sheriff's station that handled the crash. The Department's record requests page links its list of stations.	Not stated on the Department's page. Ask the station.	Sheriff's record requests. Checked November 8, 2026.
Collision report, Beverly Hills Police Department **Covers:** Crashes the Beverly Hills Police Department investigated.	**Who may ask:** Not stated on the city's page. **How:** Buy a copy online through LexisNexis, linked from the city's page. Other police reports come from the Records Bureau, 464 N. Rexford Drive, Beverly Hills.	Not stated on the city's page.	Beverly Hills collision reports. Checked November 8, 2026.
Cal/OSHA inspection file, a death at work (statewide) **Who holds it:** Cal/OSHA, part of the Department of Industrial Relations (DIR), for a work death anywhere in California.	**Who may ask:** Records are available under the Public Records Act. **How:** Online, by email, mail, telephone or fax, or in person at any Cal/OSHA District Office. Give the names of the people, places or things involved, the time period, and the office that created or keeps the records.	DIR takes up to 10 days to say whether it has the records, and sometimes 14 more. If DIR makes copies, the first 10 pages are free and each additional page costs 19 cents.	Cal/OSHA public records requests. Checked November 8, 2026.
Letters from the probate court (proof of authority) **Who holds it:** The probate division of the Superior Court in the county where the probate case is opened.	**Who may ask:** The personal representative the court appoints. Letters (Judicial Council form DE-150) are what that person uses to prove the appointment to others. **How:** Open a probate case by asking a	Not listed here. Ask the court or a lawyer.	Form DE-150. Court guide to probate. Checked

RECORD AND AGENCY	WHO MAY ASK AND HOW	FEE AND TIMING	AGENCY PAGE
	judge to appoint a personal representative. The other way to show authority is a successor in interest declaration under Code of Civil Procedure 377.32, which the family prepares.		November 8, 2026.

ORANGE COUNTY RECORDS

RECORD AND AGENCY	WHO MAY ASK AND HOW	FEE AND TIMING	AGENCY PAGE
Death certificate, Orange County Health Care Agency (additional copies) **Who holds it:** The funeral director handling final arrangements orders the first certified copies for the family. Additional copies come from the County of Orange Health Care Agency, 200 W. Santa Ana Blvd., Santa Ana, CA 92702, (714) 480-6700.	Call the Health Care Agency. The Sheriff-Coroner's page that lists it gives no fee or timing, and we list none.	Call the agency for the fee and timing.	Sheriff-Coroner questions. Checked November 8, 2026.
Death certificate, Orange County Clerk-Recorder **Who holds it:** The Orange County Clerk-Recorder's vital records office.	**Who may ask:** "Only authorized individuals may receive a certified copy," the Clerk-Recorder says. Ask the office which relatives qualify. **How:** Order through the Clerk-Recorder's vital records office.	$26 a death certificate, effective January 1, 2026. The fee schedule notes that fees can change without notice. No timing is stated.	Clerk-Recorder vital records. Fee schedule. Checked November 8, 2026.
Coroner report, Orange County Sheriff-Coroner **Who holds it:** The Orange County Sheriff-Coroner, 1071 W. Santa Ana Blvd., Santa Ana, CA 92703. The Coroner does not issue death certificates, but can provide a Verification of Death Letter.	**Who may ask:** Not stated on the Coroner's pages. Records are released only after a case is closed. **How:** Email a request to the address on the Coroner's page, and the reports come back by email, or order in person at the Coroner Facility. A $318 fee for transporting the person to the Coroner Facility is included by the mortuary or cremation service in the funeral expenses. The County of Orange covers any other cost of the autopsy examination.	Free by email; $0.15 a page in person. Pending deaths are generally finalized in about 4 to 6 months, and a "pending death certificate" can be ordered in the meantime.	Sheriff-Coroner. Sheriff-Coroner questions. Checked November 8, 2026.
Collision report, California Highway Patrol (CHP) **Covers:** Crashes the CHP investigated, such as on freeways and state highways. The CHP can only obtain copies of collision reports it investigates.	**Who may ask:** A proper "Party of Interest," such as a driver, passenger, vehicle owner, parent of a minor or legal guardian. Form CHP 190 has a box for a family member and one for a legal representative. Any CHP Area office can tell you whether you qualify. **How:** Complete form CHP 190 and submit it in person or by mail to the nearest CHP Area office, with a photocopy of your driver license or photo ID, or have the form notarized. Any CHP office can get a copy of a CHP report or arrange for one to be mailed.	The CHP's page says to submit "applicable fees" and states no amount or timing. The copy is mailed once payment is received.	CHP collision report requests. Checked November 8, 2026.
Collision report, Santa Ana Police Department **Covers:** Crashes the Santa Ana Police Department investigated on Santa Ana streets.	**Who may ask:** The person who filed the police report or someone directly involved, with a valid picture ID. **How:** Not stated beyond that on the department's page. Call the department.	"The applicable fee," with no amount or timing stated.	Santa Ana police questions. Checked November 8, 2026.
Collision report, Orange County Sheriff's Department **Covers:** Crashes the Sheriff's Department investigated, such as	**Who may ask:** Drivers, registered owners, parents of a minor driver, passengers listed in the report, insurers, people with property damage or possible civil liability, and "any	$0.15 a page. A report takes an average of 7 to 10 days to be finalized.	Sheriff's report requests. Checked

RECORD AND AGENCY	WHO MAY ASK AND HOW	FEE AND TIMING	AGENCY PAGE
in cities that contract with it.	attorney who declares that he or she represents any of the above persons." The list does not name the family of a person who died, so a family will usually need its attorney or the estate's representative to request it. **How:** Email the "Request Authorization for Release of Case Information" form, or apply in person at the Records Division in Santa Ana, by mail to P.O. Box 449, Santa Ana, CA 92702, or by fax.		November 8, 2026.
Cal/OSHA inspection file, a death at work (statewide) **Who holds it:** Cal/OSHA, part of the Department of Industrial Relations (DIR), for a work death anywhere in California.	**Who may ask:** Records are available under the Public Records Act. **How:** Online, by email, mail, telephone or fax, or in person at any Cal/OSHA District Office. Give the names of the people, places or things involved, the time period, and the office that created or keeps the records.	DIR takes up to 10 days to say whether it has the records, and sometimes 14 more. If DIR makes copies, the first 10 pages are free and each additional page costs 19 cents.	Cal/OSHA public records requests. Checked November 8, 2026.
Letters from the probate court (proof of authority) **Who holds it:** The probate division of the Superior Court in the county where the probate case is opened.	**Who may ask:** The personal representative the court appoints. Letters (Judicial Council form DE-150) are what that person uses to prove the appointment to others. **How:** Open a probate case by asking a judge to appoint a personal representative. The other way to show authority is a successor in interest declaration under Code of Civil Procedure 377.32, which the family prepares.	Not listed here. Ask the court or a lawyer.	Form DE-150. Court guide to probate. Checked November 8, 2026.

VENTURA COUNTY RECORDS

RECORD AND AGENCY	WHO MAY ASK AND HOW	FEE AND TIMING	AGENCY PAGE
Death certificate, Ventura County Public Health (2025 and 2026 deaths) **Who holds it:** Ventura County Public Health, for deaths in Ventura County in 2025 and 2026.	**Who may ask:** The relationships the county's request form lists, including a child or sibling, a spouse or registered domestic partner, an executor or holder of a power of attorney, an attorney representing the person who died or the estate, and surviving next of kin. **How:** Online through Ventura County Public Health's official vital records request site.	$26 a certified copy, plus a non-refundable $5 service fee and a card processing fee online. Certificates for a recent death typically take up to 2 to 4 weeks to become available.	Ventura County vital records requests. Checked November 8, 2026.
Death certificate, Ventura County Clerk-Recorder (deaths before 2025) **Who holds it:** For a Ventura County death before 2025, Public Health refers you to the Ventura County Clerk-Recorder's Office.	Call the Clerk-Recorder's Office. We could not verify its fee or timing, so we list none.	Call the agency for the fee and timing.	Public Health's request site, which links the Clerk-Recorder. Checked November 8, 2026.
Medical Examiner report, Ventura County Medical Examiner **Who holds it:** The Ventura County Medical Examiner. The county has a Medical Examiner, not a coroner.	Call the Medical Examiner's office. Its website did not open for our check, so we list no fee, timing or request rules.	Call the agency for the fee and timing.	Checked November 8, 2026.
Collision report, California Highway Patrol (CHP) **Covers:** Crashes the CHP investigated, such as on freeways and state highways. The CHP can only obtain copies of collision reports it investigates.	**Who may ask:** A proper "Party of Interest," such as a driver, passenger, vehicle owner, parent of a minor or legal guardian. Form CHP 190 has a box for a family member and one for a legal representative. Any CHP Area office can tell you whether you qualify. **How:** Complete form CHP 190 and submit it in person or by mail to the nearest CHP Area office, with a photocopy of your driver license or photo ID, or have the form notarized. Any CHP office can get a copy of a CHP report or arrange for one to be mailed.	The CHP's page says to submit "applicable fees" and states no amount or timing. The copy is mailed once payment is received.	CHP collision report requests. Checked November 8, 2026.
Collision report, Thousand Oaks and other local agencies **Covers:** Crashes in Ventura County that a local agency investigated rather than the CHP, including crashes in Thousand Oaks.	Call the agency that investigated and ask how it releases traffic collision reports. We could not verify these agencies' rules, so we list no fee or timing.	Call the agency for the fee and timing.	Checked November 8, 2026.
Cal/OSHA inspection file, a death at work (statewide) **Who holds it:** Cal/OSHA, part of the Department of	**Who may ask:** Records are available under the Public Records Act. **How:** Online, by email, mail, telephone or fax, or in person at any Cal/OSHA District Office. Give the names of the people, places	DIR takes up to 10 days to say whether it has the records, and sometimes 14 more. If DIR makes copies, the first 10	Cal/OSHA public records requests. Checked November 8, 2026.

RECORD AND AGENCY	WHO MAY ASK AND HOW	FEE AND TIMING	AGENCY PAGE
Industrial Relations (DIR), for a work death anywhere in California.	or things involved, the time period, and the office that created or keeps the records.	pages are free and each additional page costs 19 cents.	
Letters from the probate court (proof of authority) **Who holds it:** The probate division of the Superior Court in the county where the probate case is opened.	**Who may ask:** The personal representative the court appoints. Letters (Judicial Council form DE-150) are what that person uses to prove the appointment to others. **How:** Open a probate case by asking a judge to appoint a personal representative. The other way to show authority is a successor in interest declaration under Code of Civil Procedure 377.32, which the family prepares.	Not listed here. Ask the court or a lawyer.	Form DE-150. Court guide to probate. Checked November 8, 2026.

RECORDS AND THE DEADLINES

Most California wrongful death lawsuits must be filed within two years of the date of death (Code of Civil Procedure section 335.1). If a city, a county, the State, a school district, a transit agency or another public entity may be responsible, the family must first present a written claim to that entity within six months after the claim accrues, which is usually the date of death (Government Code section 911.2). The lawsuit against the entity then has its own deadline: six months after a written rejection notice is delivered or mailed, or two years from the date the claim accrued if no written notice is given (Government Code section 945.6). Some cases have different periods, including a death caused by a health care provider's professional negligence (Code of Civil Procedure section 340.5) and a claim against the United States (28 U.S.C. section 2401(b)). The dates in any one case should be calculated by a lawyer. Our statute of limitations guide explains each date.

Fees, timing and request rules on this page are what each agency's own page said when we checked it on November 8, 2026. Agencies change them, and the agency's page controls. For the claim itself, start with our Los Angeles wrongful death lawyer page. General information, not legal advice for your situation. Contacting us does not create an attorney-client relationship, which is formed only by a signed written fee agreement.

Free case review: (424) 235-7879. No fee unless we recover. If there is no recovery, you owe no fee and no case costs. Se habla español. The web version saves your progress: https://www.wiseinjuryfirm.com/library/tools/wrongful-death-documents-checklist/

Written and reviewed by Josh Kohanim, Esq., California Bar No. 328609. Reviewed November 9, 2026. This website is for general information and is not legal advice. Contacting us does not create an attorney-client relationship, which is formed only by a signed written fee agreement. No attorney's fee unless we recover. If there is no recovery, you owe no fee and no case costs. The written fee agreement explains this before representation begins. Prior results do not guarantee a similar outcome.

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