



IDENTIFICATION

Department	Position Title	
Justice	Chief Coroner	
Position Number	Community	Division/Region
82-13355	Yellowknife	Directorate/HQ

PURPOSE OF THE POSITION

The Chief Coroner is appointed under the *Coroners Act*, R.S.N.W.T., 1988 c. C-20, by the Minister of Justice. The incumbent provides technical, investigative and management expertise to the NWT Coroner Service in the investigation and management of all sudden and unexpected deaths in accordance with the provisions of the *Coroners Act* as well as with best practices, death investigation standards and established ethical guidelines.

The Chief Coroner is also a quasi-judicial decision-maker and the decisions made, and the inquests conducted have impacts upon government, the private sector and the public at large.

SCOPE

The Chief Coroner is a medical-legal death investigator, and has significant latitude to exercise independent judgment when carrying out or assisting in investigations. The incumbent is instrumental in effecting change in the development of policy, legislation and business plans for the Coroner Service, and must ensure that evidence-based best practices are applied by all coroners. At times, a death investigation will lead to recommendations that will contribute to the improvement of public safety and prevent future deaths of a similar nature.

The Chief Coroner must perform the professional and legal duties set out in the *Coroners Act*, also in accordance with the *Evidence Act*, *Canada Evidence Act*, *Vital Statistics Act*, *Public Health Act*, together with such ancillary or incidental duties as may be reasonably expected of or pertain to the effective performance of the Chief Coroner and the Coroner Service.

The Coroner Service investigates approximately 100 reportable deaths annually in the Northwest Territories. A "reportable death" is one that occurs in circumstances set out under subsection 8(1) of the *Coroners Act*.

The Chief Coroner has overall responsibility and accountability for the Coroner Service. The incumbent supervises the Deputy Chief Coroner and an Administrative Assistant for the office.

There are approximately 40 fee-for-service community coroners from across the NWT that require direction, support, advice and assistance to ensure that they carry out their responsibilities in accordance with applicable legislation, policies and procedures. The Chief Coroner provides expertise, direction and medical-legal expertise on investigation to the coroner and police officers on specific cases. The community coroners have different levels of literacy and language skills, as well as different levels of training, and the Chief Coroner is responsible for ensuring consistency of service. The Deputy Chief Coroner is the designated supervisor for the fee-for-service community coroners.

The incumbent works closely and liaises with stakeholders, coordinating activities with those with vested interests including police, health authorities, and other investigative partners.

The Chief Coroner has the responsibility of presiding over most public inquests. This is a quasi-judicial proceeding that allows for the public presentation of all evidence relating to a death. The Chief Coroner chooses a six-person jury, presides at the inquest, controls the proceedings, determines witnesses to be called and issues subpoenas requiring their attendance.

The Chief Coroner writes, and oversees the writing of, approximately 100 public reports each year. These reports determine the identity of the deceased, and stipulate how, where, when and by what means the deceased came to his or her death. The death is then classified as Natural, Accidental, Suicide, Homicide or Undetermined.

Every coroner case is considered for recommendations, which are directed to improving public safety and preventing future deaths in similar circumstances.

The Chief Coroner is responsible for administering the budget for program delivery and therefore has expenditure and commitment authority. The incumbent manages an annual budget of (approximately) \$700,000.00.

For administrative purposes, the Chief Coroner reports to the Assistant Deputy Minister (Attorney General) in the Department of Justice. However, the Chief Coroner exercises its core responsibilities on an independent basis.

RESPONSIBILITIES

- 1. Manages the Coroner Service to ensure the investigation of all sudden and unexpected deaths reportable under the *Coroners Act*.**

- Performs the duties of a coroner under the Act, including the investigation of a reportable death, authorizing a post mortem examination, releasing a body and recommending and/or presiding over an inquest;
- Monitors all coroners in the performance of their duties and the exercise of their statutory powers;
- Orders, as necessary, the exhumation of a body for the purposes of an investigation or inquest into the death of that person;
- Oversees all investigations of reportable deaths, reviewing evidence and ensuring that decisions are in keeping with accepted practices and protocols of a coroner-based death investigation system;
- Provides direction and expertise to coroners and police officers on specific cases;
- Hears appeals from the decision of a coroner that an inquest is not necessary; and, where appropriate, directs that an inquest be held;
- Interprets and applies the provisions of the *Coroners Act* and other statutes and regulations as required;
- Interprets autopsy, toxicology and other medical reports;
- Removes and transports human remains in the possession of a coroner in the City of Yellowknife, and within 120 km of Yellowknife as may be required;
- Liaises with family members of deceased persons, the media, Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP), Workers' Safety and Compensation Commission (WSCC), Transport Safety Board (TSB), Transport Canada, the Fire Marshall, Emergency Measures Organization (EMO), Coast Guard, Health Care professionals and the Registrar of Vital Statistics;
- Ensures the NWT Coroner Services is accessible on a 24-hour basis, 365 days per year.

2. Provides annual reporting to the Minister, and examines the program for improvement potential in service delivery, using analysis of gathered information.

- Prepares an annual report on or before September 30 of each year containing information on statistics, trends, issues, recommendations and the activities of the Coroners Program over the year covered by the report, which will be provided to the Minister for tabling in the Legislative Assembly;
- Researches and examines interjurisdictional practices, and determines value based on relevant NWT legislation and regulations;
- Determines appropriate program adjustments with reference to applicable legislation, regulations and policy, and makes recommendations to the ADM, Attorney General and Minister;
- Implements program changes as approved.

3. Provides recommendations for reform, official communications and educational resources to contribute to the Improvement of public safety and prevent future deaths of a similar nature

- Reviews evidence from investigation reports and inquests, and brings relevant findings or recommendations to the attention of the appropriate persons or businesses or to officials, agencies, or departments of Government;
- Provides recommendations to the Government on legislative reform;

- Provides information on the status of ongoing and concluded cases as requested;
- Manages crisis situations to limit burn-out and trauma of coroners;
- Provides information to media regarding deaths and death investigations;
- Provides information to the next of kin or legal representatives concerning details of the investigation, and explains medical-legal reports, autopsy reports, and toxicology reports to them;
- Communicates with legal representatives and insurance companies to provide assistance, direction, and information relating to estate settlement;
- Develops and delivers presentations to students, stakeholders, officials, Government agencies, medical and legal professionals, and the public.

4. Arranges for and presides over Coroner's Inquests (formal proceeding) to ensure the goals of the Inquest are protected and relevant facts are presented to the jury by:

- Determines potential witnesses to be called at Inquest;
- Prepares documents and arranges for the service of summonses for potential jurors and witnesses;
- Questions witnesses as required and assists the jury members by suggesting recommendations for their consideration;
- Develops, prepares and provides inquest information and documents for legal counsel.
- Develops Coroner Briefs for legal counsel.

5. Manages the financial resources of the Coroner Service for effective, financially responsible delivery

- Assists in development of a yearly business plan for the Coroners Program, including estimated expenditures;
- Administers the budget for program delivery with expenditure and commitment authority;
- Analyzes budget variances related to the Coroner Service operations and support.

6. Manages the human resources of the Coroner Service to ensure effective program delivery

- Accepts applications for, and makes recommendations to the Minister through the Department, respecting the appointment and revocation of coroners;
- Develops and implements training and continuing education programs for coroners;
- Prepares, distributes and keeps current a Coroner's Manual, Code of Ethics and Procedures for Coroners.

WORKING CONDITIONS

Physical Demands

There is a combination of field and office work.

Physical effort is required approximately 65 times per year for approximately 8-10 hours per occurrence, depending on investigation and scene location.

Must access and retrieve human remains and severed human remains, and be able to lift and carry human remains with assistance, and in some cases search for and retrieve severed body parts in the vicinity of an incident scene. The scene can be a detached or attached residence (i.e., house or apartment building). There are often many stairs inside and out, or the scene may be a remote location on the land or ice.

Often the incumbent is working in awkward and difficult positions.

The incumbent must be able to walk and carry human remains a considerable distance in difficult terrain many times of the year. Many times stairs and walkways or residences are not shoveled clear of snow.

Human remains are flown in on a regular basis to Yellowknife. Remains need to be loaded into the coroner van, sometimes for taking to the morgue for further examination and sometimes for loading into a shipping container for transportation to Alberta.

External examinations must be completed on human remains, which requires lifting, pulling and pushing to turn human remains onto their side or turning right over. This is done either alone or with the assistance of another person, with human remains that can weigh as much as 300 pounds. While working at the scene or morgue the incumbent must be able to lift, stretch, and pull and push remains for the examination, and must be able to stand for long hours without sitting.

The incumbent must handle many different sized objects as exhibits while carrying out their death investigations.

The incumbent must pick up the shipping containers which are approximately 100 pounds. The incumbent must lift and load containers into the van for delivery to the morgue or airport or for return to the storage location.

Environmental Conditions

The incumbent collects bodily fluids from human remains for toxicology examination. Exposure to, and handling of, and contact of human remains and bodily fluids that may be contaminated, decomposed, mutilated and/or arthropod infested, or infected with communicable diseases. There is frequent exposure to putrid odors.

Death investigations will be performed in all weather conditions in remote environments on the land or ice. Primitive sleeping accommodations may be provided, from a tent to the floor of an RCMP detachment.

The incumbent is frequently required to travel on small aircraft or helicopters, or by boat to reach remote death scenes.

Sensory Demands

The incumbent will be required to use the combined senses of touch, sight and smell simultaneously during an investigation, both at the death scene and during subsequent examinations of the remains and/or the death scene.

Mental Demands

The incumbent is expected to be on-call 24 hours a day more than half of the year, and is expected to travel to a death scene in remote locations on little or very short notice.

The incumbent is contacted any time of the day or night to investigate and attend death scenes. The incumbent often goes without food during investigations, and is required to remain at incident scenes for long periods of time with no breaks.

The incumbent will be exposed to very graphic and traumatic death scenes, including the mutilation of human remains through violence or trauma.

It is typical for the incumbent who is on standby to be called back to work almost every day, which can cause significant stress on incumbent's personal life. Living up to the expectations of personal life demands, public and media, both in the office and in the community, can have a negative impact on the incumbent's private life and emotional well-being in the long term.

Many of the investigations are unique, complex, and always confidential, and discretion always demands a high degree of mental awareness and sensitivity, and pressure leads to mental fatigue and stress.

For the incumbent there can be significant lack of control over the work pace, which can lead to mental fatigue and stress.

The incumbent must be supportive to individuals who are emotionally distraught by the death of a loved one, and can sometimes be difficult to communicate with. Some family members can be very aggressive, potentially abusive, volatile or in crisis, raising concerns about personal safety.

KNOWLEDGE, SKILLS AND ABILITIES

- Proven ability to manage a budget, financial programs and contracts;
- Demonstrated ability to be mature, objective, fair, honest, empathetic, tolerant, patient and courteous;
- Demonstrated and comprehensive knowledge of relevant legislation, relevant regulations, and investigative procedures, best practices and policies;
- Proven ability to direct and conduct complex death investigations;
- Knowledge of technical aspects of the investigation of death, including forensic identification, medical, social and public perception;
- Ability to identify issues and weigh facts to draw supportable and appropriate conclusions;

- Proven expertise and analytical investigation skills to assist coroners with determining the cause and manner of death;
- Strong evaluation, analytical, problem-solving and decision-making skills;
- Proven ability to interpret autopsy, toxicology and other medical reports;
- Proven knowledge of medical/legal terminology to facilitate the ability to interpret medical/legal reports for community coroners with less experience; Working knowledge of the rules of natural justice and evidence in order to preside over and successfully run inquests;
- Proven ability to preside over inquests, control the proceedings, determine appropriate witnesses to be called and issue subpoenas requiring their attendance;
- Ability to organize investigations and lead multi-faceted teams at death scenes;
- Proven ability to audit investigations conducted by coroners, and conduct quality assurance reviews to ensure completeness, uniformity and compliance within established classification and content standards;
- Proven expertise with respect to the application and interpretation of the relevant legislation to coroners, police officers, jury members, members of the public, representatives of Government and the media;
- Proven ability to assess risk and propose mitigative strategies;
- Proven ability to identify public safety issues and make recommendations for reform;
- Proven leadership abilities, including demonstrated mentoring skills, interpersonal and communication skills
- Proven ability to effectively train adults and create and lead workshops;
- Excellent verbal and written communication skills to write complex quasi legal and medical reports, proposals, and briefing documents;
- Strong communication skills to deal with the public, concerned parties, the media and interdisciplinary teams;
- Proven ability to render written public decisions, write complex quasi legal and medical reports, proposals, and briefing documents;
- Proven ability to listen, understand and respond in a helpful and responsive and empathetic manner;
- Proven ability to work cooperatively in a team approach with peers, subordinates, the public, and community agencies and groups;
- Knowledge, understanding, and respect of diverse cultures and communities to promote an effective balance between legal and cultural needs in the handling and disposition of human remains;
- Excellent delegation, organization and time management skills in order to manage a diverse workload, conflicting demands for attention, and unexpected changes in priorities and assignments;
- Proven knowledge of and ability to use computers, software and computerized office equipment;
- Proven abilities in the areas of crisis intervention, anger diffusion, interviewing, assessment, and conflict intervention and resolution;

Typically, the above qualifications would be attained by:

A baccalaureate degree in the social sciences, sciences, or legal fields, and a minimum of seven years of related experience. Equivalent combinations of education and experience will be considered.

ADDITIONAL REQUIREMENTS

A valid Class 5 NWT Driver's license to enable travel to death scenes is required.

Must have or be eligible to receive a statutory appointment as a coroner in order to perform the duties of this position.

Position Security (check one)

- No criminal records check required
- Position of Trust – criminal records check required
- Highly sensitive position – requires verification of identity and a criminal records check

French language (check one if applicable)

- French required (must identify required level below)

Level required for this Designated Position is:

ORAL EXPRESSION AND COMPREHENSION

Basic (B) Intermediate (I) Advanced (A)

READING COMPREHENSION:

Basic (B) Intermediate (I) Advanced (A)

WRITING SKILLS:

Basic (B) Intermediate (I) Advanced (A)

- French preferred

Indigenous language: Select language

- Required
- Preferred