



## KING COUNTY AUDITOR'S OFFICE

KyMBER WALTMUNSON, County Auditor

# Medical Examiner's Office: Continuous Improvement Can Strengthen Control Environment

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# Key findings



Practices in place, but gaps increase loss and safety risks



Steps needed to better document and monitor for conflicts of interest



Better training and resources could help staff

# KCMEO collects items it must safeguard



**TAKES CUSTODY  
OF ITEM FOR  
EVIDENCE OR  
PROPERTY**



**PROCESSES  
ITEM**



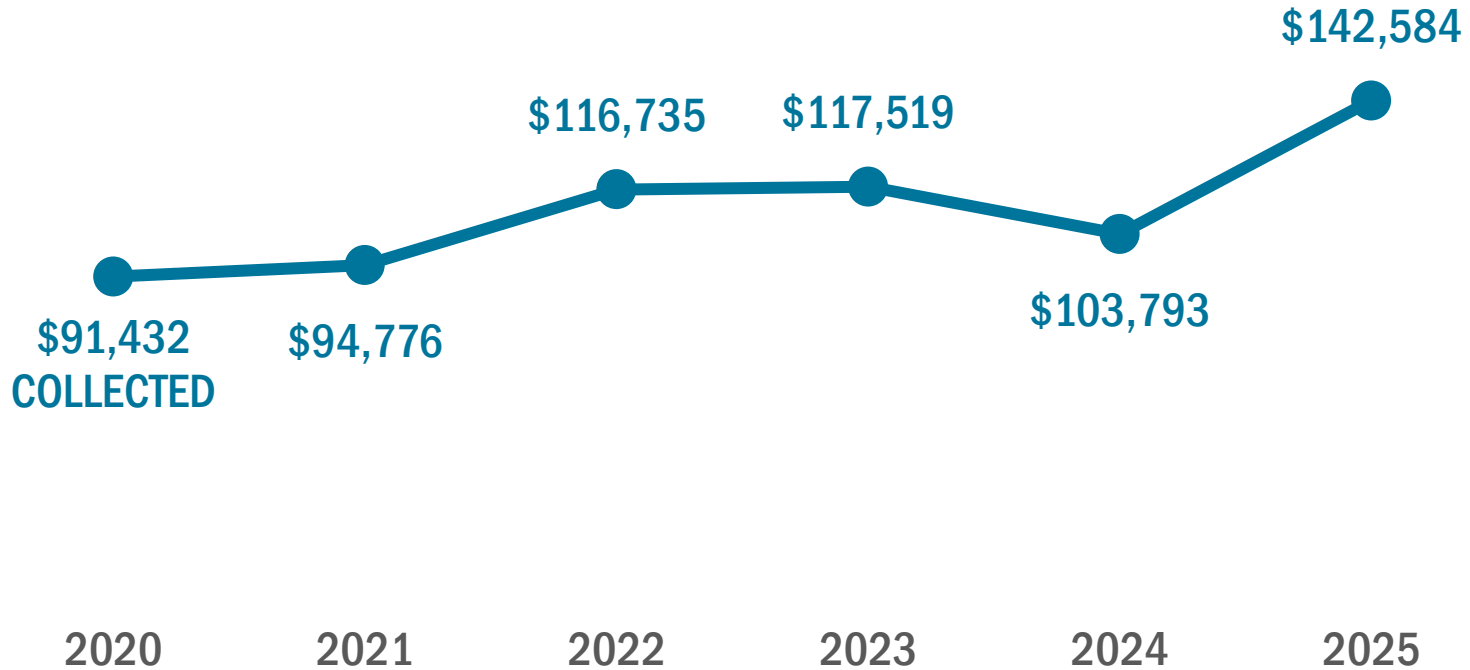
**STORES  
ITEM**



**TESTS, RELEASES,  
OR DISPOSES  
OF ITEM**



# Cash property increased over time





# Prevention and detection reduce risk



## **PREVENTION**

**AVOID UNINTENDED LOSS, THEFT, OR DAMAGE TO ITEM**



## **DETECTION**

**DISCOVER AND MAKE TIMELY CORRECTIONS TO LOSS,  
THEFT, OR DAMAGE TO ITEM**



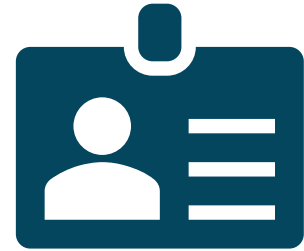
# KCMEO has some controls to reduce risk



**SEGREGATION  
OF DUTIES**



**SECURED  
STORAGE**



**LIMITED ACCESS  
TO ITEMS**



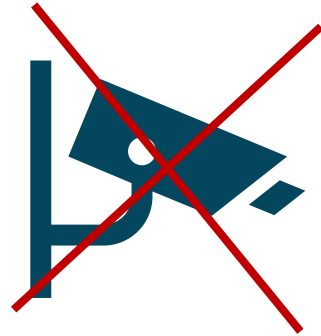
# Gaps in controls increase risk



**REGULAR  
INVENTORIES  
NOT DONE**



**DATA ANALYSIS +  
MONITORING  
NOT DONE**



**NO VIDEO  
SURVEILLANCE  
IN VAULT**





# Prioritize through risk assessment

- Risk assessment helps identify gaps
- KCMEO has not done risk assessment for items
- KCMEO lacks sufficient info to prioritize controls





# Recommendations

- Develop a risk management strategy for high-risk items
- Use the results to inform which preventive and detective controls to implement





# Gaps in review for conflicts of interest

- KCMEO works with businesses for burial services
- KCMEO staff are required to disclose outside activities
- Changes in processes add to staff confusion
- Additional steps needed to better document and review for potential conflicts



# Recommendations

- Define expectations regarding conflicts of interest
- Include provisions for King County Indigent Remains Program service partners



# Resources to help meet community needs

- Staff work to accommodate community needs
- Local tribes generally spoke positively of KCMEO
- Lack of training leaves staff feeling less prepared
- No information about accommodation requests in public brochure

# Opportunity to add guidance to brochure

## Checklist for Families

- Tissue/Cornea Donor?  
Call (800) 214-6356
- Designate a primary contact person for your family
- Provide your contact's information to the Medical Examiner's Office.
- Select a funeral home or crematory.
- Inform the Medical Examiner's Office of your selection.
- Obtain a copy of the Death Certificate from the funeral home or from King County Vital Statistics at the Medical Examiner's Office.
- Notify the Medical Examiner's Office if you would like copies of other reports.
- Contact the Medical Examiner's Office with questions of any kind or for information about support services.



## Guide F Frie D



## Understa the Me

## Supporting You And The Community

We recognize the loss of a loved one can bring deep sorrow. Death investigations are performed in part to assist grieving family and friends.

The mission of the King County Medical Examiner's Office (KCME) is to investigate sudden, unexpected and unnatural deaths in King County with the highest level of professionalism, compassion and efficiency, and to provide a resource for improving the health and safety of the community consistent with the general mission of Public Health.

We hope this brochure assists you by providing information about:

1. The investigation process, including the disposition of your loved one and any clothing or other items of personal property that are on or with the body.
2. Your special responsibilities during this process, including making arrangements with a funeral home or crematory and maintaining contact with the Medical Examiner.
3. How to obtain copies of the Death Certificate and other Medical Examiner documents.
4. Your loved one may be able to help others through tissue and cornea donation. Timing is critical and there is a short window of opportunity for this to happen. If this is something you are interested in, please call (800) 214-6356 as soon as possible to start the donation process.

## The Investigation Process What Happens Now?

Investigation at the scene of death includes taking photographs, collecting evidence, and obtaining information from family and other witnesses.

From the death scene, the KCME investigator will transport your loved one's body to the Medical Examiner's Office, which is located at 908 Jefferson Street in Seattle (on the Harborview Medical Center Campus).

Here, the investigation will continue and will include an examination of the decedent by a qualified KCME physician, usually performed the following morning.

The examination may or may not include an autopsy. If one is included, it will also be performed by a KCME physician in order to most accurately determine the cause and manner of your loved one's death.

While the examination is being performed, it is time for you to choose a funeral home or crematory to whom the body should be released after the examination is complete. In most cases, this can be accomplished within 24-48 hours.

You may contact KCME at any time during the process to inquire about the process or ask about investigation and examination findings.





# Recommendations

Update resources to help staff meet the needs of American Indian and Alaskan Native tribes and communities.



# Key findings



Practices in place, but gaps increase loss and safety risks



Steps needed to better document and monitor for conflicts of interest



Better training and resources could help staff





# Thank you!

Full report available online at  
[KingCounty.gov/Auditor](http://KingCounty.gov/Auditor)

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