

Chapter 29: BC Resource Safety Coroner

The BC Coroners Service operates under authority of the Ministry of Public Safety and Solicitor General.

The Coroners Service of British Columbia is responsible for the inquiry /investigation of all unnatural, unexpected, unexplained or unattended deaths in BC. The Service, under the direction of the Chief Coroner, is managed from five regional offices located in major centres in BC.

A Coroner is a medical-legal death investigator appointed by the Lieutenant Governor in Council upon the recommendation of the Solicitor General.

The position is judicially independent. Coroners in BC come from a wide variety of backgrounds; medical, legal, investigative, or social science.

Coroners Role

The Coroner is responsible for ascertaining the facts surrounding a death and must determine:

- The identity of the deceased.
- How, when, where and by what means he or she died.

The death is then classified as natural accidental, suicide, homicide or undetermined. Coroners may make recommendations which may prevent similar loss of life in the future. The Coroner does not assign fault or blame but rather conducts a fact finding investigation.

Coroner's Inquest

An inquest is a formal court proceeding held to publicly review the circumstances of a death. The decision to call an inquest is discretionary and is based on the particular circumstances of the death.

A five person jury hears evidence from witnesses under subpoena in order to determine facts of the death. The presiding Coroner is responsible to ensure the jury maintains the focus of fact finding, not fault finding. The jury can make recommendations to prevent a similar death in the future or any other recommendation in connection with the death. The recommendations are included in a public document, the Verdict at Coroners Inquest.

Recommendations are non binding; however, the majority are voluntarily implemented.

A Special Resource Safety Coroner Appointed in 2006

The Safety Coroner will work in the Coroner's Office under the direction of the Chief Coroner. The Safety Coroner will conduct inquiries into all forest sector fatalities and conduct public inquests if circumstances warrant. As a dedicated resource, the Coroner will help to identify common circumstances and any underlying systemic issues that may be contributing to fatalities.

BCTS Involvement with the Office of the Coroner or the Resource Safety Coroner

In the event of fatality involving BCTS staff, contract workers or workers on timber sale licences, the coroner or resource coroner may need to investigate and gather facts from BCTS and BCTS staff. Staff should provide clear factual information as promptly as possible.

Recommendations from a Coroners inquest which impact or affect BCTS will be discussed at timber sale leadership meetings and with the executives of BCTS and the Ministry of Forests and Range to determine the appropriate response and implementation.

Local Procedures

None

Forms and Checklists

None