

Department of State

§ 72.7

is no local authority able or willing to issue a death certificate or a judicial finding of death. This may include, for example, death in a plane crash where there are no identifiable remains, death in a plane crash beyond the territory of any country, death in an avalanche, disappearance/death at sea, or other sudden disaster where the body is not immediately (or perhaps ever) recoverable.

(2) *Authorization of issuance.* The Department may authorize the issuance of a consular report of presumptive death in such circumstances. A consular report of presumptive death may not be issued without the Department's authorization.

(3) *Considerations in determining whether the Department will authorize issuance of a Report of Presumptive Death.* The Department's decision whether to issue a Report of Presumptive Death is discretionary, and will be based on the totality of circumstances in each particular case. Although no one factor is conclusive or determinative, the Department will consider the factors cited below, among other relevant considerations, when deciding whether to authorize issuance in a particular case:

(i) Whether the death is believed to have occurred within a geographic area where no sovereign government exercises jurisdiction;

(ii) Whether the government exercising jurisdiction over the place where the death is believed to have occurred lacks laws or procedures for making findings of presumptive death;

(iii) Whether the government exercising jurisdiction over the place where the death is believed to have occurred requires a waiting period exceeding five years before findings of presumptive death may be made;

(iv) Whether the person who is believed to have died was seen to be in imminent peril by credible witnesses;

(v) Whether the person who is believed to have died is reliably known to have been in a place which experienced a natural disaster, or catastrophic event, that was capable of causing death;

(vi) Whether the person believed to have died was listed on the certified manifest of, and was confirmed to have

boarded, an aircraft, or vessel, which was destroyed and, despite diligent search by competent authorities, some or all of the remains were not recovered or could not be identified;

(vii) Whether there is evidence of fraud, deception, or malicious intent.

(c) Consular reports of presumptive death should be processed and issued in accordance with § 72.5.

(d) The Department may revoke a report of presumptive death if it determines in its sole discretion that the report was issued in error.

DISPOSITION OF REMAINS

§ 72.7 Consular responsibility.

(a) A consular officer has no authority to create Department or personal financial obligations in connection with the disposition of the remains of a United States citizen or non-citizen national who dies abroad. Responsibility for the disposition of the remains and all related costs (including but not limited to costs of embalming or cremation, burial expenses, cost of a burial plot or receptacle for ashes, markers, and grave upkeep), rests with the legal representative of the deceased. In the absence of a legal representative (including when the next of kin is not a legal representative), the consular officer should ask the next of kin to provide funds and instructions for disposition of remains. If the consular officer cannot locate a legal representative or next of kin, the consular officer may ask friends or other interested parties to provide the funds and instructions.

(b) Arrangements for the disposition of remains must be consistent with the law and regulations of the host country and any relevant United States laws and regulations. Local law may, for example, require an autopsy, forbid cremation, require burial within a certain period of time, or specify who has the legal authority to make arrangements for the disposition of remains.

(c) If funds are not available for the disposition of the remains within the period provided by local law for the interment or preservation of dead bodies, the remains must be disposed of by the local authorities in accordance with local law or regulations.

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PERSONAL ESTATES OF DECEASED UNITED STATES CITIZENS AND NATIONALS

§ 72.8 Regulatory responsibility of consular officer.

(a) A consular officer should act as provisional conservator of the personal estate of a United States citizen or non-citizen national who dies abroad in accordance with, and subject to, the provisions of §§ 72.9 through 72.27. The consular officer may act as provisional conservator only with respect to the portion of the personal estate located within the consular officer's district.

(b) A consular officer may act as provisional conservator only to the extent that doing so is:

- (1) Authorized by treaty provisions;
- (2) Not prohibited by the laws or authorities of the country where the personal estate is located; or
- (3) Permitted by established usage in that country.

§ 72.9 Responsibility if legal representative is present.

(a) A consular officer should not act as provisional conservator if the consular officer knows that a legal representative is present in the foreign country.

(b) If the consular officer learns that a legal representative is present after the consular officer has taken possession and/or disposed of the personal estate but prior to transmission of the proceeds and effects to the Secretary of State pursuant to § 72.25, the consular officer should follow the procedures specified in § 72.22.

§ 72.10 Responsibility if a will intended to operate locally exists.

(a) If a will that is intended to operate in the foreign country is discovered and the legal representative named in the will qualifies promptly and takes charge of the personal estate in the foreign country, the consular officer should assume no responsibility for the estate, and should not take possession, inventory and dispose of the personal property and effects or in any way serve as agent for the legal representative.

(b) If the legal representative does not qualify promptly and if the laws of

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the country where the personal estate is located permit, however, the consular officer should take appropriate protective measures such as—

(1) Requesting local authorities to provide protection for the property under local procedures; and/or

(2) Placing the consular officer's seal on the personal property of the decedent, such seal to be broken or removed only at the request of the legal representative.

(c) If prolonged delays are encountered by the local or domiciliary legal representative in qualifying and/or making arrangements to take charge of the personal estate, the consular officer should consult the Department concerning whether the will should be offered for probate.

§ 72.11 Responsibility if a will intended to operate in the United States exists.

The consular officer immediately should forward any will that is intended to operate in the United States and that is among the effects taken into possession to the person or persons designated as executor(s). When the executor(s) cannot be located, the consular officer should send the will to the appropriate court in the State of the decedent's domicile. Until the consular officer knows that a legal representative is present in the foreign country and has qualified or made arrangements to take charge of the personal estate, the consular officer should act as provisional conservator in accordance with § 72.8.

§ 72.12 Bank deposits in foreign countries.

(a) A consular officer is not authorized to withdraw or otherwise dispose of bank accounts and other assets deposited in financial institutions left by a deceased United States citizen or non-citizen national in a foreign country. Such deposits or other assets are not considered part of the personal estate of a decedent.

(b) The consular officer should report the existence of bank accounts and other assets deposited in financial institutions of which the officer becomes aware to the legal representative, if any. The consular officer should inform