

2025 RESPONSE TO GRAND JURY REPORT

Report Title: **Humboldt County Sheriff's Office – Coroner: Serving the Community, Involving the Community**

Report Date: June 2025

Response by: W. Honsal, Sheriff, County of Humboldt

FINDINGS

See Following Pages

RECOMMENDATIONS

See following pages

Date: 9/5/25

Signed: W. Honsal

Number of pages attached: 3

RESPONSE TO GRAND JURY REPORT – RECOMMENDATIONS AND RESPONSE SUMMARY STATEMENT

FINDINGS:

Finding 1:

The Coroner's Office staff and volunteers perform exemplary service and maintain investigational integrity while operating in an antiquated, undersized, and poorly maintained facility. Providing this professional and respectful service benefits the community, deceased individuals, and their families.

Response: Agree

Finding 2:

The Coroner's Office staff and volunteers perform exemplary service and maintain investigational integrity while operating under severe budget and resource constraints. Providing this professional and respectful service benefits the community, deceased individuals, and their families.

Response: Agree

Finding 3:

The Coroner's Office relies substantially on volunteers, who collectively contributed 4,722 volunteer hours in 2024. This generated significant cost savings for the County while providing valuable training and experience to local medical students.

Response: Agree

Finding 4:

Dedicated staff have successfully produced a comprehensive 86-page Humboldt County Coroner's Office Policy & Procedures Manual. This manual will standardize practices, inform employees of policies, and serve as an operational reference guide.

Response: Agree

Finding 5:

The Humboldt County Coroner's Register is maintained in both physical and digital formats. This enables efficient report generation from the digital version.

Response: Agree

Finding 6:

Safety Data Sheets for formaldehyde and other chemicals are readily available to the Coroners' Office staff. This provides immediate access to safety protocols and ensures compliance with California Division of Occupational Safety and Health Administration (Cal/OSHA) requirements.

Response: Agree

Finding 7:

A Sheriff's Office Property Technician has dedicated nine months to cataloging and organizing the evidence room to facilitate record digitization. The digital database will enhance record retrieval, sharing, and storage efficiency and reliability.

Response: Agree

Finding 8:

The existing counter surfaces and cabinets in the Coroner's Office autopsy room are permeable, deteriorating, and fail to comply with National Association of Medical Examiners standards. This creates safety risks and contamination hazards.

Response: Agree

Finding 9:

The Coroner's Office evidence/storage room access is controlled by a single code shared among all staff. The inability to identify specific room access creates risks of tampering, contamination, or loss of records, forensic evidence, cremated remains, and decedents' personal property.

Response: Agree

RECOMMENDATIONS:**R1:**

The Humboldt County Sheriff / Coroner's Division complete the cataloging and organization of the evidence/storage room and enter all property information into a digital file record system by April 1, 2026.

The recommendation will be implemented by the April 2026 recommendation.

The Sheriff's Office Property Technicians are diligently working to catalog and organize the evidence and storage facility, ensuring that all pertinent information is accurately entered into the RIMS digital records system.

R2:

The Humboldt County Sheriff replace counter surfaces and cabinets with stainless steel or other non-permeable surfacing materials by January 1, 2026.

The recommendation will be implemented as soon as funding can be identified.

Stainless steel countertops are ideal for the Coroner's Office autopsy room because they provide a durable, non-porous, and easily sanitized surface that withstands harsh chemicals and high use, ensuring the highest standards of hygiene, safety, and longevity in a critical medical environment.

R3:

The Humboldt County Sheriff installs a locking system on the evidence/storage room door by October 15, 2025, that differentiates between users, records date and time of entry/exit, and identifies everyone accessing the room.

The recommendation will be implemented as soon as County Public Works RFP determines a contractor to conduct the work.

Public Works is in the RFP process to determine the who will be the contractor that will install and manage the keyless entry/exit systems for the county.