

Skeletal remains are those of once-living individuals and, as such, should be treated with the utmost care, dignity, and respect.



Cemeteries, Indian burial grounds, historic graves, and pioneer cemeteries are significant and irreplaceable cultural resources in Washington state. Because of their cultural importance, they are all strictly protected under state laws.



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## Human Skeletal Remains in Washington State



Department of Archaeology and  
Historic Preservation

The **Department of Archaeology and Historic Preservation (DAHP)** has jurisdiction over all non-forensic human skeletal remains found in the state of Washington on non-federal and non-tribal lands (except tribal fee land). Non-forensic remains are those determined by a medical examiner or coroner to be outside of their purview (RCW 68.60).



The **State Physical Anthropologist** at DAHP:

- Investigates, preserves, and, when necessary, removes and reinters non-forensic human skeletal remains.
- Notifies appropriate affected tribes and cemeteries when non-forensic human skeletal remains are discovered.
- Determines whether non-forensic human skeletal remains are Indian (Native). This step is required by law (RCW 27.44.055) and is solely the responsibility of the State Physical Anthropologist.

## What do I do if I've found human skeletal remains?

### 1. STOP

Immediately cease all activity in the area.

### 2. SECURE and PROTECT

Leave the remains and surrounding area untouched. Create a well-marked boundary and prevent access.

### 3. NOTIFY

Washington state law (68.50.645) requires you to notify

- 1) The county medical examiner (ME) or coroner's office
- 2) Local law enforcement as promptly as possible.

DAHP also suggests notifying the State Physical Anthropologist.

## What happens after notification?

Once the county ME or coroner is notified, they will assume jurisdiction over the remains and determine whether the remains are forensic. If the remains are forensic, the ME/coroner and law enforcement investigate. If the remains are non-forensic, then the DAHP assumes jurisdiction. MEs and coroners have 5 business days to determine whether remains are forensic and must notify the DAHP within 2 business days of their decision.

## What happens to non-forensic human skeletal remains?

After assuming jurisdiction over non-forensic remains, the DAHP has 2 business days to notify tribal chairs, tribal cultural resources staff, and cemeteries about the remains. The DAHP then has 2 more business days to assess whether the remains are Indian (Native) or not and notify affected tribes and cemeteries of these findings. If the remains are determined to be Indian (Native), then affected tribes have 5 business days to communicate their interest in their remains to the DAHP.

The State Physical Anthropologist handles consultation concerning Indian/Native remains with affected tribes and other parties to determine their future preservation, excavation, and disposition.

## What if I don't know whether remains are human or not?

Questions about what you've found can be directed to the State Physical Anthropologist (contact information is on the back). Be prepared to describe how and where you found the remains and provide overall and close-up photos if possible.