

The Tucson At-Need Roadmap: Your First 48 Hours

A Step-by-Step Guide to Navigating Loss in Pima County

Step 1: The Immediate Phone Call (The Legal Pronouncement)

Before any funeral arrangements can be made, a legal pronouncement of death must occur. Who you call depends on **where** the passing happened.

- **If at Home (Unexpected):** Call **911** immediately. Dispatch will send Tucson Police or Pima County Sheriffs and a medical professional to the scene.
 - **If at Home (Under Hospice Care):** Do **NOT** call 911. Call your Hospice Nurse first. They will come to the home to officially pronounce the death.
 - **If at a Hospital or Nursing Home:** The staff will handle the pronouncement and notify the attending physician.
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Step 2: The Search for Information (The First 2 Hours)

Before calling a funeral home, you need to know if your loved one already made a plan. This prevents you from paying for services twice. Look for a "Pre-Need" folder or a Will in these common spots:

- Top dresser drawers or bedside tables.
- Home office files or a fireproof safe.
- The freezer (a common Tucson "safe spot" for important papers).

If you find nothing: Search for a business card from a local funeral home. They may have a "Pre-Paid" plan on file.

Step 3: Contacting the Pima County Medical Examiner (If Applicable)

In Arizona, if a death is sudden, accidental, or occurs at home without hospice, the body may be taken to the Medical Examiner to determine the cause of death.

- **Office of the Pima County Medical Examiner**
 - **Phone:** 520-724-8600
 - **Action:** Ask if the body has been released. A funeral home cannot pick up your loved one until the Medical Examiner gives the "OK."
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Step 4: Selecting a Funeral Home or Crematory (The "Transport")

You must choose a facility to transport your loved one. Under **Arizona Law (ARS § 36-3251)**, the "Right to Control Disposition" falls in this order: 1. Spouse, 2. Adult Children, 3. Parents, 4. Siblings.

Important: You do not have to call the closest funeral home. You have the right to shop around for pricing.

- **Common Tucson Providers:** Adair, East Lawn or Angel Valley. There are many!
 - **The Question to Ask:** "What is your General Price List (GPL) for a Basic Cremation/Burial, and what is your transportation fee?"
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Step 5: Understanding Arizona Timelines & Laws

- **The 24-Hour Rule:** In Arizona, a body must be refrigerated or embalmed within 24 hours of death.
 - **The Death Certificate:** The funeral home will file this for you. In Pima County, you can get extra copies later from **Pima County Vital Records (520-724-7900)**. You will need roughly 5 - 10 copies for banks, life insurance, and property.
 - **Cremation Authorization:** If you choose cremation, all legal next-of-kin (e.g., all four children if there is no spouse) must sign the authorization. This can be done digitally.
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Step 6: The "Initial Call" Checklist

When the funeral home calls you for the "Arrangement Conference," have this info of the deceased ready:

- Social Security Number.
 - Date and Place of Birth.
 - Parents' names (including Mother's maiden name).
 - Veteran status (Discharge papers/DD214). *Tucson is home to the **Arizona Veterans' Memorial Cemetery at Marana (520-682-4600)** - veterans often get a free plot/interment.*
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Step 7: Identifying if there is a Will or Trust

If you still haven't found a will, you may need to check with the **Pima County Superior Court**.

- **Probate Court:** 520-724-3230
 - **Action:** If there is no will (Intestate), Arizona law dictates how assets are split. Do not move or sell any property (cars, houses) until you speak with a professional.
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Summary: Your Next Three Actions

1. **Locate the "Right of Disposition" person** (the legal decision-maker).
 2. **Call a Funeral Home** to authorize transport.
 3. **Take a Breath.** You have time. Arizona law does not require you to have a funeral service immediately.
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Need an Advocate? *If this feels overwhelming, an Independent Advocate can handle these calls, audit the funeral home contracts, and ensure you aren't overcharged. Contact M.K. at 520-685-7485.*