

Is it necessary to report the death of SA expats to Home Affairs?

By [Jenny Fung](#) and [Daniel Hirschowitz](#)

19 Mar 2024

Globalisation coupled with opportunities abroad, has made it quite common for many South Africans to emigrate. Although a South African expat may think that they are finally free from South African bureaucracy once they leave, this is often not the case.



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Aside from the more well-known issue of formal emigration and the implications of accessing pension fund contributions after emigrating, there is also the issue of their family reporting the expat's death with the South African Department of Home Affairs (DHA) on their passing.

Apart from the fact that it enables the government to maintain accurate registers and records, it has a more personal impact on the expat's estate. In order to wind up an expat's South African estate, the Master, the banks and the financial institutions all require a South African death certificate.

This is part of their internal processes and to confirm that the deceased is in fact deceased and that it is not an elaborate fraud. Without the South African death certificate, the Master will not issue Letters of Authority/Executorship, the banks will not pay out the account balances and the financial institutions will not pay out the investments. It is not to say that these assets will be forfeited but rather, everything will be frozen until such a time as the death has been reported to the DHA.

Notwithstanding the inconvenience of the South African estate being stuck in limbo, it may also feel like bureaucracy is conspiring to hinder the process. In fact, if reported and done correctly at the start of the process, the estate should run smoothly and uneventfully.

Embassy assistance

The other issue related to reporting the death to the DHA is that often the family no longer resides in South Africa and they

cannot afford to return for the sole purpose of reporting the death. A simpler, more cost-effective way around this is for the death to be reported at the appropriate South African Embassy which will then liaise with the DHA to obtain the death certificate.

As has been discussed, once an expat passes away, it is imperative that the death is reported to the DHA. Doing so becomes critical when trying to finalise the Deceased's South African estate and it can even be reported from the family's new country of residence.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Jenny Fung, Director: Estates, and Daniel Hirschowitz, Senior Associate: Estates, at Fluxmans

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