

Rule 144. Actions for Death by Wrongful Act**Rule 144.01 Application for Appointment of Trustee**

Every application for the appointment of a trustee of a claim for death by wrongful act under Minnesota Statutes, section 573.02, shall be made by the verified petition of the surviving spouse or one of the next of kin of the decedent. The petition shall show the dates and places of the decedent's birth and death; the decedent's address at the time of death; the name, age and address of the decedent's surviving spouse, children, parents, grandparents, and siblings; and the name, age, occupation and address of the proposed trustee. The petition shall also show whether or not any previous application has been made, the facts with reference thereto and its disposition shall also be stated. The written consent of the proposed trustee to act as such shall be endorsed on or filed with such petition. The application for appointment shall not be considered filing of a document in the case for the purpose of any requirement for filing a certificate of representation or civil cover sheet.

(Amended effective January 1, 1993; amended effective January 1, 2000; amended effective July 1, 2013.)

Cross Reference: Minn. R. Civ. P. 17.

Rule 144.02 Notice and Hearing

The petition for appointment of trustee will be heard upon such notice, given in such form and in such manner and upon such persons as may be determined by the court, unless waived by the next of kin listed in the petition or unless the court determines that such notice is not required.

(Amended effective January 1, 2000.)

Rule 144.03 Caption

The petition, any order entered thereon, and the trustee's oath, will be entitled: "In the matter of the appointment of a trustee for the next of kin of _____, Decedent."

Rule 144.04 Transfer of Action

If the trustee, after appointment and qualification, commences an action for death by wrongful act in a county other than that in which the trustee was appointed, a certified copy of the petition, the order entered thereon and the oath shall be filed in the court where such action be commenced, at the time the summons and complaint are filed therein, and the court file and jurisdiction over the trust will thereupon be transferred to such court.

Rule 144.05 Distribution of Proceeds

Application for the distribution of money recovered under Minnesota Statutes, section 573.02, shall be by verified petition of the trustee. Such petition shall show the amount which has been received upon action or settlement; a detailed statement of disbursements paid or incurred, if any; the amount, if any, claimed for services of the trustee and of the trustee's lawyer; the amount of the funeral expenses and of demands for the support of the decedent; the name, age and address of the surviving spouse and each next of kin required to be listed in the petition for appointment of trustee and all other next of kin who have notified the trustee in writing of a claim for pecuniary loss, and the share to which each is entitled.

If an action was commenced, such petition shall be heard by the court in which the action was tried, or in the case of a settlement, by the court in which the action was pending at the time of settlement. If an action was not commenced, the petition shall be heard by the court in which the

trustee was appointed. The court hearing the petition shall approve, modify, or disapprove the proposed disposition and shall specify the persons to whom the proceeds are to be paid.

The petition for distribution will be heard upon notice, given in form and manner and upon such persons as may be determined by the court, unless waived by all next of kin listed in the petition for distribution or unless the court determines that such notice is not required. The court by order, or by decree of distribution, will direct distribution of the money to the persons entitled thereto by law. Upon the filing of a receipt from each distributee for the amount assigned to that distributee, the trustee shall be discharged.

The foregoing procedure will, so far as can be applicable, also govern the distribution of money recovered by personal representatives under the Federal Employers' Liability Act (45 U.S.C. section 51) and under Minnesota Statutes, section 219.77.

(Amended effective January 1, 2000.)

Cross Reference: Minn. R. Civ. P. 17.

Rule 144.06 Validity and Timeliness of Action

The failure to name the next of kin in a petition required by Rule 144.01 or the failure to notify or obtain a waiver from the next of kin shall have no effect on the validity or timeliness of an action commenced by the trustee.

(Added effective January 1, 2000.)

Advisory Committee Comment - 2007 Amendment

*This rule is derived from Rule 2 of the Code of Rules for the District Courts. The Task Force has amended the rule to refer to "next of kin" rather than "heirs." Minnesota Statutes, section 573.02, makes no requirements as to who must receive notification of petitions for appointment of trustees or for orders for distribution. Amendments to Rule 144.01, 144.02, and 144.05 codify the longstanding practice of requiring petitioners to name and notify only the decedent's surviving spouse and close relatives, not "all next of kin," which under *Wynkoop v. Carpenter*, 574 N.W.2d 422 (Minn. 1998), and recent changes to Minnesota's intestacy statute would include distant relatives such as nieces, nephews, aunts, uncles, and cousins. These amendments address only the matter of notification and are not intended to reduce substantive rights of any next of kin.*

*The Task Force considered the advisability of amending Rule 144.05 to require the court to consider and either approve, modify, or disapprove the settlement itself, in addition to the disposition of proceeds as required under the existing rule. Although it appears that good reasons exist to change the rule in this manner, the Minnesota Supreme Court has indicated that the trial court has no jurisdiction to approve or disapprove the settlement amounts agreed upon by the parties. The court can only approve the distribution of those funds among the heirs and next of kin. See *Minneapolis Star & Tribune Co. v. Schumacher*, 392 N.W.2d 197, 200 n. 1 (Minn. 1986).*

The final sentence of Rule 144.01 was added in 1992 to make it clear that it is the filing of papers in the actual wrongful death action, and not papers relating to appointment of a trustee to bring the action, that triggers the scheduling requirements of the rules, including the requirement to file a certificate of representation and parties (Rule 104) and an informational statement (Rule 111.02). Some have interpreted this comment to mean that the advisory committee intended there to be two separate actions for purposes of computing filing fees. Although a filing fee must be paid when the petition for appointment of a trustee is filed, a second filing fee should not be required in the wrongful death action, even when that wrongful death action is commenced in a different county or district.

Rule 144.06 codifies existing law holding that failure to notify some next of kin does not void an appointment. See Stroud v. Hennepin County Medical Center, 544 N.W.2d 42, 48-49 (Minn. App. 1996) (failure to list and obtain signatures of all next of kin did not invalidate trustee's appointment and commencement of a wrongful death action), rev'd on other grounds, 556 N.W.2d 552, 553-55, nn. 3 & 5 (Minn. 1996) (trustee's original complaint effectively commenced wrongful death action despite her improper appointment).