



**MESA
COUNTY**

**MESA COUNTY
CORONER'S OFFICE**

2007 Annual Report

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This report provides a summary and statistical analysis of the deaths that were investigated by the Mesa County Coroner's Office in the year 2007. Mesa County encompasses an area over 3300 square miles which consists of desert, agricultural and mountain areas. Mesa County is home to approximately 135,000 people in 12 communities. The largest of these is Grand Junction, followed by Fruita and Palisade. Other towns and unincorporated areas of the County include Clifton, Fruitvale, De Beque, Collbran, Mesa, Mack, Loma, Gateway, Glade Park and Whitewater.

The Coroner and/or Deputy Coroner are on duty 24 hours a day, 365 days a year. The Coroner's mission is to satisfy the legal requirements of the office in an expeditious manner. The primary task of the Coroner's Office is to determine the cause and manner of death of those who have died in Mesa County or in those whose traumatic event originated in Mesa County. An autopsy may be required depending upon the circumstances of the death.

The Coroner's Office investigates sudden, unexpected deaths, especially those that occur under violent or suspicious circumstances. Those deaths to be reported to the Mesa County Coroner's Office include all deaths occurring in Mesa County as outlined below regardless of where or when the initial injuring event occurred. In addition, all deaths as outlined below shall be reported that occurred outside of Mesa County but the initiating injuring event occurred in Mesa County.

- From disease which may be hazardous or contagious or which may constitute a threat to the health of the general public
- From external violence, an unexplained cause, or under suspicious circumstances
- Where no physician is in attendance, or where, though in attendance, the physician is unable to certify the cause of death
- From thermal, chemical, or radiation injury
- From criminal abortion
- While in the custody of law enforcement officials or while incarcerated in a public institution
- When the death was sudden and happened to a person who was in good health
- From an industrial accident or any death suspected to involved with the decedent's occupation
- When death occurs in a hospital less than 24 hours after admission to a hospital or after any invasive procedure
- Any death suspected to be due to alcohol intoxication or the result of exposure to drugs or toxic agents
- Any death due to neglect or suspected neglect
- Any stillbirth of 20 or more weeks gestational age unattended by a physician
- Any maternal death to include death of a pregnant woman regardless of the length of the pregnancy, and up to six weeks (or one year) post-delivery, even where the cause of death is unrelated to the pregnancy
- Any death of an infant or child where the medical history has not established a significant pre-existing condition

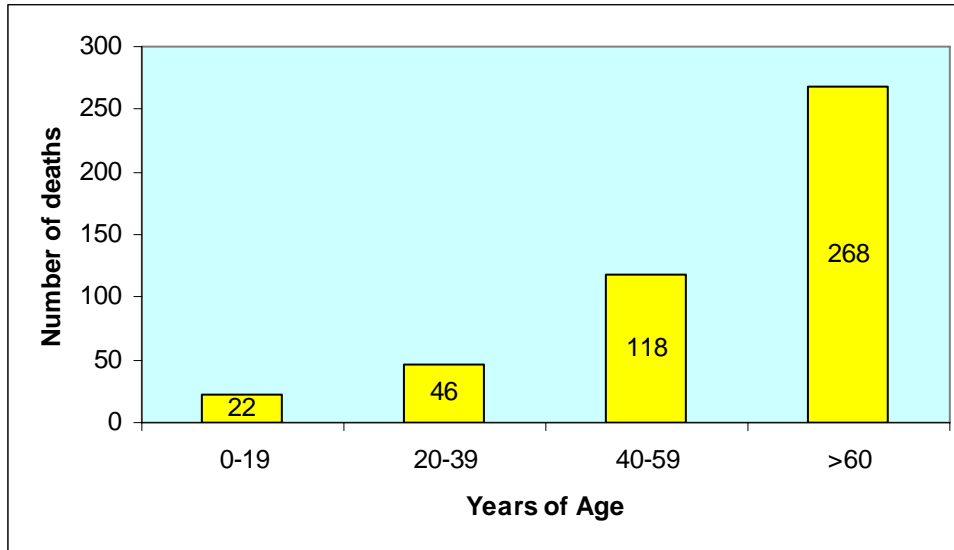
Staff

Dean Havlik, M.D.	Coroner & Forensic Pathologist
Robert Kurtzman, D.O.	Chief Deputy Coroner & Forensic Pathologist
Steven Stogsdill, D-ABMDI	Deputy Coroner
L.M. "Mike" Smith	Deputy Coroner
Larry Bullard	Deputy Coroner

General Statistics

Mesa County population in 2007 (estimated)	135,000
Total Mesa County deaths	1351
Deaths that were Mesa County citizens	1189
Percentage of Mesa County citizens who died in 2007	.88%
Number of deaths investigated	455
Percentage of deaths investigated	33.7%
Number of postmortem examinations	168
Autopsies	157
External examinations by pathologist	11
Gender	
Males	280
Females	175
Race	
Caucasian	422
Hispanic	24
Black	6
Native American	2
Asian	1

Age



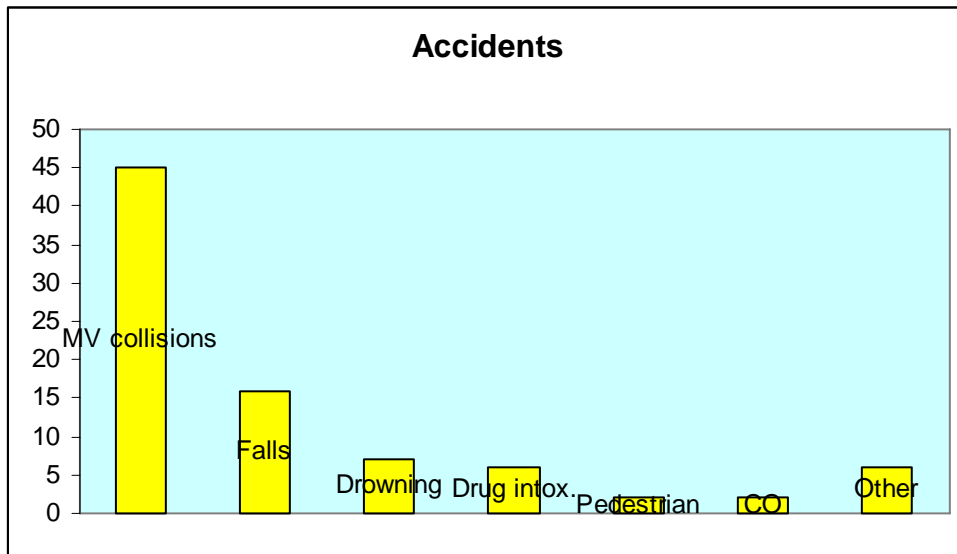
Manner of Death

Manner	# of cases	# of postmortem exams	% receiving a postmortem exam **
Natural	308	48	15.5%
Accident	84	59	70%
Suicide	43	41	95%
Homicide	7	7	100%
Undetermined	14	14	100%

** Of the 25 accidental deaths in which no postmortem examination was performed, the decedents were hospitalized for an extended period of time and the injuries were documented in the hospital. Of these deaths, 8 were motor vehicle accidents, 7 were falls from standing heights in older individuals, 5 were other types of falls, 2 were drug intoxications, 1 was a drowning, 1 was food aspiration and 1 was a pedestrian struck by a motor vehicle. Of the 2 suicide deaths in which no postmortem examination was performed, both were hospitalized for an extended period of time and the injuries were documented (one gunshot wound of the head and one drug intoxication).

Accidental Deaths

Type	Number of deaths
Motor vehicle (MV) collisions	45
Falls	16
Drowning	7
Drug intoxication	6
Pedestrian vs. Motor vehicle (MV)	2
Carbon Monoxide (CO)	2
Other **	6



**The “other” cases include one each of the following deaths: fire victim, medical therapeutic accident, large beam fell on the individual, asphyxia, food aspiration and a forklift accident.

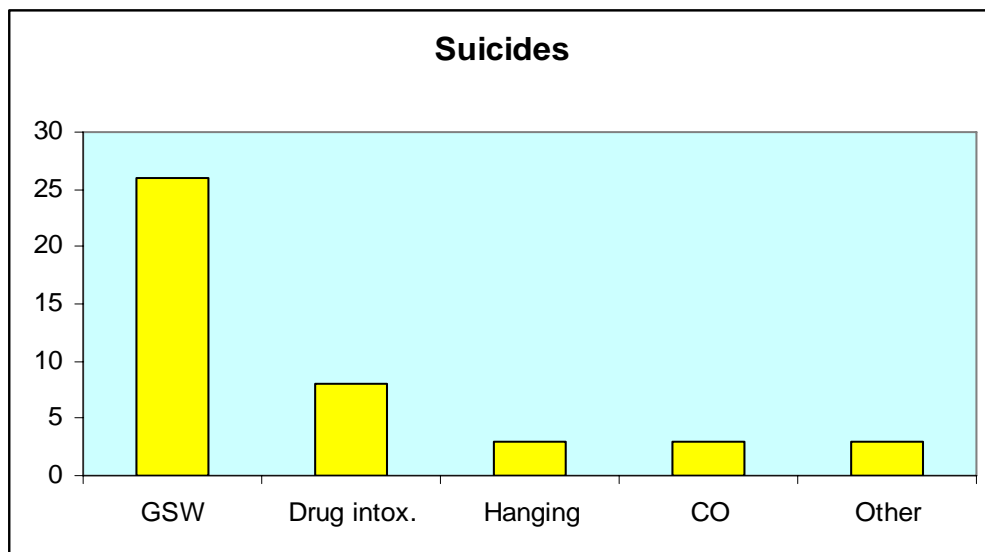
The majority of the falls were of elderly individuals who fell from a standing height, many of which resulting in a fractured hip.

The 45 motor vehicle collision-related deaths displayed the following characteristics:

- Drivers of automobiles – 22
- Passengers of automobiles – 13
- Drivers of motorcycle/ATV wearing a helmet – 5
- Drivers of motorcycle/ATV without a helmet – 5
- Automobile victims wearing a seatbelt – 13
- Automobile victims not wearing a seatbelt – 13
- Automobile victims unknown if wearing a seatbelt – 9
- 4 occurrences of multiple fatalities
 - 3 accidents with 2 deaths each
 - 1 accident with 3 deaths
- Alcohol or drugs involved in at least 17 of the deaths (38% of cases)
 - Alcohol only in 9 deaths
 - Alcohol and drugs in 4 deaths
 - Drugs only in 4 deaths
 - Unknown if alcohol or drugs involved in 7 deaths

Suicides

Type	Number of deaths
Gunshot wounds (GSW)	26
Drug intoxications	8
Hanging	3
Carbon monoxide (CO)	3
Other **	3



**The "other" cases include one each of the following deaths: helium inhalation, incised wounds and a driver of a motor vehicle that drove off the Colorado National Monument.

The following are some features of the suicide deaths:

- 32 males and 11 females
- Males ranged from 21 to 87 years of age (average age 57) and included the following:
 - Gunshot wounds – 24 deaths
 - Drug intoxications – 3 deaths
 - Hanging – 2 deaths
 - Carbon monoxide – 2 deaths
 - Helium inhalation – 1 death
- Females ranged from 32 to 78 years of age (average age 51) and included the following:
 - Drug intoxications – 5 deaths
 - Gunshot wounds – 2 deaths
 - Hanging – 1 death
 - Carbon monoxide – 1 death
 - Driver of automobile that drove off CO Nat. Monument – 1 death
 - Incised wounds – 1 death

Homicides

There were a total of 7 homicides investigated. However, one of the deaths involved a 20 year old man who sustained a gunshot wound in La Plata County but was subsequently transported to St. Mary's Hospital. The 6 Mesa County incidents had the following characteristics:

- 2 deaths due to gunshot wounds
- 1 death due to child abuse (head injuries)
- Intoxicated driver struck a motor vehicle resulting in 2 deaths
- One death of an infant who died shortly after delivery because of maternal injuries sustained in a motor vehicle collision

Undetermined deaths

There were 14 deaths that had an undetermined manner of death. The majority of these deaths were drug intoxications (11 deaths). The manner was undetermined in these deaths primarily due to the lack of evidence indicating whether these deaths were suicides (intentional ingestion of the drug(s)) versus accidental over usage of the drug(s). One of the undetermined deaths was that of a 1 month old infant where no definitive cause of death was identified. One death was of a driver of an automobile that ran off a road (suicide vs. accident). There was one death of an individual who was markedly decomposed and no definitive cause of death could be identified.

Natural deaths

Of the 308 natural deaths investigated, the majority were cardiovascular related (210 deaths, 68%). Deaths due to cardiovascular causes include myocardial infarcts (heart attacks), heart arrhythmias, strokes and aneurysms. There were 21 deaths related to infectious causes (predominantly pneumonia in elderly individuals), 19 cancer related deaths and 7 deaths related to chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (emphysema).