



# **MESA COUNTY CORONER'S OFFICE**

## **2008 Annual Report**

Dean M. Havlik, M.D.  
Mesa County Coroner  
2021 N. 12<sup>th</sup> Street  
Grand Junction, CO 81501  
Phone: (970) 256-6462  
Fax: (970) 256-6521  
E-mail: [dhavlik@gjhosp.org](mailto:dhavlik@gjhosp.org)

This report provides a summary and statistical analysis of the deaths that were investigated by the Mesa County Coroner's Office in the year 2008. Mesa County encompasses an area over 3300 square miles which consists of desert, agricultural and mountain areas. Mesa County is home to approximately 142,000 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

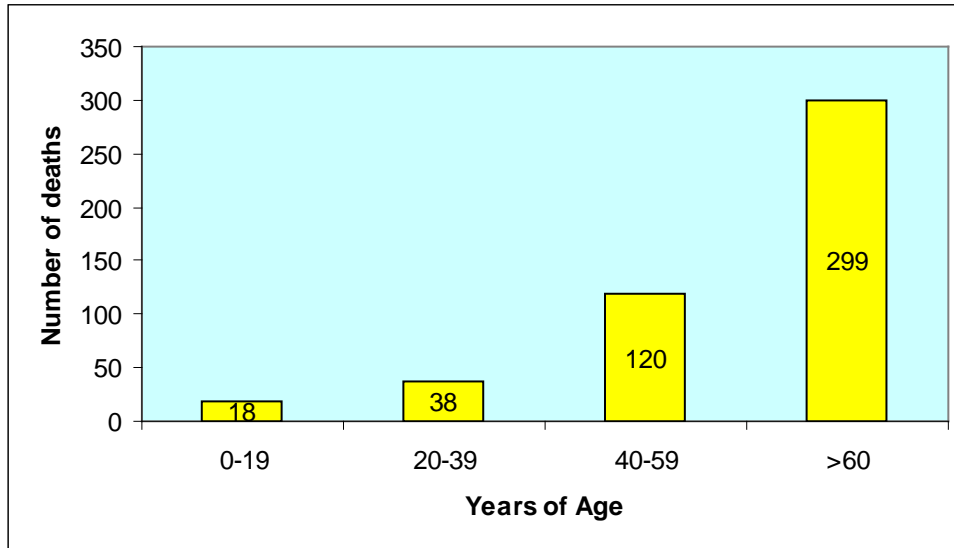
## Staff

|                           |                                |
|---------------------------|--------------------------------|
| Dean Havlik, M.D.         | Coroner & Forensic Pathologist |
| Steven Stogsdill, D-ABMDI | Chief Deputy Coroner           |
| Kim Hollingshead, D-ABMDI | Deputy Coroner                 |
| Robert Kurtzman, D.O.     | Forensic Pathologist           |

## General Statistics

|   |         |
|---|---------|
| Mesa County population in 2008 (estimated)          | 142,000 |
| Total Mesa County deaths                            | 1268    |
| Deaths that were Mesa County citizens               | 1074    |
| Percentage of Mesa County citizens who died in 2007 | .76%    |
| Number of deaths investigated                       | 475     |
| Percentage of deaths investigated                   | 37.5%   |
| Number of postmortem examinations                   | 153     |
| Percentage of deaths having an examination          | 12%     |
| Gender  |         |
| Males   | 276     |
| Females   | 199     |
| Race  |         |
| Caucasian   | 444     |
| Hispanic  | 23      |
| Black   | 2       |
| Native American                                     | 3       |
| Asian   | 3       |

## Age



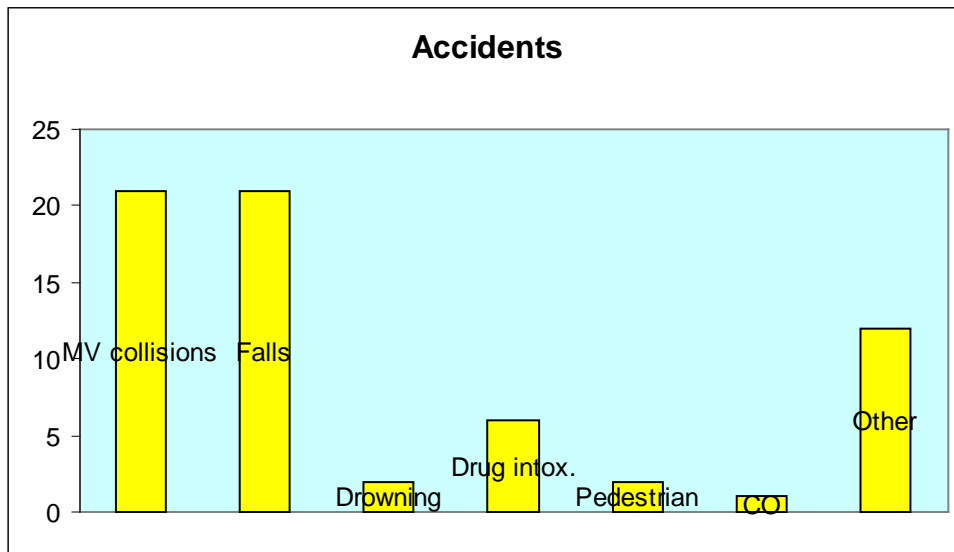
## Manner of Death

| Manner       | # of cases | # of postmortem exams | % receiving a postmortem exam ** |
|--------------|------------|-----------------------|----------------------------------|
| Natural      | 346        | 53                    | 15%                              |
| Accident     | 65         | 37                    | 57%                              |
| Suicide      | 39         | 38                    | 97%                              |
| Homicide     | 9          | 9                     | 100%                             |
| Undetermined | 16         | 16                    | 100%                             |

\*\* Of the 28 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, 5 were motor vehicle accidents, 18 were falls from standing heights in older individuals, 1 was a fall off a piece of farm equipment, 1 was food aspiration, 1 was from a house fire and 2 were related to medical therapy. The 1 suicide death that did not receive a postmortem examination was an individual who had a gunshot wound of the head and was hospitalized for an extended period of time.

## Accidental Deaths

| Type                              | Number of deaths |
|-----------------------------------|------------------|
| Motor vehicle (MV) collisions     | 21               |
| Falls                             | 21               |
| Drowning                          | 2                |
| Drug intoxication                 | 6                |
| Pedestrian vs. Motor vehicle (MV) | 2                |
| Carbon Monoxide (CO)              | 1                |
| Other **                          | 12               |



\*\*The “other” cases include three work-related deaths, three medical therapy related deaths and one each of the following deaths: fire victim, skiing accident, bicycle accident, cold-exposure related death (hypothermia), food aspiration and a death due to acute alcohol intoxication.

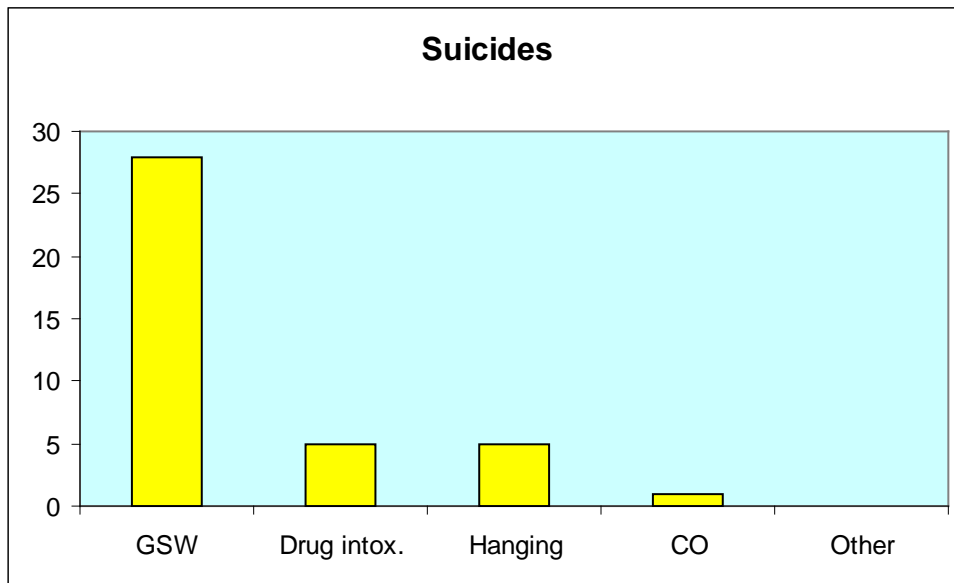
The majority of the falls were of elderly individuals who fell from a standing height, many of which resulting in a fractured hip.

The 21 motor vehicle collision-related deaths displayed the following characteristics:

- Drivers of automobiles – 10
- Passengers of automobiles – 4
- Drivers of motorcycle/ATV wearing a helmet – 3
- Drivers of motorcycle/ATV without a helmet – 4
- Automobile victims wearing a seatbelt – 7
- Automobile victims not wearing a seatbelt – 5
- Automobile victims unknown if wearing a seatbelt – 2
- 1 occurrence of multiple fatalities in a motor vehicle collision (2 deaths)
- Alcohol or drugs involved in at least 5 of the deaths (24% of cases)
  - Alcohol only in 2 deaths
  - Alcohol and drugs in 1 death
  - Drugs only in 2 deaths
  - Unknown if alcohol or drugs involved in 3 deaths

## Suicides

| Type                 | Number of deaths |
|----------------------|------------------|
| Gunshot wounds (GSW) | 28               |
| Drug intoxications   | 5                |
| Hanging              | 5                |
| Carbon monoxide (CO) | 1                |
| Other **             | 0                |



The following are some features of the suicide deaths:

- 29 males and 10 females
- Males ranged from 22 to 86 years of age (average age 51) and included the following:
  - Gunshot wounds – 22 deaths
  - Drug intoxications – 2 deaths
  - Hanging – 4 deaths
  - Carbon monoxide – 1 death
- Females ranged from 27 to 67 years of age (average age 49) and included the following:
  - Gunshot wounds – 6 deaths
  - Drug intoxications – 3 deaths
  - Hanging – 1 death

## Homicides

The 9 homicides had the following characteristics:

- 5 deaths due to gunshot wounds
- 1 assault resulting in blunt force injuries causing death
- Intoxicated driver struck a motor vehicle resulting in 1 death
- 1 death from intrauterine asphyxia due to a gunshot wound of the mother
- 1 asphyxia death of an infant that died shortly after birth

## Undetermined deaths

There were 16 deaths that had an undetermined manner of death. The majority of these deaths were drug intoxications (12 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 an infant where no definitive cause of death was identified but was found dead in bed where others were sleeping (possible asphyxia death due to accidental roll-over onto the infant). One death was a medical therapy related death that was either a natural death or accident. There was one death of a woman found unresponsive in Eastern Utah that died after being hospitalized and at autopsy had some relatively minor blunt force injuries but was also intoxicated (accident vs. homicide). One death was that of a man who was struck by a train (accident vs. suicide).

## **Natural deaths**

Of the 346 natural deaths investigated, the majority were cardiovascular related (227 deaths, 66%). Deaths due to cardiovascular causes include myocardial infarcts (heart attacks), heart arrhythmias, strokes and aneurysms. There were 25 deaths related to infectious causes (predominantly pneumonia in elderly individuals), 26 cancer related deaths and 8 deaths related to chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (emphysema).

## **Notes of interest**

The numbers of accidents in 2008 decreased from 84 in 2007 to 65 in 2008, which was predominantly due to the decrease in the numbers of motor vehicle accidents (45 in 2007 compared to 21 in 2008). There were also only 2 drowning deaths in 2008 compared to 7 drowning deaths in 2007. The numbers of suicides in 2008 (39) was slightly less than that in 2007 (43). There were 9 homicides in 2008 compared to 6 homicides in Mesa County in 2007.