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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 2016. Mesa County encompasses an area over 3300 square miles, which consists of desert, agricultural, and mountain areas. Mesa County is home to approximately 148,500 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
Victor Yahn, D-ABMDI	Chief Deputy Coroner
Chuck Nelson, D-ABMDI	Deputy Coroner
Jody Hudson	Deputy Coroner
Shaye Schottel	Deputy Coroner

## General Statistics (Including deaths transferred to the county of origin)

Mesa County population in 2016 (2015 census data)	148,513
Total Mesa County deaths	1680
Percentage of Mesa County citizens who died in 2016	1.1%
Number of deaths investigated	679 (567 in 2015)
Scene Investigations	339 (298 in 2015)
- Victor Yahn	148
- Chuck Nelson	124
- Brian Clark	28
- Jody Hudson	33
- Shaye Schottel	6
Facility Investigations	340 (269 in 2015)
Percentage of total deaths investigated	40.4% (34.5 in 2015)
Number of deaths originating in other counties	57
Jurisdiction declined	34
Number of postmortem examinations (Mesa County)	136
Percentage of deaths having an examination	8.1%
- Complete Autopsies	134
- Partial Autopsies	0
- External Examinations	2
- Facility deaths having complete autopsy	8
Toxicology performed (Mesa County)	115
Community Hospital	63
Axis/AIT	50
Community Hospital and Axis/AIT	2
Gender of those deaths investigated (2016 Total Cases)	
Males	411
Females	268

## Race of those deaths investigated (2016 Total Cases)

Caucasian	631
Hispanic	38
Native American	3
Black	3
Asian	3
Other/Unknown	1

## Body Transport (2016 Total Cases)

Coroner's Office	296
Coroner's Office to mortuary	10
Mortuaries – from scene	46
Mortuaries – from facilities	327

## Other county and private cases transported to Community Hospital autopsy suite for postmortem examination

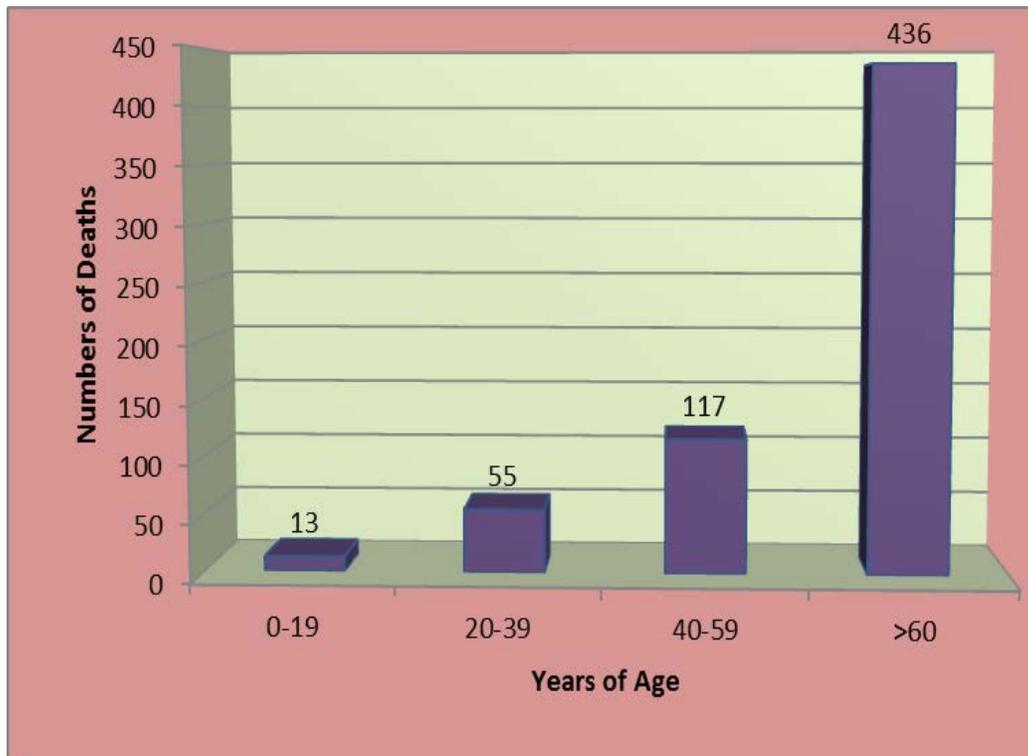
Delta County	4
Garfield County	50
Gunnison County	1
Hospital cases	1
Moffat County	23
Pitkin County	1
Private cases	4
Rio Blanco County	13

## Additional Information (2016 Total Cases)

Unidentified bodies	1
Organ and Tissue referrals	26
Donated to CMU Forensic Investigation Research	4
Unclaimed bodies	0
Exhumations	0

**The following information pertains only to deaths that were not transferred back to the county of origin.**

## Age



\*\* In the 0 to 19 years old group there were 13 deaths, which included 11 males and 2 females. Of these, 2 were natural deaths from complications during or shortly after birth, 4 were accidents, 4 were suicides and 3 were homicides. The 4 accidental deaths were 1 teen car surfing, 1 teen that ran into oncoming traffic, 1 infant that drowned in a pool and 1 teen that drowned in the Colorado River. The suicides were all teenagers with 3 from gunshot wounds and 1 from jumping from the Monument. The homicides included an 11-year-old child that was shot at a home, a 6-year-old strangulation death and a 3-year-old that was a victim of child abuse with multiple blunt force injuries.

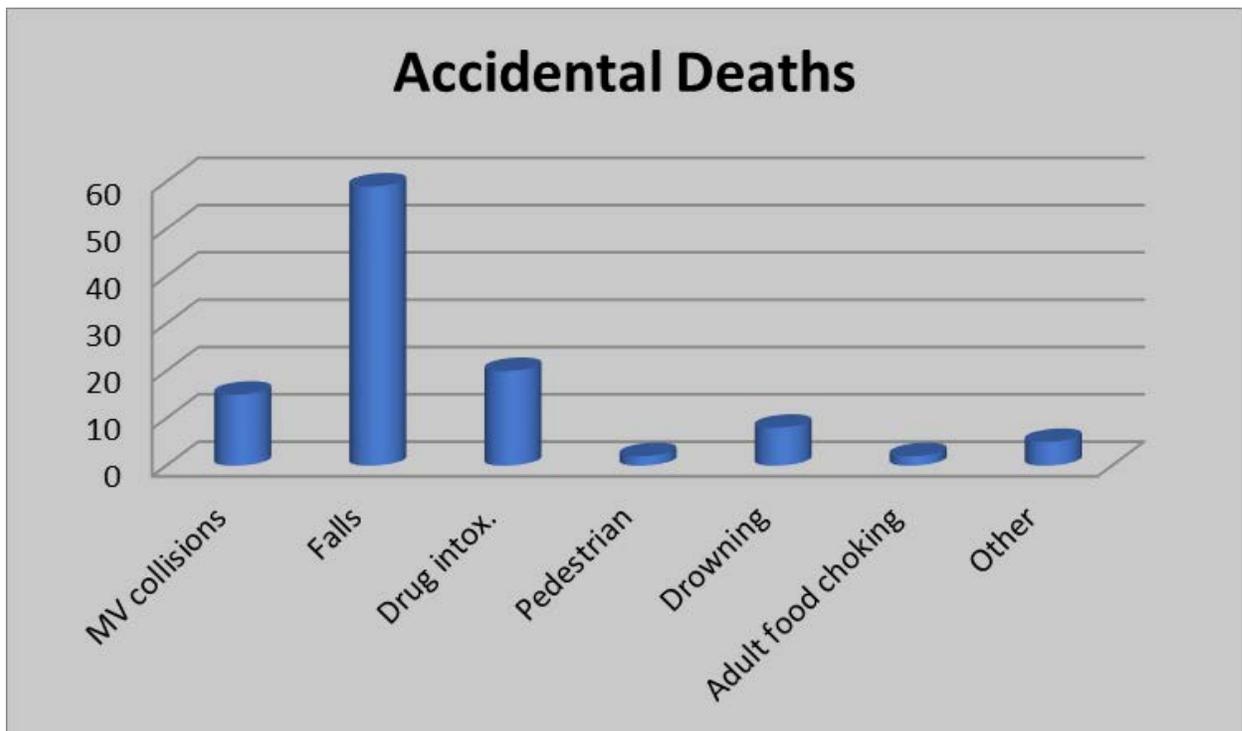
## Manner of Death

Manner	# of cases	# of postmortem exams	% receiving a postmortem exam **
Natural	448	30	6.7%
Accident	111	45	40.5%
Suicide	48	46	95.8%
Homicide	10	10	100%
Undetermined	5	5	100%

\*\* In the 66 accidental deaths in which no postmortem examination was performed, all were individuals who were hospitalized for an extended period of time and the injuries were well documented in the hospital and/or care facility. Of these 66 deaths, 56 were from complications of a fall from standing height or a low height like a bed, 2 were motor vehicle crashes, 2 were from adults that choked on food, 1 was the result of thermal injuries, 1 was a fall from the roof of a car that was driving down a roadway, 1 was from injuries sustained from a house fire in which the decedent sustained both thermal and sharp force injuries, 1 was a drug intoxication, 1 was a fall from a cliff and 1 was a fall down stairs while intoxicated. Please note the numbers of cases in this chart (622) reflects those deaths that were Mesa County deaths and do not include the 57 deaths that were transferred back to another county where the event leading to death took place.

## Accidental Deaths

Type	Number of deaths
Motor vehicle (MV) collisions	15
Falls	59
Drug intoxication	20
Pedestrian vs. Motor vehicle (MV)	2
Drowning	8
Adults choking on food	2
Other **	5



\*\*The “other” cases include: 1 hanging (autoerotic fatality), 1 due to thermal injuries in an individual who was smoking while on oxygen, 1 with a combination of sharp force and thermal injuries, 1 carbon monoxide poisoning and 1 adult positional asphyxia from being pinned under a vehicle.

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

For the first time in several years, there were no infant deaths due to an unsafe sleep environment.

The 15 motor vehicle collision-related deaths displayed the following characteristics:

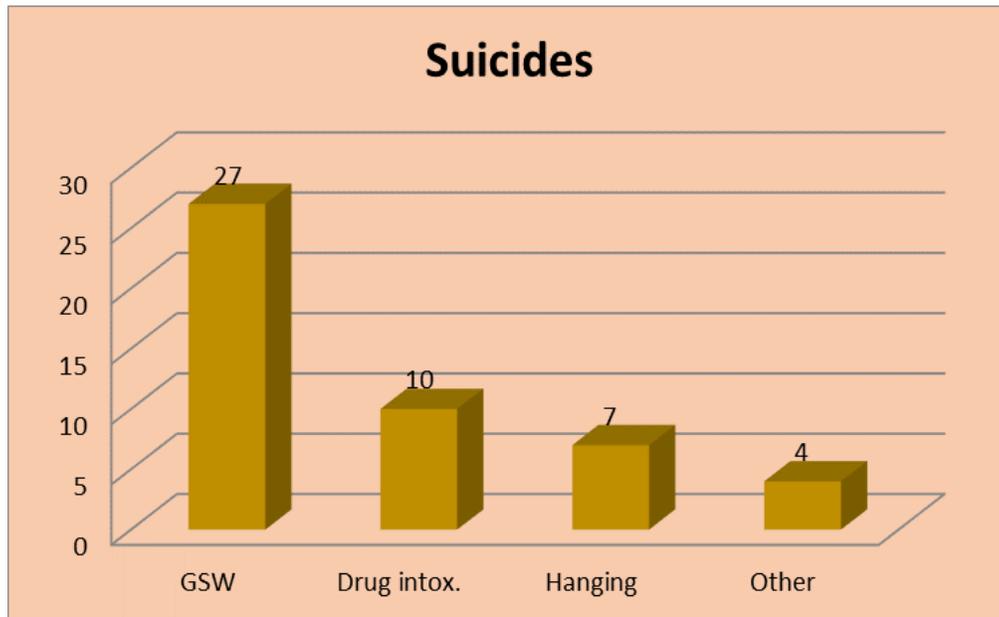
- Drivers – 12
- Passengers – 3
- Motorcycle/ATV wearing a helmet – 0
- Motorcycle/ATV without a helmet – 4
- Motorcycle/ATV unknown if wearing a helmet – 0
- Automobile victims wearing a seatbelt – 7
- Automobile victims not wearing a seatbelt – 3
- Automobile victims unknown if wearing a seatbelt – 1
- Alcohol and/or drugs involved in at least 5 of the deaths (33% of cases)
  - Alcohol only in 4 deaths
  - Drugs only in 1 death
  - Alcohol and drugs in 3 deaths
  - Unknown if alcohol and drugs involved in 3 deaths

The drownings consisted of:

- 3 Colorado River drownings
- 2 Bathtub drownings
- 1 “Potholes” drowning
- 1 Fall head first into a water pump well
- 1 infant who fell into a swimming pool

## Suicides

Type	Number of deaths
Gunshot wounds (GSW)	27
Drug intoxications	10
Hanging	7
Other	4



The following are some features of the suicide deaths:

- 40 males and 8 females
- Males ranged from 16 to 95 years of age (average age 55.5) and included the following:
  - Gunshot wound - 25 deaths
  - Drug intoxication - 6 deaths
  - Hanging - 6 deaths
  - Blunt force injuries – 2 deaths
  - Sharp force injuries - 1 death
- Females ranged from 25 to 60 years of age (average age 42.5) and included the following:
  - Gunshot wound - 2 deaths
  - Drug intoxication – 4 deaths
  - Hanging - 1 death
  - Drowning – 1 death

## Homicides

The 10 homicides had the following characteristics:

- 1 death due to multiple stab wounds
- 1 strangulation
- 1 blunt force head injuries
- 7 deaths due to gunshot wounds

There were 2 child abuse related homicides, one of which was a 3 year old with blunt force injuries and the other was a 6 year old strangulation victim.

## Natural deaths

Of the 448 natural deaths investigated, the majority of the deaths were cardiovascular related (325 deaths, 72.5%). Deaths due to cardiovascular causes include myocardial infarcts (heart attacks), heart arrhythmias, strokes and aneurysms. There were 14 deaths related to infectious causes (predominantly pneumonia in elderly individuals), 33 cancer related deaths, 14 deaths related to chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (emphysema), and 21 deaths due to effects of chronic alcoholism. The remaining 41 deaths were primarily from complications of other long-standing disease processes.

## Undetermined

The 4 undetermined deaths had the following characteristics:

- 1 death due to drug intoxication (accident vs. suicide)
- 3 deaths that were decomposed/skeletal remains (unclear cause and manner of death due to the condition of the bodies)

## Notes of interest

The year 2016 had the most cases investigated on record by the Office with 679 deaths investigated. The prior highest numbers of deaths investigated were 478 deaths investigated in 2014 and 567 deaths investigated in 2015. The increase in numbers was primarily related to increased numbers of natural deaths being reported but there was also an increase in suicides and homicides investigated in 2016 with 6 homicides in 2015 compared to 10 in 2016 and 37 suicides in 2015 compared to 48 in 2016.