

**MESA
COUNTY**

**MESA COUNTY
CORONER'S OFFICE**

2009 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 2009. Mesa County encompasses an area over 3300 square miles which consists of desert, agricultural and mountain areas. Mesa County is home to approximately 140,000 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

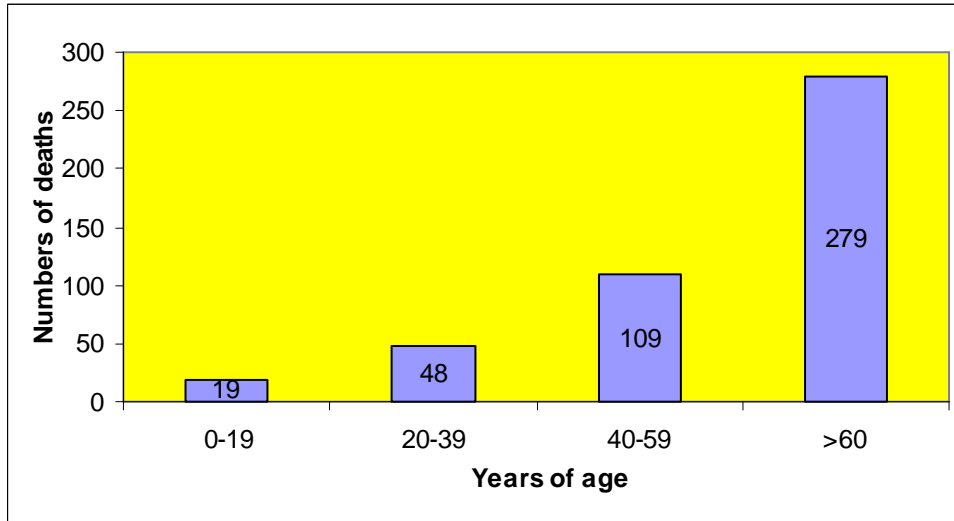
General Statistics

Mesa County population in 2009 (estimated)	140,000
Total Mesa County deaths	1430
Deaths that were Mesa County citizens	1216
Percentage of Mesa County citizens who died in 2009	.87%
Number of deaths investigated	455
Percentage of deaths investigated	31.8%
Number of postmortem examinations	139
Percentage of deaths having an examination	9.7%
Gender	
Males	269
Females	185
Unknown (recovered bone)	1
Race	
Caucasian	420
Hispanic	25
Black	1
Native American	6
Asian	1
Unknown	2

Deaths by Day of the Week and Month

Day	2009	
	Count	% of Total
Sunday	73	16.0%
Monday	74	16.3%
Tuesday	58	12.7%
Wednesday	58	12.7%
Thursday	60	13.2%
Friday	66	14.5%
Saturday	66	14.5%
Month	2009	
	Count	% of Total
January	39	8.6%
February	39	8.6%
March	38	8.4%
April	44	9.7%
May	39	8.6%
June	28	6.2%
July	24	5.3%
August	38	8.4%
September	19	4.2%
October	45	9.9%
November	51	11.2%
December	51	11.2%

Age



** In the 0 to 19 years old group, 9 were natural deaths, 8 were accidental deaths, 1 was a suicide of a 19 year old and 1 was an undetermined death of an infant with no definitive cause of death but was co-sleeping with others (possible asphyxia related death due to roll-over onto the infant). There were no homicides in the 0-19 year old age category.

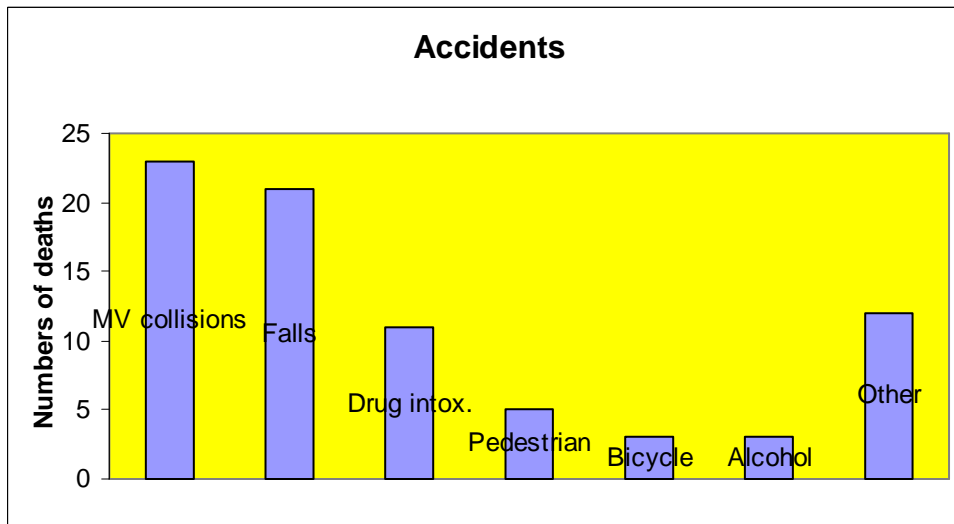
Manner of Death

Manner	# of cases	# of postmortem exams	% receiving a postmortem exam **
Natural	327	45	14%
Accident	78	46	59%
Suicide	35	33	94%
Homicide	5	5	100%
Undetermined	10	10	100%

** In the 32 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, 15 were falls from standing heights in older individuals, 1 was a fall down stairs, 1 was a fall from a ladder, 2 were due to drug intoxication, 1 was a pedestrian hit by a motor vehicle, 2 were fire victims, 1 was when a tree fell on an individual and 1 was related to medical therapy. The 2 suicide deaths that did not receive a postmortem examination were related to drug intoxications in which the decedents were hospitalized for an extended period of time.

Accidental Deaths

Type	Number of deaths
Motor vehicle (MV) collisions	23
Falls	21
Drug intoxication	11
Pedestrian vs. Motor vehicle (MV)	5
Bicycle accident	3
Alcohol related	3
Other **	12



**The “other” cases include 2 deaths due to drowning, 1 infant who died due to positional asphyxia related to the sleeping environment, 1 where a large television fell on the head of an individual, 2 fire victims, 2 deaths related to medical therapy, 1 where a car fell on top of the decedent while the individual was working on the car, 1 hyperthermia death, 1 death due to a skateboard accident and 1 death where a tree fell on an individual.

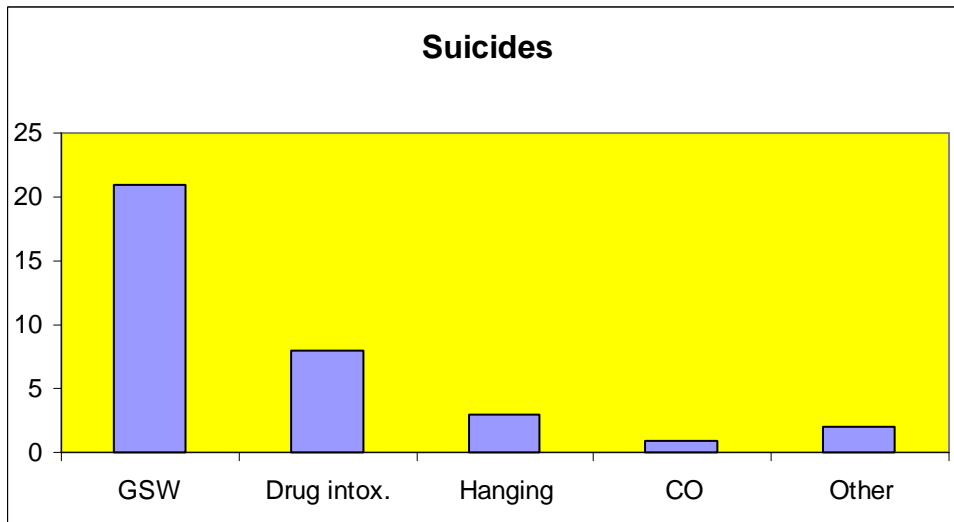
The majority of the falls were of elderly individuals who fell from a standing height, many of which resulting in a fractured hip.

The 23 motor vehicle collision-related deaths displayed the following characteristics:

- Drivers of automobiles – 14
- Passengers of automobiles – 4
- Drivers of motorcycle/ATV wearing a helmet – 4
- Drivers of motorcycle/ATV without a helmet – 1
- Automobile victims wearing a seatbelt – 5
- Automobile victims not wearing a seatbelt – 12
- Automobile victims unknown if wearing a seatbelt – 1
- 1 occurrence of multiple fatalities in a motor vehicle collision (2 deaths)
- Alcohol or drugs involved in at least 10 of the deaths (43% of cases)
 - Alcohol only in 8 deaths
 - Alcohol and drugs in 2 deaths
 - Drugs only in no deaths
 - Unknown if alcohol or drugs involved in 2 deaths

Suicides

Type	Number of deaths
Gunshot wounds (GSW)	21
Drug intoxications	8
Hanging	3
Carbon monoxide (CO)	1
Other **	2



** The “other” suicide deaths include 1 death when a pedestrian intentionally stepped in front of an automobile and 1 death when a pedestrian intentionally went in front of a train.

The following are some features of the suicide deaths:

- 22 males and 13 females
- Males ranged from 21 to 89 years of age (average age 50) and included the following:
 - Gunshot wounds – 17 deaths
 - Drug intoxications – 2 deaths
 - Hanging – 2 deaths
 - Pedestrian vs. train – 1 death
- Females ranged from 19 to 59 years of age (average age 43) and included the following:
 - Gunshot wounds – 4 deaths
 - Drug intoxications – 6 deaths
 - Hanging – 1 death
 - Carbon monoxide – 1 death
 - Pedestrian vs. automobile – 1 death

Homicides

The 5 homicides had the following characteristics:

- 2 deaths due to gunshot wounds
- 2 assaults resulting in blunt force injuries causing death
- 1 death due to stabbing

Undetermined deaths

There were 10 deaths that had an undetermined manner of death. Five of these deaths were drug intoxications. The manner was undetermined in these deaths primarily due to the lack of evidence indicating whether these deaths were suicides, i.e. intentional ingestion of the drug(s), versus accidental over usage of the drug(s). One other undetermined death was in an individual who was hospitalized for a period of time and the death may have been related to drug intoxication but sufficient samples for toxicology examination could not be attained. 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). There was 1 death of an intoxicated individual who had some injuries but it was unclear if the death was due to a fall or if the individual was assaulted. Two of the deaths were decomposed or skeletal remains and an exact cause and manner of death could not be determined due to the condition of the bodies.

Natural deaths

Of the 327 natural deaths investigated, the majority were cardiovascular related (217 deaths, 66.4%). Deaths due to cardiovascular causes include myocardial infarcts (heart attacks), heart arrhythmias, strokes and aneurysms. There were 27 deaths related to infectious causes (predominantly pneumonia in elderly individuals), 18 cancer related deaths and 8 deaths related to chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (emphysema). Of the 27 deaths due to infectious causes, 7 were due to complications of H1N1 pneumonia. However, of these 7 H1N1 deaths, only 1 was that of a Mesa County resident. The other 6 individuals were from other parts of Colorado, Utah and Arizona, who were hospitalized, transported to St. Mary's Hospital for treatment and ultimately died at St. Mary's Hospital.

Notes of interest

There were no child homicides in 2009. In 2008 there were 3 child homicides and in 2007 there were 2 child homicides. Overall, the numbers of homicides in 2009 (5 homicides) were lower compared to 2008 (9 homicides) and 2007 (6 homicides). The numbers of suicides has decreased over the last three years. There were 35 suicides in 2009, 39 in 2008 and 43 in 2007.