

Kittitas County

Coroner

2016 Annual Report



Member of the Washington Association of Coroners and Medical Examiners

Member of International Association of Coroners and Medical Examiners

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Message to the Board of Commissioners and Citizens of Kittitas County

The Kittitas County Coroner's Office investigates sudden, violent, unexpected, and suspicious deaths that occur in Kittitas County. The Office of the Coroner certifies death after investigation and postmortem examination and issues the death certificate as required by law. Complete findings of the death investigation are distributed to families and law enforcement agencies as appropriate.

The main duties of the Office of the Coroner are to determine the cause and manner of death, and certify deaths that are reported to the coroner. The cause of death is the disease process or injury that resulted in death. There are thousands of diseases and injuries that may result in death. The manner of death is a classification in which a determination is made regarding whether the death resulted from natural causes, homicide, suicide, or an accident. On occasion, the manner of death is classified as indeterminate.

Information collected during the investigation helps clarify the circumstances, such as the sequence of events prior to death. Evidence collected during an investigation and/or postmortem examination may help lead to the arrest or successful conviction of a suspect in a homicide case. Because deaths occur around the clock, Coroner staff members are available 24 hours a day, 365 days per year.

With the skill and experience of the coroner investigators and board-certified forensic pathologists, we believe the quality of death investigations in Kittitas County are among the best in the State. The death scene investigation reports filed by the investigators are very thorough and supply comprehensive information to the coroners.

Our investigators also extend their duties to the living by answering questions and addressing concerns regarding deaths within the county. Coroner investigators frequently make personal contact with family members of a deceased and assist them by providing appropriate answers regarding the circumstances of the death. Coroner investigators are supplied with a pamphlet for distribution to families. The information provides answers to common questions and facts about how to proceed when their loved one passes.

In 2018 the Medicolegal Death Investigation Log or, MDI Log was launched and has been used for digitizing 2016 Kittitas County Coroner's reports. MDI Log is a comprehensive investigative report/database system that enables the Coroner to review death scene investigation information from a secure internet site any time of the day. MDI Log enables coroner investigators to submit death scene investigation reports via the internet in an efficient manner. MDI Log has evolved to become a valuable tool for our office and it is now available to Coroner offices across the country.

We extend our sincere gratitude to the Kittitas County Board of Commissioners for their support of the Coroner's office and the services we provide to the citizens of the Kittitas County.

Kittitas County Coroner's Office

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Types of Deaths Reportable to the Coroner

Revised Code of Washington (RCW 68.50.10) [1] remands jurisdiction of all deceased persons who come to their death suddenly when in apparent good health without medical attendance within the thirty-six hours preceding death; or where the circumstances of death indicate death was caused by unnatural or unlawful means; or where death occurs under suspicious circumstances; or where a coroner's autopsy or postmortem or coroner's inquest is to be held; or where death results from unknown or obscure causes, or where death occurs within one year following an accident; or where the death is caused by any violence whatsoever, or where death results from a known or suspected abortion; whether self- induced or otherwise; where death apparently results from drowning, hanging, burns, electrocution, gunshot wounds, stabs or cuts, lightning, starvation, radiation, exposure, alcoholism, narcotics or other addictions, tetanus, strangulations, suffocation or smothering; or where death is due to premature birth or still birth; or where death is due to a violent contagious disease or suspected contagious disease which may be a public health hazard; or where death results from alleged rape, carnal knowledge or sodomy, where death occurs in a jail or prison; where a body is found dead or is not claimed by relatives or friends, is hereby vested in the county coroner, which bodies may be removed and placed in the morgue under such rules as are adopted by the coroner with the approval of the county commissioners, having jurisdiction, providing therein how the bodies shall be brought to and cared for at the morgue and held for the proper identification where necessary.

Deaths Reportable to the Coroner in which a postmortem examination would generally be ordered include, but are not limited to:

- **Violent death** (e.g., strangulation, gunshot, stabbing, poisoning, etc.)
- **Accidental deaths** (e.g., falls, drowning, motor vehicle collisions, burns, overdose, etc.)
- **Death of a prisoner** (e.g., deaths in any county or city jail while imprisoned or in custody).
- **Suspicious Circumstances** (e.g., Unidentified Bodies or events surrounding death)
- **Unexpected infant deaths**
- **Deaths resulting from a violent or neglectful crime**

[1] <https://apps.leg.wa.gov/rcw/default.aspx?cite=68.50.010>

Kittitas County Coroner's Office Cases

Population [2]	44,928
Cases Reported to Medical Examiner	192
A. Number of deaths certified after postmortem examination	37
1. Number of Medical Examiner Cases with Complete Autopsy	35
2. Number of Medical Examiner Cases with Limited Examination	0
3. Number of Medical Examiner Cases with Toxicology Only	2
B. Number of deaths certified without postmortem examination	157
C. Number of deaths not certified by Medical Examiner's Office after investigation	139

[2] https://www.dailyrecordnews.com/news/kittitas-county-s-population-increases-percent/article_6c8f1bd1-1a3e-5590-88d9-c9a425056417.html

Definitions

Full Autopsy: A complete external and internal examination of a decedent. A full autopsy includes a toxicology test. As mentioned previously a full autopsy will generally be completed for any death which occurred as a result of violent, accidental, suspicious or neglectful circumstances and for in custody/prisoner and unexplained infant deaths.

Limited Examination: An examination which is focused on a specific organ or region of the body, for example, the heart. The limited examination also includes an external examination. In 2017 a limited examination was completed for skeletonized human remains which had been found.

Toxicology Only Test: May be done without a full autopsy to help with the Coroner's investigation. Forensic or Post Mortem Toxicology test results are used to determine if and what kind of drugs were in a person's system. They also measure the amount of drugs and look to see if the concentration is of a lethal dosage.

Death Certificate:

Once a death is reported a brief investigation by a coroner will determine if death falls under the authority, or jurisdiction, as defined by RCW 68.50.10. Deaths that are violent, sudden or unexpected are remanded to the Coroner to be investigated and to determine the manner and cause of death. When jurisdiction is assumed, certifying the death becomes the Coroner's responsibility and the coroner will complete and sign a death certificate.

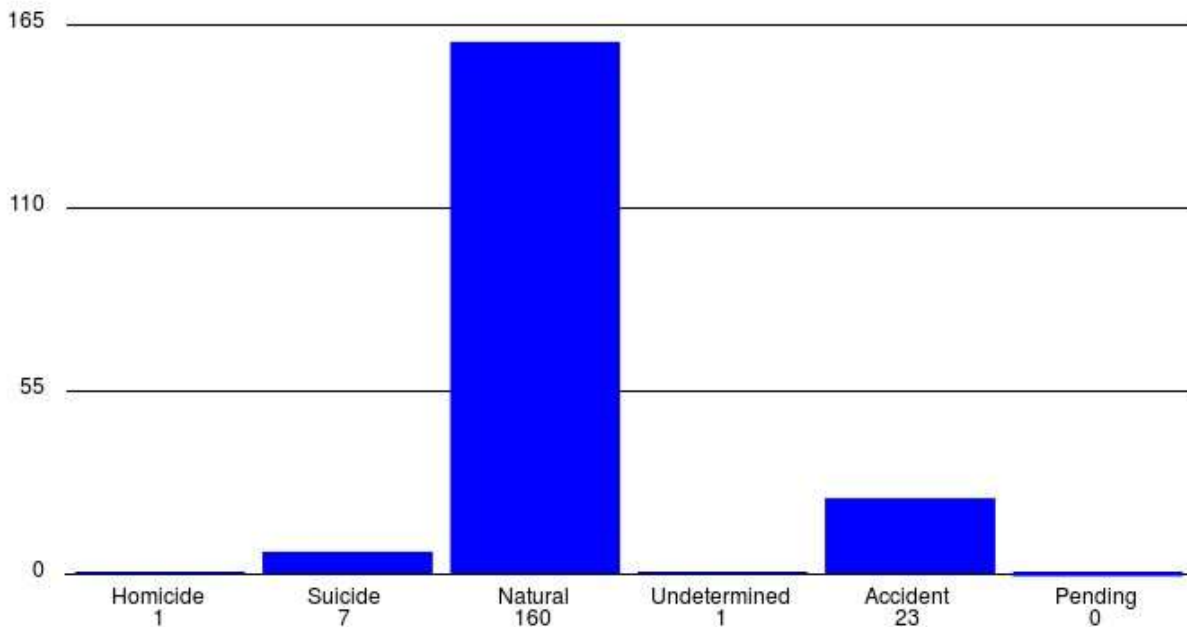
The death certificate contains important information about the decedent. Details include full name, birth date, parents' names, education level, marital status and name of surviving spouse when applicable; manner and cause of death; date, place and time of death.

A death certificate may be started by the funeral home or cremation service but must be signed by a medical certifier such as a physician, coroner or medical examiner.

Death Certified by Coroner are deaths in which the Coroner's office **accepts jurisdiction** and is responsible for investigating cause or manner. The Coroner may choose to complete a varied level of postmortem examination to include full autopsy, limited examination or a toxicology test.

Death Certified by Primary Care Physician are terminally ill or end-of-life care patients may be referred for hospice care by their primary care physician. Deaths of those patients referred in this manner are discussed with the Coroner but most often **jurisdiction is declined**. The death certificates are most often signed by the decedent's primary care physician or last seen physician who is familiar with the decedent's medical history.

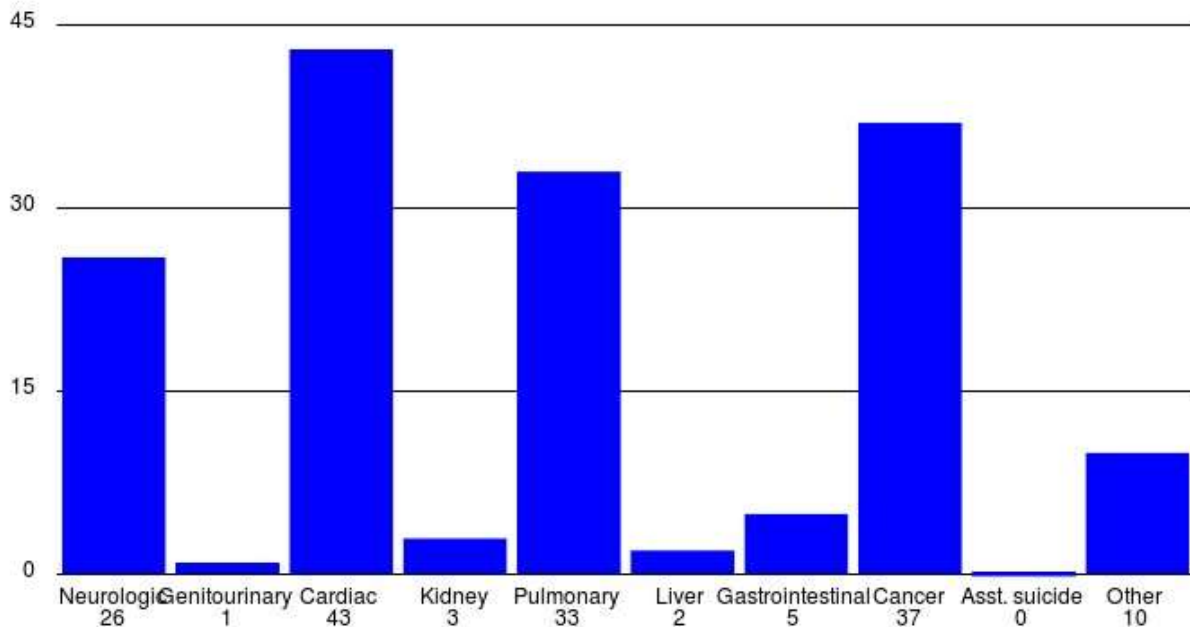
Manner of Death by Postmortem Examination



Manner of Death is the way to categorize death as required by the Washington State Department of Health. The classifications are natural, accident, suicide, homicide, undetermined, and pending. Only coroners and coroners may use all of the manners of death. Other certifiers must use natural or refer the death to the Coroner. The manner of death is determined by the Coroner based upon the following definitions:

- **Natural Death:** Those deaths caused solely by disease or natural process.
- **Unnatural Deaths:** Those deaths resulting from an external cause.
 - **Accidental:** For death certification purposes an unnatural death resulting from an inadvertent chance happening.
 - **Homicide:** Defined as the action of one person directly causing the death of another.
 - **Suicide:** A death from self-inflicted injury with evidence of the intent to die.
- **Pending Deaths:** Deaths listed temporarily on a death certificate for cause and/or manner when additional investigation, information and testing are required. These classifications are generally amended as soon as additional information becomes available.
- **Undetermined Deaths:** Deaths which a manner of death cannot be found after investigation, examination and testing. This classification is used in a small number of cases each year.

Deaths by Natural Causes



Natural Deaths (160 reported in 2016)

Natural is defined as death caused solely by disease or natural process. If natural death is hastened by injury (such as a fall or drowning in a bathtub), the manner of death is not considered natural.

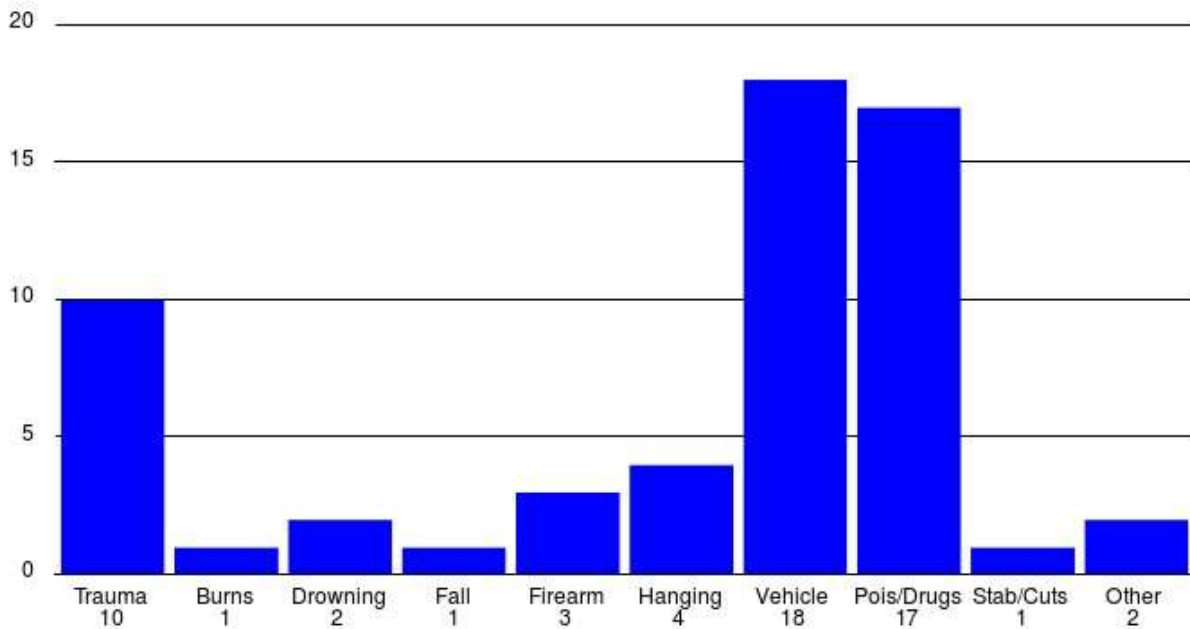
Sudden Unexplained Infant Death (SUID), formerly known as sudden infant death syndrome (SIDS), is a subset of natural death. It is the sudden death of an infant under one year of age which remains unexplained after a thorough and complete investigation. The investigation includes a complete autopsy, examination of the death scene, and clinical history. If significant risk factors were present, such as an unsafe sleep environment, including co-sleeping or inappropriate bedding, then the cause of death would fall out of the definition of SUID and the manner would be classified as "undetermined."

The following explanations are taken from the seventeenth edition of the Merck Manual to help explain how natural causes of death are categorized in this report:

- **(26) Neurological** death may occur from injury, disease or disorder of the nervous system. Some examples are cerebrovascular accidents such as stroke or aneurysm, convulsive disorders such as epilepsy, genetic alterations such as muscular dystrophy or Huntington's disease, neurodegenerative diseases such as Parkinson's and Alzheimer's, traumatic brain or spinal injury, euplastic conditions such as brain tumors or from infectious processes such as meningitis.
- **(1) Genitourinary** deaths are those occurring from disorders. Genitourinary organs are the bladder, kidney (renal), vagina, ovaries, penis or testicle. Genitourinary disorders are illnesses or conditions which occur when the urinary and genital organs are not functioning properly. Genitourinary disorders may also occur in the uterus, ureter, bladder, urethra and the two sphincter muscles.

- **(43) Cardiac** death pertains to the heart. Some cardiac deaths include heart failure, cardiac or respiratory arrest, hypertension, heart disease such as aortic aneurysm and aortic dissection, endocarditis and cardiac tumors.
- **(3) Kidney** deaths include infection, transport disorders such as Bartter's or Liddle's syndrome, trauma, or tumors of the kidney(s).
- **(33) Pulmonary** death pertains to the lungs. Respiratory failure such as Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary Disorder (COPD), or emphysema.
- **(2) Liver** death is caused by diseases which create an inability for the liver to perform its normal metabolic functions. Liver disease may be caused by an ongoing health condition like diabetes, hepatitis, cirrhosis or fatty liver.
- **(5) Gastrointestinal** death may occur from an inflammation of the stomach and intestine which originates from different types of bacteria.
- **(37) Cancer** can develop in any tissue of any organ at any age. Cancer is an uncontrolled or unregulated division and growth of cells in a part of the body. These cells then spread into surrounding tissue crowding out normal cells.
- **(10) Other** deaths are investigated and after a postmortem examination no obvious cause may be found. Using other as a cause of death is pretty uncommon but may be used when an autopsy does not reveal an apparent cause of death, there is no history of illness or heart disease, no toxins, drugs or injuries.

Deaths by Unnatural Causes

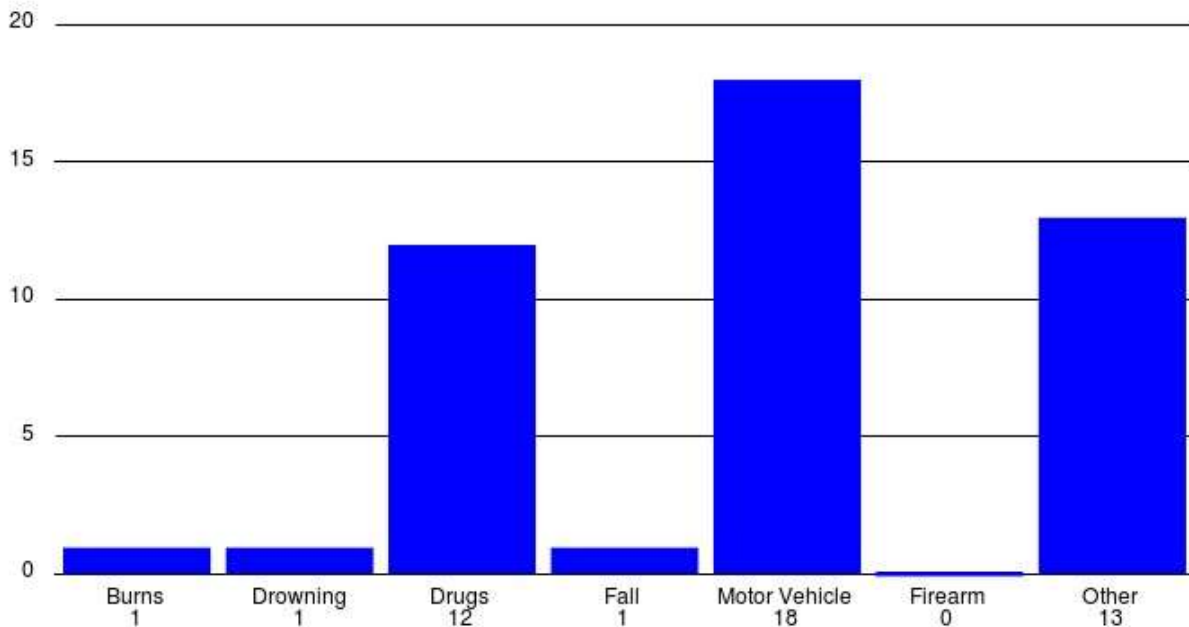


Unnatural Deaths (32 reported in 2016)

Unnatural death is defined as a death resulting from an external cause, such as intentional injury (homicide or suicide) or unintentional injury (in an accident). For manner of death there are three categories: Accident, Homicide and Suicide which are explained below.

Some of the external mechanisms affecting unnatural death include injury, inhalation, ingestion or submersion. It is important to understand unnatural death may include multiple mechanisms such as a motor vehicle accident may also include alcohol.

Accidental Deaths by Types



Accidental Deaths (23 total reported in 2016)

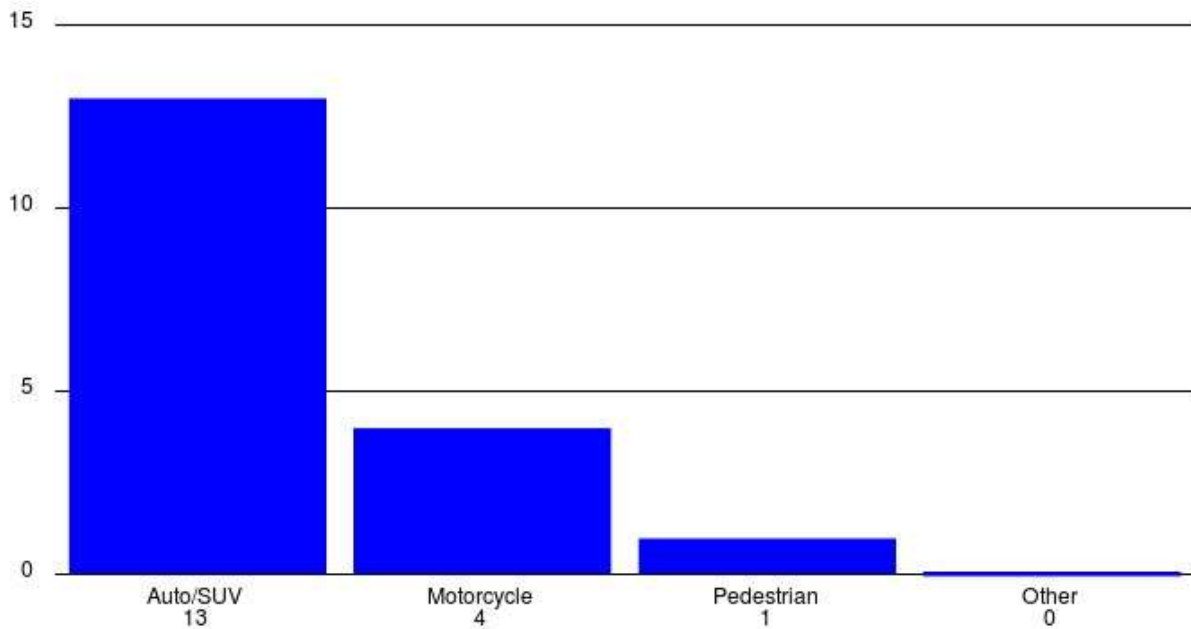
Accident is defined for death certification purposes as an unnatural death resulting from an inadvertent chance happening. Traffic related fatalities (involving vehicles used for transportation on any public roadway) are classified as accidents. On the job injury related deaths are referred to as industrial deaths and are classified as accidents. Deaths related to illicit drug or excessive medication use in the absence of specifically supporting the conclusion of the manner of death being homicide or suicide, are classified as accident.

More than one thing may contribute to the accidental death, for example a DUI fatality motor vehicle accident would be listed above in both the Drugs and Motor Vehicle columns.

Traffic Deaths are a subset of accidental deaths, but deaths resulting from traffic accidents are reported separately from other accidental deaths for statistical purposes. A traffic death is defined as an unintentional death of a driver, passenger, or pedestrian involving a motor vehicle on public roadways. Accidents involving motor vehicles on private property (such as driveways) are not included in this category and are classified non-traffic vehicular deaths. Classification of traffic related deaths as an "accident" does not preclude the prosecution as a vehicular homicide by legal authorities.

Complication of Therapy Deaths is accidental deaths that occur during or due to complications that occur during medical, surgical, therapeutic, or diagnostic procedures.

Accidental Deaths - Motor Vehicle Crashes

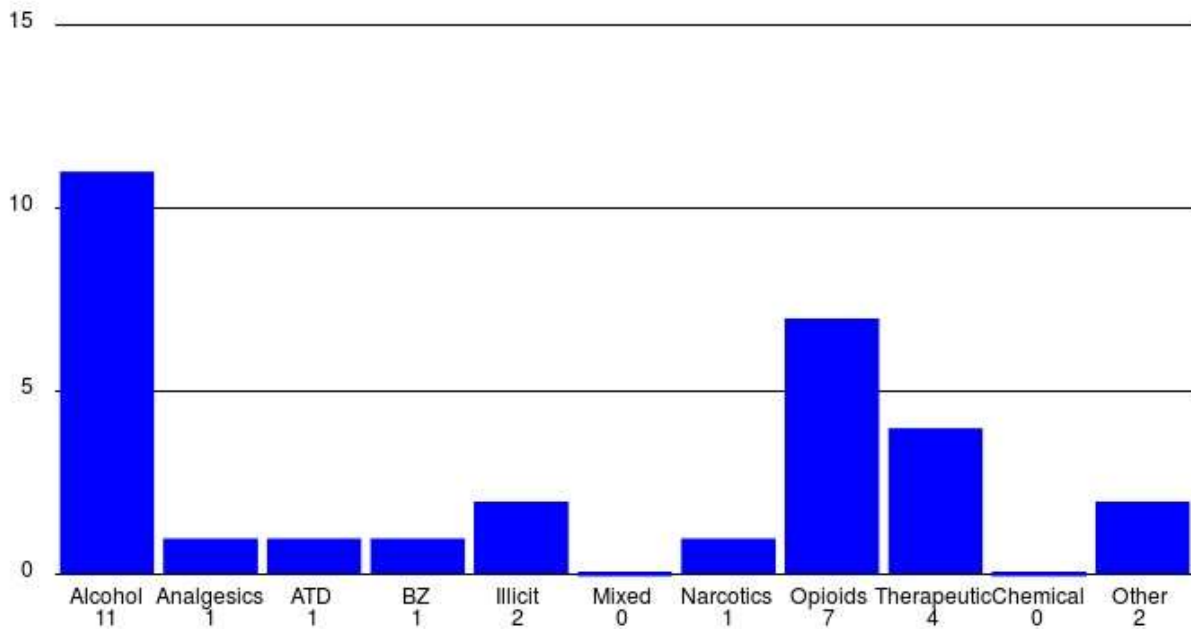


Accidental Motor Vehicle Deaths (18 total reported in 2016)

DOD	Age	Sex	Circumstances	Investigated By
07/10/2016	70	Female	Occupant	WSP
10/31/2016	57	Male	Occupant	WSP
10/07/2016	46	Male	Driver	WSP
11/14/2016	65	Male	Pedestrian	WSP
05/20/2016	34	Male	Motorcyclist Driver	WSP
05/31/2016	21	Male	Motorcyclist Driver	EPD
07/12/2016	16	Male	Occupant	WSP
09/04/2016	23	Male	Occupant	KCSO

DOD	Age	Sex	Circumstances	Investigated By
09/24/2016	70	Male	Bicyclist	WSP
07/30/2016	55	Male	Motorcyclist Driver	WSP
10/31/2016	66	Male	Driver	WSP
03/27/2016	61	Male	Driver	KCSO
08/13/2016	25	Male	Occupant	KCSO
07/10/2016	64	Male	Motorcyclist Driver	WSP
07/24/2016	42	Female	Driver	WSP
08/03/2016	32	Male	Driver	WSP
07/06/2016	23	Male	Occupant	WSP

Drugs Contributing to Cause of Death

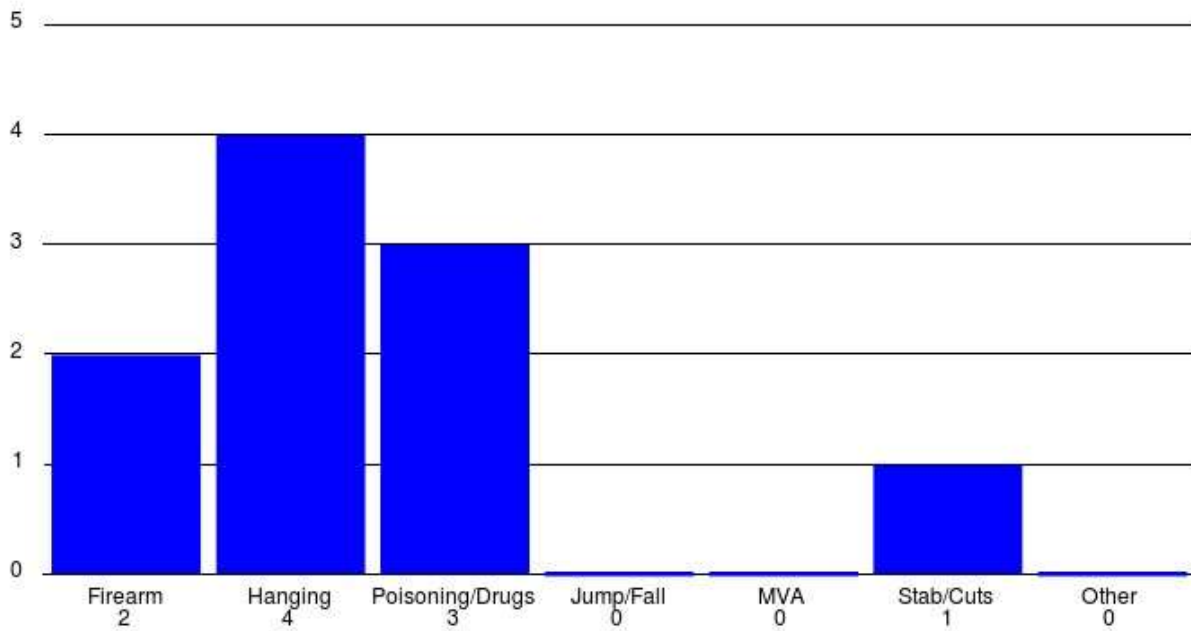


The manner of death may include multiple mechanisms such as alcohol and therapeutic drugs or medications.

Overdose Deaths (3 total)

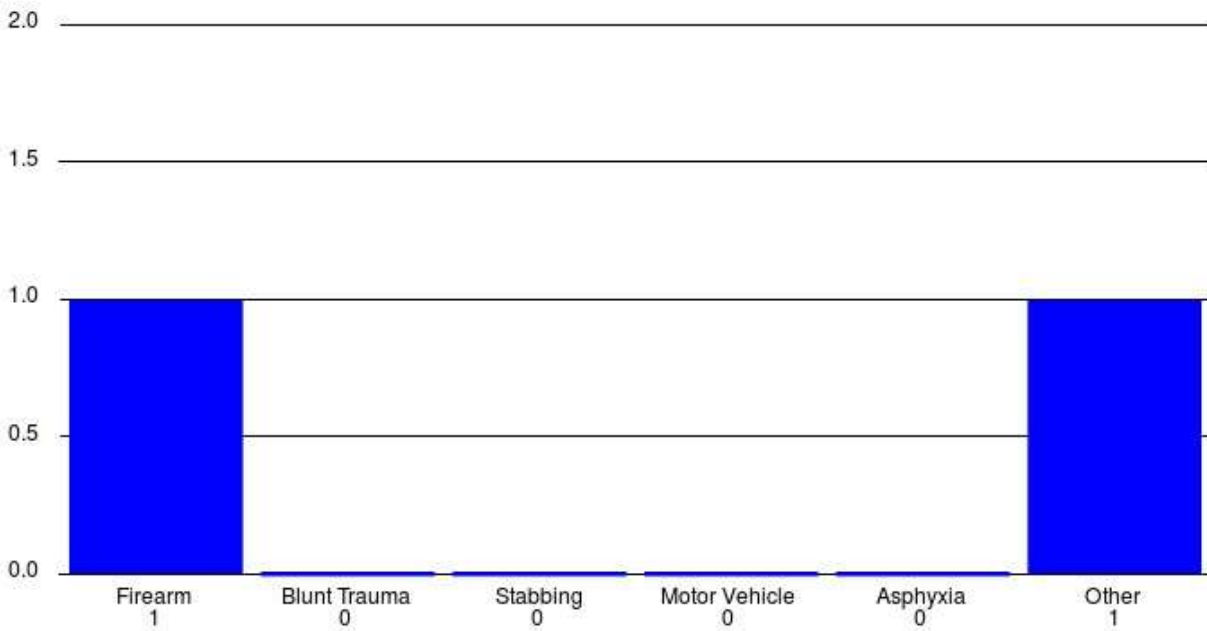
Age	Sex	Race	Cause of Death
53	Female	White	Acute intoxication by the combined effects of methamph oxycodone
67	Female	White	Acute alcohol abuse
59	Female	White	Acute intoxication by the combined effects of methadone

Suicide by Means



Suicide Methods	18-25	26-44
Firearm		
Hanging	1	1
Poisoning/Drugs		
Stab/Cuts		
Total	1	1

Homicide Deaths



Homicide Deaths (1 reported in 2016)

This case included both a firearm and alcohol.

Deaths by Age Group

