



2022 ANNUAL REPORT

Kittitas County Coroner

This annual report presents 2022
mortality data for Kittitas County, WA.

Revised May 9, 2024

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Table of Contents

Contents

Kittitas County Coroner	1
Associations and Certifications	2
About Us	2
Jurisdiction:	2
Mission:.....	3
Duty:.....	3
Our Database:	3
Year in Review.....	3
Our Team	5
Office Location	5
Coroner Office Activities by Month.....	6
Total Forensic Examinations:	6
Manner of Death by Month	7
Total Cases with Scene Investigations.....	8
Natural Deaths Involving.....	9
Definitions:.....	9
Unnatural Causes of Death Involving:	10
Factors Contributing to Unnatural Death.....	11
Accident	11
Suicide.....	12
Homicide.....	12
Demographics	12
Disposition of Body	12
Ethnicity of Deceased.....	13
Sex of Deceased	13
Age of Deceased.....	13
Infants and Youths (birth – age 17), Categorized by Manner of Death	13

Associations and Certifications

- Member of Washington Association of Coroners and Medical Examiners (WACME)
- Member of International Association of Coroners and Medical Examiners (IACME)
- Certified Diplomats of American Board of Medicolegal Death Investigators (ABMDI)

About Us

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 for the citizens of Kittitas County.

The Kittitas County Coroner was first sworn in on January 1st, 2015. At that time the elected coroner was the only employee. In 2022 the office has grown to include two full-time personnel (elected coroner and an office administrator) and four part-time investigators. Investigations may occur at any time so there is an investigator on call 24/7 year-round.

Jurisdiction:

Kittitas County Coroner's Office investigates deaths occurring within the geographic boundaries of Kittitas County per Washington State Law, Revised Code of Washington Chapter 68.50.10 RCW (Human Remains).

We have a responsibility to investigate all deaths:

- Sudden death of persons who are not under care of a physician in the thirty-six hours preceding death
- Where the circumstances of death indicate death was caused by unnatural or unlawful means
- Where death occurs under suspicious circumstances
- Where a coroner's autopsy or postmortem or coroner's inquest is to be held
- Where death results from unknown or obscure causes
- Where death occurs within one year following an accident
- Where the death is caused by any violence whatsoever
- Where death results from a known or suspected abortion
- 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
- Where death is due to premature birth or still birth
- Where death is due to a violent contagious disease or suspected contagious disease
- 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

Mission:

Our mission is to serve and protect the interests of the community by determining the cause, manner, and mechanism of sudden or unexplained deaths. To identify deceased persons and notify their next of kin, regardless of where they may live in the world. To ensure the deceased and their property are treated with the utmost respect and dignity.

We accomplish our mission with a team of medicolegal certified investigators and forensically certified pathologists. Through scientific methods of inquiry, we serve as an independent finder of fact, working alongside, but independently from law enforcement investigators. We complete our investigations compassionately and make every effort to provide information to the loved ones of those who have died. Death data collected by our investigation is reported to local, state, and federal health departments to help keep our community safe.

Duty:

- Determine Cause of Death
- Determine Manner of Death
- Certify Death
- Notify Next-of-Kin

Our Database:

June 2018 our office began using MDILog which is a nationwide reporting system. With this software we electronically complete our death investigations from anywhere, at any time. We efficiently manage our casework from the scene through certification.

Year in Review

	Cases	Autopsies	Hospice	Organ Donation	Non-Coroner
Jan	30	4	16	5	1
Feb	19	1	14	5	0
Mar	12	1	6	7	0
Apr	23	4	9	8	0
May	27	6	10	8	0
Jun	22	4	11	5	0
Jul	22	4	11	5	0
Aug	19	2	11	7	2
Sep	19	1	9	5	0
Oct	35	7	16	10	0
Nov	27	5	9	6	0
Dec	21	1	4	76	3
Total	271	37	124	76	3

This wall calendar illustrates daily activity in 2022. Deaths investigated were noted on the calendar by highlighting the day in orange and then writing in the number of deaths investigated. For example, on January 2nd there were two investigations.



Our Team

<p>Nick Henderson Coroner nick.henderson@co.kittitas.wa.us</p>	<p>Cori McKean Office Administrator cori.mckean@co.kittitas.wa.us</p>
<p>Bob Seelye Deputy Coroner bob.seelye@co.kittitas.wa.us</p>	<p>Jacob Schroeder Deputy Coroner jacob.schroeder@co.kittitas.wa.us</p>
<p>Ryan Gausman Deputy Coroner ryan.gausman@co.kittitas.wa.us</p>	<p>Kayleen Gordon Deputy Coroner kayleen.gordon@co.kittitas.wa.us</p>
<p>Norman Thiersch, MD Forensic Pathology Consultant</p>	<p>Eric Kiesel, MD, Ph.D Forensic Pathology Consultant</p>
<p>Megan Quinn, MD Forensic Pathology Consultant</p>	<p>Kiana Miller Forensic Autopsy Technician- Anthropology Consultant</p>
<p>Kyle Tanaka, DDS Forensic Odontology Consultant</p>	

Office Location

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Coroner Office Activities by Month

	Reported Deaths	Jurisdiction Accepted	Jurisdiction Declined	Cases with Scenes	Coroner Signed Death Certificate	Autopsies
Jan	30	11	19	12	7	4
Feb	19	5	14	3	2	1
Mar	12	6	6	5	2	1
Apr	23	12	11	12	7	4
May	27	17	10	16	12	6
Jun	17	6	11	8	2	1
Jul	22	9	13	7	6	4
Aug	19	8	11	8	8	2
Sep	19	6	13	9	4	1
Oct	35	16	19	13	12	7
Nov	27	17	10	16	14	5
Dec	21	14	7	17	8	1
Total	271	128	143	126	84	37

Jurisdiction, or the official power to make legal decisions and judgments, is accepted for those deaths suspected to be homicides, suicides, accidents, or sudden unexpected natural deaths and they are investigated. Jurisdiction may be declined when a death is due to natural causes such as illness, old age, or a known medical condition. In such cases the attending physician can issue a natural death certificate without further investigation.

According to the Washington Health and Life Event System a total of 339 deaths were certified in Kittitas County in 2022. Not all deaths that occur in the county require the coroner’s office to be notified.

In 2022 there were no law enforcement related deaths.

The office approved disposition as follows:

Burial	Cremation	Storage	Unclaimed	Removed from State
27	231	1	1	5

Total Forensic Examinations:

Our medicolegal investigators conduct physical examinations of decedent’s during their investigations. A forensic examination or autopsy is completed by a board-certified forensic pathologist.

Exam Type	Total
Full Autopsy	35
Limited Autopsy	2
Toxicology Only	3
No Forensic Examination	231

Definitions:

- Full Autopsy (or complete autopsy) is an examination of the entire external body and an internal examination of all the major organs of the body, like heart, lungs, liver, brain, and kidneys.
- Limited Autopsy (or partial autopsy) is an examination of the entire external body and an internal examination of a specific part of the body, such as “head” or “chest”.
- Toxicology is the analysis of biological samples for the presence of toxins, including drugs. In some instances only toxicology specimens are submitted for testing.
- Forensic Examination is not completed on every case. Death investigation include an external body examination completed by a medicolegal death investigator and with enough medical information the coroner can certify a death without a forensic examination. Medical history, risk factors, and the *totality of the circumstances* surrounding the death all play factors in determining to whether to complete a forensic examination.

Manner of Death by Month

All	Homicide	Suicide	Accident	Natural	Undetermined	Pending	NA	Total
Jan	0	0	2	28	0	0	0	30
Feb	0	0	1	18	0	0	0	19
Mar	0	0	0	12	0	0	0	12
Apr	0	0	1	20	1	0	1	23
May	0	0	6	19	0	0	2	27
Jun	0	0	0	17	0	0	0	17
Jul	1	0	2	18	0	0	1	22
Aug	0	1	6	12	0	0	0	19
Sep	0	0	1	17	0	0	1	19
Oct	0	1	2	30	1	0	1	35
Nov	0	1	4	22	0	0	0	27
Dec	0	0	2	19	0	0	0	21
Total	1	3	27	232	2	0	6	271

Manner of death indicates the circumstances surrounding the death, how the fatal event came about and is based on investigation. This is determined through scene investigation, medical records review, examination of the body, autopsy, and ancillary studies.

Definitions

- **Homicide:** due to a volitional act by another with intent to cause fear, harm, or death and in some negligent acts, even when a person did not intend to cause harm.
- **Suicide:** injury that occurred with the intent to induce self-harm or cause one’s own death.
- **Accident:** injury when there is no evidence of intent to harm.
- **Natural:** due to natural disease processes.
- **Undetermined:** there is inadequate information regarding the circumstances of death to determine a manner. An example is a person found unconscious with a subdural hemorrhage; in the absence of information on the events leading up to death, it may not be possible to determine if the hemorrhage is due to accidental fall, homicidal violence, etc.
- **Pending:** for the benefit of the decedent’s family, to provide a timely legal document indicating death has occurred, while an investigation is ongoing into a more specific cause and manner of death.
- **Not Applicable:** those cases where investigation resulted in identifying remains as “non-human” or “human - anthropological remains” and no death certification was necessary.

Total Cases with Scene Investigations

All	# Cases	Cases with Scenes	Scenes Attended
Jan	30	12	12
Feb	19	3	3
Mar	12	5	5
Apr	23	12	12
May	27	16	16
Jun	17	8	8
Jul	22	7	7
Aug	19	8	8
Sep	19	9	9
Oct	35	13	13
Nov	27	16	16
Dec	21	17	17
Total	271	126	126

Why not go to the scene to investigate every time? At times there is no reason to go to a scene.

Examples of when a scene visit is not necessarily done include bones photographed and determined to be non-human, deaths at a medical facility where we are completing a medical records review but do not assume jurisdiction, or those deaths which occur when the scene is either not accessible to us (alpine wilderness) or not safe (avalanche areas).

Natural Deaths Involving

	Neurologic	Genitourinary	Cardiac	Kidney	Pulmonary	Liver	Cancer	Other	Total
Jan	1	1	13	1	3	0	7	2	28
Feb	4	0	7	0	0	1	4	2	18
Mar	0	0	6	1	2	0	2	1	12
Apr	1	0	9	0	3	0	5	2	20
May	3	0	6	0	1	0	7	2	19
Jun	0	0	8	0	2	0	7	0	17
Jul	3	1	5	0	1	0	5	3	18
Aug	2	0	4	0	1	1	4	0	12
Sep	3	0	8	1	2	0	2	1	17
Oct	7	0	12	0	2	0	8	1	30
Nov	3	0	9	0	4	0	2	1	19
Dec	3	0	9	0	4	0	2	1	19
Total	33	2	99	3	24	2	53	16	232

Definitions:

Simply put, a “natural” death is one that occurs due to an internal factor that causes the body to shut down. It means there was no external reason for the death.

- Neurological: death may occur from injury, disease, or disorder of the nervous system.
- Genitourinary: deaths are those occurring from disorders.
- Cardiac: death pertains to the heart.
- Kidney: deaths include infection, transport disorders, or tumors.
- Pulmonary: death pertains to the lungs.
- Liver: death is caused by diseases.
- Cancer: can develop in any tissue of any organ at any age.
- Other: deaths are investigated and after a post-mortem examination no obvious cause may be found that fits in any of the above categories.

COVID-19

	# Cases
Feb	1
Oct	1

Two cases investigated by the coroner’s office in 2022 were certified with COVID-19 as the immediate and sole cause of death.

COVID-19 and Other Causes

	# Cases	Other Causes
May	1	Kidney disease, diabetes, hypertension
Dec	1	Myocardial infarction, diabetes, dementia

Two cases investigated by the coroner’s office in 2022 were certified with COVID-19 as one cause of death among others, but not as sole cause of death.

Unnatural Causes of Death Involving:

All	Trauma	Burns	Drowning	Fall	Firearm	Hanging	Vehicle	Drugs	Other	Total
Jan	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	2
Feb	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	1
Mar	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Apr	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	1	2
May	1	0	1	0	0	0	4	4	0	6
Jun	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Jul	0	0	1	0	1	0	1	1	0	3
Aug	1	0	1	1	0	1	2	0	2	7
Sept	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	1
Oct	1	0	0	0	1	0	2	1	1	4
Nov	1	0	0	0	1	0	1	2	1	5
Dec	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	2
Total	4	1	3	1	3	1	12	10	7	33

Unnatural death is defined as death resulting from an external cause. These are deaths from homicide, suicide, or by accident.

Factors Contributing to Unnatural Death

Unnatural death can include injury, inhalation, ingestion, or submersion or any combination of these mechanisms.

Accident

Types of Vehicles

	Auto	Motorcycle	Garden Tractor	Total
Apr	1	0	0	1
May	4	0	0	4
Jul	0	1	0	1
Aug	1	0	1	2
Sep	1	0	0	1
Oct	2	0	0	2
Nov	1	0	0	1
Total	10	1	1	12

Types of Drugs

	Alcohol	Benzodiazepines	Methamphetamine	Opioids	Marijuana	Amphetamines
Feb	0	0	1	0	0	1
Apr	0	0	0	0	0	0
May	3	0	0	1	1	1
Jul	0	0	0	0	1	0
Oct	1	0	0	0	0	1
Nov	1	1	2	2	1	1
Dec	1	0	0	0	0	0
Total	6	1	3	3	3	4

Suicide

	Firearm	Hanging	Drugs	Total
Aug	0	1	0	1
Oct	2	0	1	1
Dec	0	0	0	0
Total	2	1	1	3

Total of three suicides:

- One suicide with contributing factors of firearms (shotgun) and drugs (alcohol and amphetamines).
- One suicide with contributing factor of firearms (rifle).
- One suicide with contributing factor of hanging asphyxia.

Homicide

	Firearm	Drugs	Total
Jul	1	1	1
Total	1	1	1

It is important to understand that Homicide and Murder do not have the same meaning. Murder is used in criminal law matters but cannot be used as a manner of death. While all murders are homicides, not all homicides are murders.

Kittitas County had a total of one homicide in 2022 which included two contributing factors of firearms (shotgun) and drugs (marijuana).

Demographics

Disposition of Body

	Burial	Cremation	Anthropological Storage	Unclaimed	Removal from State
2022	27	231	1	1	5

Ethnicity of Deceased

	White	Black	Asian	Indian	Pacific Islander
2022	255	1	2	1	2

Sex of Deceased

	Male	Female
2022	171	93

Age of Deceased

	1	1 to 5	11 to 17	18 to 25	26 to 44	45 to 64	65
202	3	1	1	6	17	44	192

Infants and Youths (birth – age 17), Categorized by Manner of Death

AGE	< 1	1 – 5	6 – 10	11 – 17
Total	3	1	0	1
Manner	Natural	Undetermined	NA	Accident