

**LARAMIE COUNTY  
OFFICE OF THE CORONER**

*Martin A. Luna, D-ABMDI*

*Coroner*

310 West 19th Street, Suite 410  
Cheyenne, Wyoming 82001-4449  
(307) 633-4513

***TO THE CITIZENS OF LARAMIE COUNTY:***

I present to you the year end report for the Office of Coroner for Laramie County. The information you find contained in here has been gathered from the records of this office as well as that of the Wyoming Department of Health, Vital Statistics. Our staff strives to serve Laramie County with integrity and professionalism. We feel it is the obligation and responsibility of this office to provide the public the information contained herein.

We hope that the information provided will be of value to you. If you have any questions, please feel free to contact us at any time.

Martin A. Luna, D-ABMDI  
Laramie County Coroner

## **FOREWARD**

The Office of the Coroner for Laramie County serves the residents by incorporating the fields of medicine and forensic sciences to investigate any sudden or unexplained death or those deaths that may occur under unknown circumstances. Wyoming Statutes mandate that the Office of the Coroner has a legal obligation to investigate deaths within its jurisdiction. In some cases this is done in conjunction with a law enforcement agency, but in most instances the Coroner's investigation is an independent one.

In general, these are the types of cases the Coroner investigates:

- Homicides and Suicides
- Accidents resulting in death
- Deaths with unusual, unexplained or suspicious circumstances
- Deaths of children
- Deaths not attended by a physician

### **THE MEDICOLEGAL DEATH INVESTIGATION**

Every state has a medicolegal death investigation system in place. Wyoming utilizes the elected Coroner system. The Coroner, his deputies and investigators are specially trained in the process of the medicolegal investigation of death.

A medicolegal death investigation is a specialized examination integrating personal, social and medical history, scene investigation, and external examination of the decedent and may include internal examination by autopsy.



The obligation assumed by the Coroner and his staff for proper death investigation is mandatory for legal, religious and humanitarian satisfaction in society.

The Coroner's Office also functions as an advocate for families by working with them to insure they are notified in a timely manner of the death, relaying medical information from autopsies and placing families in touch with other agencies that can assist in the grieving process. The office works with Chaplin services from the community and those representing Cheyenne Regional Medical Center who assist in coordinating with organizations such as the Rocky Mountain Lion's Eye Bank and the Donor Alliance Network to facilitate the decedent's and family's wishes regarding organ donations.

Many of the cases investigated by the Coroner are dealt with in a routine manner because the identity of the decedent is known and the next-of-kin can be readily contacted.

However, there are occasional cases that are difficult to resolve. In these deaths, one or more pertinent pieces of information may be missing or difficult to establish. Identification of the deceased may require scientific methods are employed such as fingerprints, finding dental records or utilizing DNA. The decedent may not have next-of-kin, or next-of-kin may be far removed or difficult to locate. These cases may take more time to resolve, but the Coroner's staff will pursue any and all leads to find solutions.

### **LARAMIE COUNTY OFFICE OF THE CORONER**



The Coroner for Laramie County is an elected official and is the only full-time employee of the Office. He is served by eight (8) part-time Deputy – Investigators and this year began an intern program.

#### ***The Coroner's Office personnel are:***

Martin A. Luna, D-ABMDI  
Coroner

Ronald J. Sargent  
Deputy – Investigator

Leah F. Innocci  
Deputy – Investigator

Brenda K. Beckman  
Deputy – Investigator

Tom McDonough  
Deputy

Jeanine West  
Administrative Assistant

Charles S. Trimble  
Deputy – Investigator

Donald F. Heiduck  
Investigator

Todd C. Nalder  
Deputy – Investigator

Alex Silva  
Investigator – Intern

## **BOARD CERTIFICATION**



The American Board of Medicolegal Death Investigators (ABMDI) sets quality and process standards for death investigations. Though investigators are not required by law to comply with ABMDI standards, the standards provide important guidelines for quality forensic investigation. In addition to death investigation standards, the ABMDI in 2000 began a certification program for medicolegal death investigators. Individuals who pass the certification requirements of the American Board of Medicolegal Death Investigators are designated as Diplomats and use the letters “D-ABMDI” following their names.



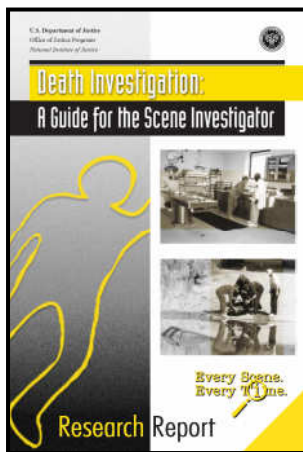
The American College of Forensic Examiners (M-ACFE) is an international membership association, developed to bring together professionals from a variety of disciplines to provide a reliable, credible forum for ethical and professional standards for forensics. It is comprised of forensic professionals actively engaged in the fields of medicine, psychology, criminology, dentistry, and toxicology and risk analysis, among others. The ACFEI also provides Diplomate and Fellow status and certification at five (5) levels of Certified Medical Investigator (CMI). Upon completion of the requirements an individual may use the letters CMI and their rating (I – V) after their names.

All certifications have continuing education requirements.

## **ACCOMPLISHMENTS IN 2007**

In 2007, The Office of the Coroner adopted and implemented guidelines and protocols on how all deaths are investigated. Wyoming law sets standards in which Coroners, Deputies and Investigators must meet minimum educational requirements. These are monitored and

reviewed annually by the Board of Coroner's Standards with the assistance of the Wyoming Peace Officer's Standards and Training Commission.



In 1997 The National Institute of Justice, in cooperation with the National Medicolegal Review Panel, developed and approved the ***National Guidelines for Death Investigation***, a suggested set of standards that death investigation agencies should follow.

These suggested standards, and those used by the American Board of Medicolegal Death Investigators were those adopted by the Coroner and utilized by him, the Deputies and Investigators.

These guidelines and protocols will be reviewed yearly and updated as needed. Because the work done by the Coroner's Office is so important to our community, we are working diligently to develop and maintain exceptionally high standards for our

program. We are proud to say we believe we have succeeded, and will continue to look toward improvement into 2008.

### ***DEMOGRAPHICS OF CORONER CASES***

The Coroner's Office investigated 225 cases in 2007, slightly down from 2006 (330). The Coroner investigates approximately 25 to 30 percent of all deaths that occur in the County.

The Coroner's Office will investigate a death when 1) the cause and manner of death cannot be determined by a medical history; 2) when it necessary to confirm the presence of legal or illegal substances (e.g. alcohol or "street drugs") and determine if they were a contributing factor in the death; and 3) when the death is suspicious and an autopsy must be conducted to assist in making determination of cause and manner of death.

Autopsies were ordered on 60 (26.67%) of the deaths investigated by the Coroner in 2007.

### ***AUTOPSY***

In certain situations, the circumstances surrounding a person's death may require further examination. An autopsy may be performed to better understand these circumstances and to establish the cause and manner of death. Not every death investigated by the Coroner requires autopsy.

The Coroner contracts with a Forensic Pathologist and assists during the procedure. The Pathologist examines and documents any evidence of the person's medical condition. Many times, diseases or conditions unknown to the deceased or their family may be uncovered. Samples of tissue are obtained for histology as well as samples for toxicological examination.

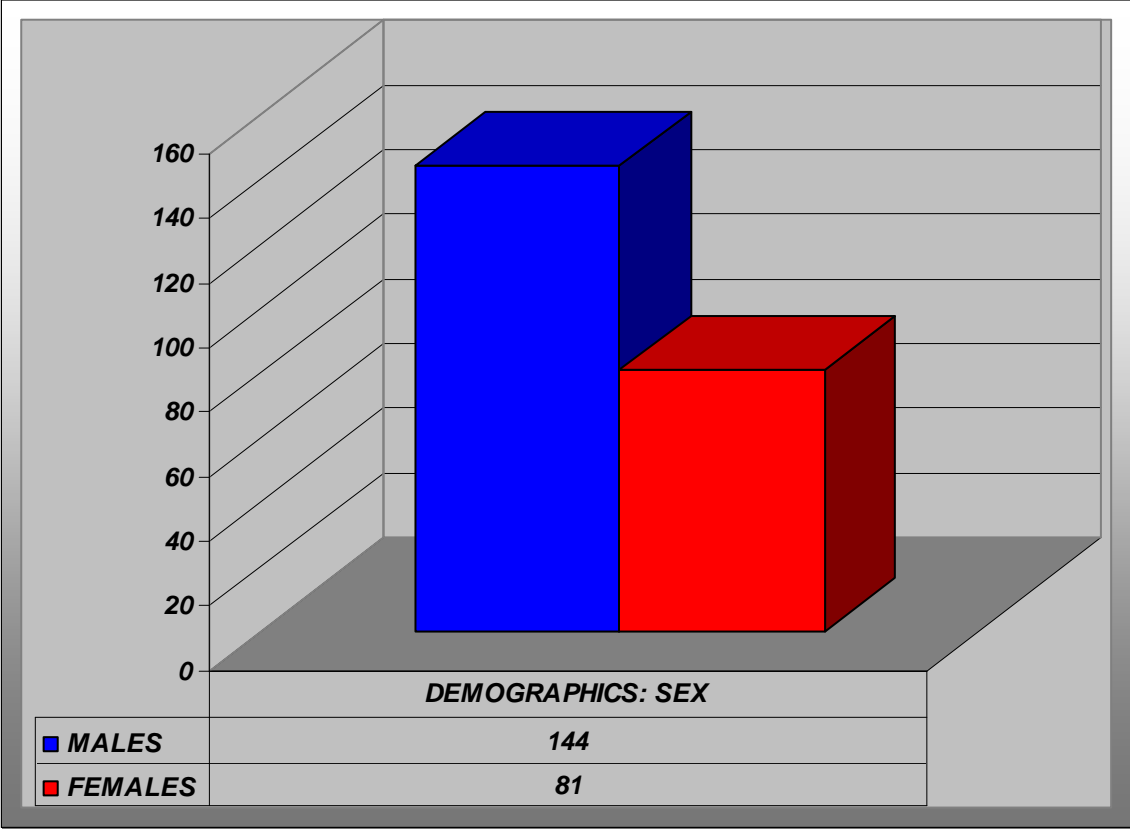
From the evidence uncovered at autopsy and remaining investigation, the Coroner can determine the cause and manner of death and then assist the family in their recovery efforts.

Funeral arrangements do not have to be postponed or changed because an autopsy must be performed. Family members are also usually able to view their loved one during funeral services.

**DEMOGRAPHICS: SEX**

Males represent the majority of Coroner's cases in Laramie County (64%) of the 225 cases investigated with females representing 36%.

Males, it appears, have statistically higher rates of sudden, unexplained, or medically unattended deaths. Males are more likely to commit suicide, be a homicide victim, die as a result of drug overdose, or due to vehicular wrecks than females.



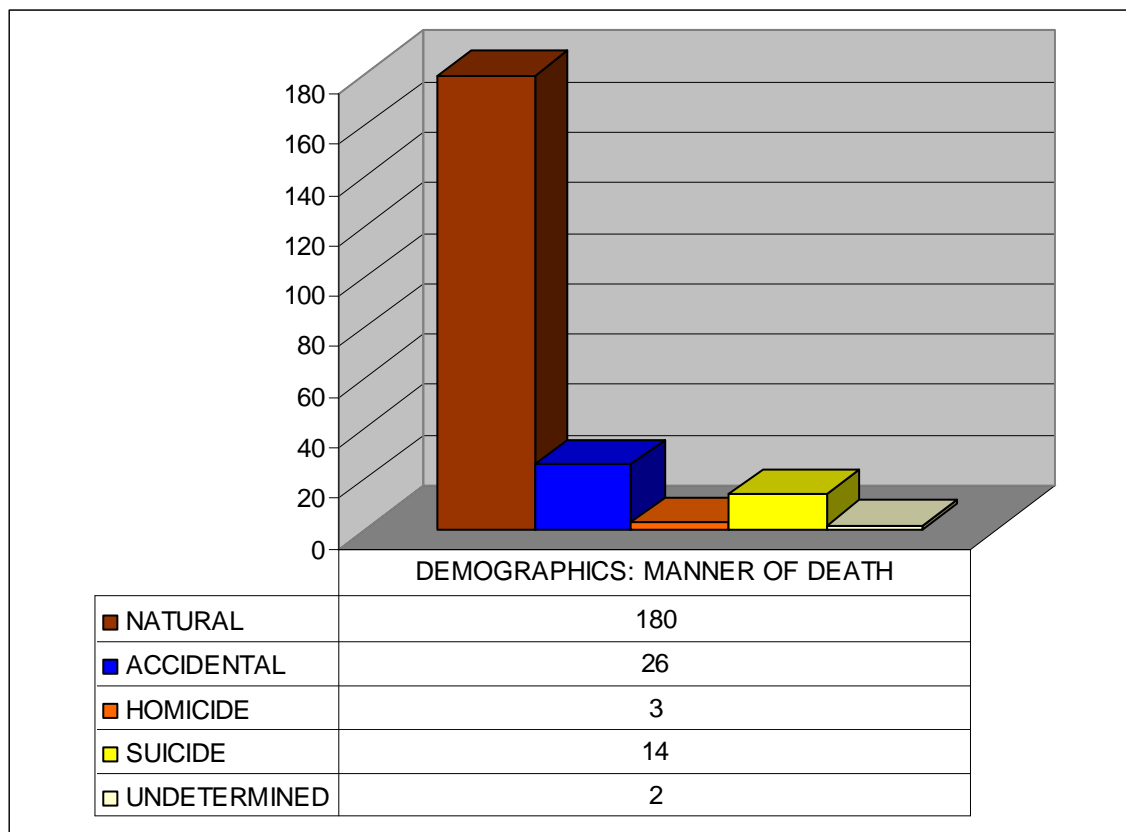
## MANNER OF DEATH

One of the most important duties of the Coroner or his investigators is the determination of the circumstance, cause and **manner** of death in cases of sudden, unexplained, or medically unattended deaths. Cause of death refers to the actual “event” that precipitated the death (e.g. heart attack or stroke), while the manner of death refers to what precipitated the “event.”

Manner of death is categorized as:

- Natural
- Accidental
- Suicide
- Homicide
- Undetermined

For deaths where a chronic disease (heart disease, cancer, diabetes, etc.) is listed as the cause of death, the manner is generally categorized as “natural.” Because chronic diseases are responsible for over 65% of all deaths, the “natural” category is always the highest in Coroner cases.



## **DETERMINING CAUSE OF DEATH**

Most determinations of cause of death, without autopsy, are based upon the medical history of the decedent and the events surrounding the death. Natural causes have typically accounted for over 80% of the cases investigated by the Coroner. If an autopsy is not performed, laboratory work is routinely conducted on samples taken from a decedent. The results are examined, and the decedent's personal physician or a pathologist is consulted to aid in the determination. All of this information is recorded and remains a part of the decedent's Coroner investigative file.

## **THE FUTURE FOR THE OFFICE OF THE CORONER LARAMIE COUNTY**

*“Show me the manner in which a nation or community cares for its dead and I will measure with mathematical exactness the tender sympathies of its people, their respect for the laws of the land and their loyalties to high ideals.”*

These words are as true today as they were when spoken by British Prime Minister William Gladstone in 1871. The Office of the Coroner for Laramie County has made great strides in changing the professionalism of the office to mirror national standards for how medicolegal death investigations are conducted. The next logical step is to provide the people of Laramie County with a proper and professional facility from which the Coroner and investigators can conduct business.

One of the projects proposed in the May special election for use of 6<sup>th</sup> penny tax is a County Morgue. Currently, the Coroner's Office is housed in the Historic Laramie County Courthouse and a "storage and equipment" facility is located in a Quonset hut at Laramie County Public Works.



The proposed morgue would provide the Coroner with approximately 5300 square feet of office space, storage, a secured area in which to process and conduct examinations on decedents and an area, if needed, where autopsies and decedent identifications could be conducted.

The Coroner is legally obligated to conduct investigations into the circumstances, cause and manner of deaths. This means that the Coroner may hold remains for a period of time while awaiting laboratory results, or if the decedent has to be taken for post mortem examination. This facility would provide state-of-the-art service to Laramie County and would meet the needs of a county pushing a population of 86,000 residents.

Visit the Coroner's website at [www.laramiecounty.com/departments/coroner](http://www.laramiecounty.com/departments/coroner) where updated information can be found on the morgue's development. The website is also a good source for brochures used by the office, provides the Coroner's Mission Statement and a biography section so you can get to know the Coroner, his Deputies and Investigators.