

DEPARTMENT OF THE MEDICAL EXAMINER



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POWERS, DUTIES AND FUNCTIONS

The Department of the Medical Examiner (MED) serves the public through the investigation of sudden, unexpected, violent, and suspicious deaths. The purpose of such an investigation is to discover, document, and preserve the medical, anatomic, or evidentiary findings, which will allow the department to determine the cause and manner of death, to identify the time of death and injury, to confirm or deny the account of how death occurred, to determine or exclude other contributory or causative factors to the death, and to provide expert testimony in criminal and civil litigation. Documented, sound, and objective medical evidence enables recognition of murder and exoneration of the innocent in court proceedings.

Section 6-1305 of the 1973 Revised Charter of the City and County of Honolulu (2000 Edition) states, "When any person dies in the City as a result of violence or by a casualty, or by apparent suicide, or suddenly when in apparent health, or when not under the care of a physician, or when in jail or in prison, or within twenty-four hours after admission to a hospital, or in any suspicious or unusual manner, it shall be the duty of the person having knowledge of such death to immediately notify the Department of the Medical Examiner and the Police Department."

The MED is staffed by physicians specialized in the area of forensic pathology, medical examiner investigators, laboratory technologists, autopsy assistants, and clerical personnel. The physicians are board certified in the specialty of anatomic pathology as required by Section 841-14.5 of the Hawaii Revised Statutes.

The staff is aware of the tragedy that accompanies sudden and unexpected deaths, and realizes that each case represents an individual who is deeply missed by his or her loved ones. Our investigators are trained to deliver death notifications with the utmost compassion, courtesy, and professionalism. A thorough investigation into the circumstances of death, postmortem examination, and necessary laboratory studies are directed at determining the cause and manner of death. In addition to providing pertinent answers for significant issues such as insurance claims, estate settlements, information and evidence necessary for civil and criminal legal proceedings, they also provide factual data for relatives, which helps them through their grieving process with better understanding of the cause and manner of death. The physicians are available for the relatives, attorneys and estate representatives to provide necessary information.

HIGHLIGHTS

Principal objectives of the MED are to protect the public health by (a) diagnosing previously unsuspected contagious disease; (b) identifying trends affecting the lives of our citizens such as traffic accident fatalities, drug-related deaths, industrial accidents, and teen and other suicides aimed at prevention; and (c) identifying hazardous environmental conditions in the workplace, home and elsewhere. The department's community outreach educational program this year included 37 different requested presentations in house and in the field to approximately 355 at risk teenagers aimed at DUI and drug abuse prevention, and to approximately 425 students interested in forensic careers as well as professional groups. Presentations most often include morgue tours for high school students with an informative seminar on drug-related deaths, speeding accidents, teen suicides, and other trends affecting the lives of our citizens. The goal is to provide a better perspective of how their actions and decisions can affect them as well as others in the community. Driving schools frequently ask for these programs for their student drivers. The MED actively participates in multi-disciplinary state-wide child death review systems, thereby generating recommendations for decreasing child deaths by identification of risk factors and promulgation of preventive measures. The Department similarly participates in an inter-agency domestic violence fatality review team, aimed at prevention by identification of risk factors. Assisting local donor agencies to obtain consent for organ and tissue procurement is an ongoing priority. The Department continues to participate in the Honolulu Heart Program which includes aging studies of the brain in pre-registered enrollees. Scientific death investigation additionally provides factual material and evidence for agencies involved in workers' compensation, public health hazards, and community health and disease. As a proponent of city-wide mass casualty readiness, the MED has participated in a multi-echelon interagency mass fatalities leadership course, and has completed a department continuity of operations plan, also updating the Department and the City mass casualty plans. The Department's participation in the National Missing and Unidentified Persons System (NamUS), a new online database, assists in determining whether a missing loved one might be one of otherwise unidentified remains in our custody.

The MED offers pathology electives to medical students, medical transitional program residents, and pathology residents from the University of Hawaii John A. Burns School of Medicine. In addition, the Chaminade University forensic science curriculum provides opportunities for on-site internships as part of the requirement to complete the forensic science baccalaureate degree.

The Department maintains a high level of competence in the field of scientific death investigation and continues to contribute to the improvement of the quality of life of the people of Oahu.

The Department's website is included in the official website of the City and County of Honolulu at <http://www.honolulu.gov>.

The work of the Department is tabulated in statistical form as follows:

SUMMARY OF STATISTICAL REPORT OF CASES HANDLED BY DEPARTMENT FISCAL YEAR 2011

The office investigated 2149 deaths this past year as compared to 1982 in Fiscal Year 2010. The MED assumed jurisdiction in 786 cases and performed autopsies in 558 cases. Non-autopsied cases comprised complete external examinations and toxicological testing of body fluids.

Next-of-kin authorized organ donation in 35 cases. Of the 786 jurisdiction cases, the MED investigators visited 408 original death scenes. These scenes are where the incident occurred and, therefore, are an integral part of a thorough death investigation. For example, if the death of a young child occurs in a medical institution, in addition to visiting the medical institution, the MED investigator goes to the original scene of the incident.

Number of deaths investigated	2149
..... Jurisdiction assumed in	786
..... Violent deaths	486
Autopsied	366
Not autopsied.....	120
..... Violent deaths (undetermined manner) ..	20
Autopsied	18
Not autopsied	2
..... Unclassified (undetermined manner)	19
Autopsied	15
Not autopsied	4
..... Non-violent deaths	260
Autopsied	158
Not autopsied	102
..... Historical remains	1
..... Non-human artifacts.....	1
..... Jurisdiction released to private physician (death within 24 hours).....	710
..... Attended/other deaths reported ...	653
Total autopsies performed by Medical Examiner	558
Total number of bodies transported to Morgue .	743
Total organ/tissue harvesting	35
Total original scene of incident visited	408
Total no body, no autopsy (DC jurisdiction).....	91
Total unidentified skeletal remains	1

**LABORATORY PROCEDURES CONDUCTED
FISCAL YEAR 2011**

Laboratory Chemical Tests	1022
Ethanol Tests	700
Toxicology Screen	1217
Toxicology Sent Out	281
Hematoxylin and Eosin Slides Prepared	2685
Special Slides Prepared	18

Laboratory procedures that include toxicological analysis, blood alcohol determinations, preparation of microscopic slides for histological examinations, and various other chemical analyses of different types of body fluids continue to be a very important aspect of investigation of deaths occurring under our jurisdiction.

Drug-related deaths continue to be a concern, and there has been a rise in the number of deaths associated with methadone. Cocaine, opiates, Oxycontin, and methamphetamine continue to be detected in toxicological screens of deaths investigated by the Department. Methamphetamine continues to be associated with violent deaths.

**REQUEST FOR REPORTS
FISCAL YEAR 2011**

Investigation and Autopsy Reports	685
Fees Collected	\$2,714

A fee of \$5.00 is charged for each report requested by individuals and private agencies. There is no charge to governmental agencies or to hospitals. There is a fee of not less than \$5.00 for reports subpoenaed. Other related fees include duplication of microscopic slides and digital photographs.

**BUDGET AND AUTHORIZED PERSONNEL
FISCAL YEAR 2011**

Budget Expenditures		\$1,236,508
..... Salaries	\$871,015	
..... Current Expenses...	365,493	
..... Equipment	0	
..... Positions	19	

CLASSIFICATION OF VIOLENT DEATHS FISCAL YEAR 2011

The number of violent deaths increased to 516 compared to 458 last fiscal year. There were 230 other accidental deaths this past year compared to 207 in FY 2010. Falls (101) and poisoning (93) comprised the majority of the 230 victims. There was an increase in the number of homicides, 22 this year compared to 17 the previous year.

Violent Deaths.....		516
..... Homicide		22
..... Blunt trauma	7	
..... Child abuse..	1	
..... Fall.....	1	
..... Fire	1	
..... Gunshot.....	7	
..... Sharp force trauma.	1	
..... Stabbing	4	
..... Suicide		128
..... Asphyxia.....	2	
..... Fall.....	17	
..... Fire	3	
..... Gunshot.....	25	
..... Hanging	46	
..... Poisoning.....	28	
..... Sharp force trauma.	4	
..... Stabbing	2	
..... Traffic	1	
..... Traffic		70
..... Water-Related		39
..... Industrial.....		8
..... Other Accident		230
..... Undetermined.....		38
..... Blunt trauma	1	
..... Drowning	1	
..... Fall.....	5	
..... Gunshot.....	1	
..... Hanging	1	
..... Poisoning.....	12	
..... Unclassified.	17	

NOTE: Some deaths are reported in 2 different categories.

**BREAKDOWN OF HOMICIDE VICTIMS BY RACE
FISCAL YEAR 2011**

<u>Race</u>	<u>2010 July-December</u>	<u>2011 January-June</u>	<u>Total</u>
Black	2	0	2
Caucasian	4	0	4
Filipino	1	1	2
Hawn/Part-Hawn	1	8	9
Japanese	0	1	1
Micronesian	0	1	1
Vietnamese	0	3	3
TOTAL	8	14	22

**BREAKDOWN OF HOMICIDE METHODS USED
FISCAL YEAR 2011**

<u>Methods Used</u>	<u>2010 July-December</u>	<u>2011 January-June</u>	<u>Total</u>
Blunt trauma	2	5	7
Child abuse	0	1	1
Fall	1	0	1
Fire	0	1	1
Gunshot	2	5	7
Knife wounds/ Stabbing	3	1	4
Sharp force trauma	0	1	1
TOTAL	8	14	22

**SUICIDE STATISTICS
FISCAL YEAR 2011**

<u>Method</u>	Blk		Cau		Fil		Hwn P-Hwn		Jps		Kor		Pac Island		Other		<u>Total</u>
	<u>M</u>	<u>F</u>	<u>M</u>	<u>F</u>	<u>M</u>	<u>F</u>	<u>M</u>	<u>F</u>	<u>M</u>	<u>F</u>	<u>M</u>	<u>F</u>	<u>M</u>	<u>F</u>	<u>M</u>	<u>F</u>	
Asphyxia			1	1													2
Fall	1		5	1			1	3	4						2		17
Fire			1						1		1						3
Gunshot			5		1		9	1	4						4	1	25
Hanging			3	2	8	1	12	1	3	2	2	4		6	2		46
Sharp force trauma			3						1								4
Stabbing															2		2
Poisoning	1		10	7	1		4	1	1					2	1		28
Traffic			1														1
TOTAL	2		29	11	9	2	26	6	12	4	3	4		16	4		128

**SUICIDE VICTIMS
FISCAL YEAR 2011**

<u>Age</u>	<u>Male</u>	<u>Female</u>	<u>Total</u>
10 thru 19	6	1	7
20 thru 29	22	3	25
30 thru 39	9	6	15
40 thru 49	26	6	32
50 thru 59	14	6	20
Over 60	21	8	29
TOTAL	98	30	128

**SUMMARY OF SUICIDES
FISCAL YEAR 2011**

<u>2010</u>	<u>Male</u>	<u>Female</u>	<u>Total</u>
July	13	0	13
August	10	4	14
September	11	2	13
October	6	5	11
November	9	2	11
December	7	7	14
Sub-Total	56	20	76
<u>2011</u>			
January	9	2	11
February	5	3	8
March	10	0	10
April	10	2	12
May	5	2	7
June	3	1	4
Sub-Total	42	10	52
TOTAL	98	30	128

**TRAFFIC FATALITIES
FISCAL YEAR 2011**

Type of Occupant	<u>MALE</u>			<u>FEMALE</u>			<u>Total</u>
	<u>2010 July-Dec</u>	<u>2011 Jan-Jun</u>	<u>(With Alc.)</u>	<u>2010 July-Dec</u>	<u>2011 Jan-Jun</u>	<u>(With Alc.)</u>	
Operator	5	6	(6)	4	3	(2)	18
Passenger	3	5	(4)	1	2	(1)	11
Pedestrian	10	2	(4)	7	5	(0)	24
Motorcyclist	3	2	(3)	1	0	(0)	6
Moped rider	4	2	(1)	0	0	(0)	6
Bicyclist	2	1	(0)	1	0	(0)	4
Other	0	0	(0)	0	1	(0)	1
TOTAL	27	18	(18)	14	11	(3)	70

WATER-RELATED DEATHS FISCAL YEAR 2011

There were 39 water-related deaths compared to 37 last year. Thirty-one victims died while engaged in ocean-related activities.

<u>Location and Activity</u>	<u>MALE</u>		<u>FEMALE</u>		<u>Total</u>
	<u>2010 July-Dec</u>	<u>2011 Jan-Jun</u>	<u>2010 July-Dec</u>	<u>2011 Jan-Jun</u>	
Ocean					
Diving, free	2	4	0	0	6
Diving, SCUBA	1	1	0	0	2
Fishing	1	0	0	0	1
Paddle boarding	1	1	0	0	2
Snorkeling	3	1	1	0	5
Swimming	1	4	1	0	6
Wading/walking	2	4	0	3	9
Bathtub	0	0	0	1	1
Jacuzzi	1	1	0	0	2
Swimming pool	1	1	1	1	4
Undetermined (manner), Reservoir	1	0	0	0	1
TOTAL	14	17	3	5	39

INDUSTRIAL DEATHS FISCAL YEAR 2011

There were eight job-related deaths this year compared to five the previous year. Five of the eight deaths were due to an explosion of fireworks in a confined space.

<u>Age</u>	<u>Synopsis</u>
24	This explosives disposal technician sustained toxic effects of carbon monoxide inhalation due to an explosion of fireworks in a confined space.
24	This explosives ordinance operation/disposal technician sustained thermal burns and toxic effects of carbon monoxide inhalation due to an explosion of fireworks in a confined space.
29	This explosives disposal technician sustained toxic effects of carbon monoxide inhalation due to an explosion of fireworks in a confined space.
50	This fireworks disassembly technician sustained thermal burns/toxic effects of carbon monoxide inhalation due to an explosion of fireworks in a confined space.
25	This fireworks specialist technician sustained thermal burns due to an explosion of fireworks in a confined space.
42	This general maintenance worker sustained multiple internal injuries when he was crushed by an overturned backhoe.
70	This ranch field worker sustained multiple internal injuries on a farm when a reversing vehicle struck him.
73	This shop helper sustained blunt force trauma to the head when a truck boom struck him.

**OTHER ACCIDENTAL DEATHS
FISCAL YEAR 2011**

<u>Method</u>	<u>MALE</u>		<u>FEMALE</u>		<u>Total</u>
	<u>2010 July-Dec</u>	<u>2011 Jan-Jun</u>	<u>2010 July-Dec</u>	<u>2011 Jan-Jun</u>	
Asphyxia	8	7	3	4	22
Blunt trauma	1	1	0	0	2
Fall	31	38	15	17	101
Fire	1	0	0	0	1
Poisoning	37	31	11	14	93
Sharp force trauma	0	1	0	0	1
Other	1	8	1	0	10
TOTAL	79	86	30	35	230

**UNDETERMINED DEATHS (MANNER)
FISCAL YEAR 2011**

When investigative information and autopsy findings cannot determine the fashion in which a cause of death came about, the manner of death is listed as "Undetermined." Thirty deaths fell within this category. The majority of cases fell into two categories: poisoning (drug-related), where accidental or intentional overdose could not be determined, and unknown, where after a complete autopsy, the cause and manner of death could not be determined.

<u>Method/Cause</u>	<u>MALE</u>		<u>FEMALE</u>		<u>Total</u>
	<u>2010 July-Dec</u>	<u>2011 Jan-June</u>	<u>2010 July-Dec</u>	<u>2011 Jan-June</u>	
Blunt trauma	0	0	1	0	1
Drowning	1	0	0	0	1
Fall	1	4	0	0	5
Gunshot wound	0	1	0	0	1
Hanging	0	0	0	1	1
Poisoning	0	8	2	2	12
Unknown	10	3	1	3	17
TOTAL	12	16	4	6	38