

DEPARTMENT OF THE MEDICAL EXAMINER

Kanthy De Alwis, M.D., Chief Medical Examiner
William W. Goodhue, Jr., M.D., First Deputy Medical Examiner

POWERS, DUTIES AND FUNCTIONS

The Department of the Medical Examiner 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. Recognition of murder and exoneration of the innocent in court proceedings are provided with documented, sound, and objective medical evidence.

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 immediately to notify the department of the medical examiner and the police department."

The Department of the Medical Examiner is staffed by physicians specialized in the area of forensic pathology, medical examiner's investigators, laboratory technologists, autopsy assistants and clerical personnel. The physicians are board certified in the specialty of anatomic pathology as required and stated in Section 841-14.5 of the Hawaii Revised Statutes. The chief medical examiner and deputy medical examiner are board certified by the American Board of Pathology in anatomic, clinical and forensic pathology.

The department is accredited by the National Association of Medical Examiners (NAME). Accreditation by NAME is an endorsement that the department provides an adequate environment for a medical examiner in which to practice and provides reasonable assurance that the department well serves its jurisdiction. It is the objective of NAME that the application of the NAME standards will aid materially in developing and maintaining a high caliber of medicolegal investigation of death for the communities and jurisdictions in which they operate.



Continuing education training at MED

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 the news of the death with the utmost compassion, courtesy and professionalism. A thorough investigation into the circumstances of death, postmortem examination and necessary laboratory studies are conducted to determine 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, we 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



Data input at scene expedites MED process

One of the main objectives of the department is to protect the public health of the citizens of Oahu by (a) diagnosing previously unsuspected contagious disease, (b) identifying trends affecting the lives of our citizens such as drug-related deaths, teen suicides, etc., and (c) to identify hazardous environmental conditions in the workplace, home and elsewhere. Educational seminars with emphasis on child abuse, identification of risk factors of sudden unexplained infant deaths are conducted for law enforcement personnel, social workers of the Child Protective Services, and physicians. Educational seminars have been conducted with emphasis on prevention of elderly

neglect/abuse to increase the public awareness in identification, intervention, and treatment for elders and their caregivers. As a community outreach program, prevention of deaths through morgue tours for high school students are conducted with an informative presentation on drug-related deaths, speeding accidents, teen suicides, and other trends affecting the lives of our citizens, to provide a better perspective of how their actions and decisions can affect them as well as everyone else around them. The department participates in the multi-disciplinary Child Death Review System. Recommendations for decreasing the number of child deaths following an adequate interval study will be provided. Renewed emphasis has been and will continue to be placed on assisting local donor agencies to obtain consent for organ and tissue procurement. The department continues to participate in the Honolulu Heart Program that has been expanded to include aging studies of the brain in pre-registered participants. Scientific death investigation provides factual material and evidence for agencies involved in worker's compensation, public health hazards and community health and disease.

The department 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, students majoring in forensic science at Chaminade University are given an opportunity to do an internship as part of their requirement to complete their Forensic Science bachelor's 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 work of the department is tabulated in statistical form as follows:

SUMMARY OF STATISTICAL REPORT OF CASES HANDLED BY DEPARTMENT, 2007-2008

The office investigated 1930 deaths this past year as compared to 1894 in 2006-2007. Jurisdiction was assumed in 698 cases and autopsies were performed in 470 cases. In non-autopsied cases, complete external examinations and toxicological testing of body fluids were performed.

The number of deaths due to homicide, traffic, and drowning have decreased in comparison to fiscal year 2006-2007.

Authorization for organ harvesting was permitted on 34 cases. Of the 698 cases where jurisdiction was assumed, 315 original death scenes were visited. These scenes are where the incident occurred and, therefore, are an integral part of a thorough death investigation. For example, if a death of a young child occurs in a medical institution, in addition to visiting the medical institution, our medical examiner's investigator goes to the original scene of the incident.

Number of deaths investigated.....	1930
Jurisdiction assumed in	698
Violent deaths	395
Autopsied	279
Not autopsied.....	116
Violent deaths (undetermined manner) .	29
Autopsied	29
Not autopsied	0
Non-violent deaths..	271
Autopsied	161
Not autopsied.....	110
Historical remains...	0
Non-human artifacts	2
Human remains	1
Jurisdiction released to private physician (death within 24 hours)	703
Attended/other deaths reported....	529
Total autopsies performed by Medical Examiner	470
Total number of bodies transported to Morgue .	696
Total organ/tissue harvesting.....	34
Total original scene of incident visited	315
Total no body, no autopsy (DC jurisdiction).....	50
Total unidentified skeletal remains.....	0

LABORATORY PROCEDURES
CONDUCTED DURING FISCAL YEAR 2007-2008

Laboratory Chemical Tests	833
Ethanol Tests.....	647
Toxicology Screen	1180
Toxicology Sent Out	266
Hematoxylin and Eosin Slides Prepared.....	2177
Special Slides Prepared	46

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 2007-2008

Investigation and Autopsy Reports	664
Fees Collected	\$2,524.00

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.

BUDGET AND AUTHORIZED PERSONNEL
FISCAL YEAR 2007-2008

Budget Expenditures	\$1,382,735
..... Salaries	\$1,145,358
..... Current Expenses.....	237,377
..... Equipment	0
..... Positions.....	19

CLASSIFICATION OF VIOLENT DEATHS
FISCAL YEAR 2007-2008

The number of violent deaths decreased slightly. There were 193 other accidental deaths this past year compared to 212 in 2006-2007. Falls (99) and poisoning (77) comprised the majority of the 193 victims. There was also a decrease in the number of homicides, 17 this year compared to 27 the previous year.

Violent Deaths.....	431
..... Homicide	17
..... Asphyxia.....	1
..... Blunt trauma	3
..... Child abuse..	1
..... Fall....	1
..... Gunshot.....	4
..... Knife wounds/stabbing	6
..... Sharp force trauma.	1
..... Suicide	87
..... Asphyxia.....	2
..... Drowning	2
..... Fall....	18
..... Fire	1
..... Gunshot.....	13
..... Hanging	30
..... Poisoning.....	12
..... Sharp force trauma.	7
..... Traffic	2
..... Traffic	66
..... Water-Related.....	30
..... Industrial.....	9
..... Other Accident	193
..... Undetermined.....	29
..... Asphyxia.....	2
..... Fall....	2
..... Gunshot	1
..... Poisoning.....	10
..... Sharp force trauma.	1
..... Traffic	1
..... Unknown.....	10
..... Other	2

NOTE: Some deaths are reported in 2 different categories.

**BREAKDOWN OF HOMICIDE VICTIMS BY RACE
FISCAL YEAR 2007-2008**

<u>Race</u>	<u>2007 July-December</u>	<u>2008 January-June</u>	<u>Total</u>
Chinese	0	1	1
Filipino	2	2	4
Hawn/Part-Hawn	2	2	4
Japanese	0	1	1
Samoan	1	0	1
All Other	3	3	6
TOTAL	8	9	17

**BREAKDOWN OF HOMICIDE METHODS USED
FISCAL YEAR 2007-2008**

<u>Methods Used</u>	<u>2007 July-December</u>	<u>2008 January-June</u>	<u>Total</u>
Asphyxia	1	0	1
Blunt trauma	1	2	3
Child Abuse	1	0	1
Fall	0	1	1
Gunshot	0	4	4
Knife wounds/ Stabbing	4	2	6
Sharp force trauma	1	0	1
TOTAL	8	9	17

**SUICIDE STATISTICS
FISCAL YEAR 2007-2008**

<u>Method</u>	<u>Cau</u>		<u>Chi</u>		<u>Fil</u>		<u>Hawn P-Hawn</u>		<u>Jps</u>		<u>Kor</u>		<u>Oth</u>		<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>	
Asphyxia		1			1										2
Drowning											2				2
Fall	4	7			1		2		1	2			1		18
Fire													1		1
Gunshot	4				1		1	1	2				4		13
Hanging	6	1	1		1		4	2	5	1	1		8		30
Sharp Force Trauma	3				1				2				1		7
Poisoning	2	2					1		2	4			1		12
Traffic					1								1		2
TOTAL	19	11	0	1	6	0	5	6	12	7	0	3	14	3	87

**SUICIDE VICTIMS
FISCAL YEAR 2007-2008**

<u>Age</u>	<u>Male</u>	<u>Female</u>	<u>Total</u>
10 thru 19	3	2	5
20 thru 29	9	4	13
30 thru 39	9	4	13
40 thru 49	15	7	22
50 thru 59	10	6	16
Over 60	10	8	18
TOTAL	56	31	87

**SUMMARY OF SUICIDES
FISCAL YEAR 2007-2008**

<u>2007</u>	<u>Male</u>	<u>Female</u>	<u>Total</u>
July	6	1	7
August	6	5	11
September	5	2	7
October	5	2	7
November	3	2	5
December	0	2	2
Sub-Total	25	14	39
<u>2008</u>			
January	1	3	4
February	8	2	10
March	4	3	7
April	9	1	10
May	4	5	9
June	5	3	8
Sub-Total	31	17	48
TOTAL	56	31	87

**TRAFFIC FATALITIES
FISCAL YEAR 2007-2008**

<u>Type of Occupant</u>	<u>MALE</u>			<u>FEMALE</u>			<u>Total</u>
	<u>2007 July-Dec</u>	<u>2008 Jan-Jun</u>	<u>With Alc.</u>	<u>2007 July-Dec</u>	<u>2008 Jan-Jun</u>	<u>With Alc.</u>	
Operator	6	9	4	4	3	4	22
Passenger	1	2	0	4	0	1	7
Pedestrian	7	4	4	4	4	0	19
Motorcyclist	9	4	8	0	0	0	13
Moped Rider	3	1	0	0	0	0	4
Bicyclist	1	0	0	1	0	0	2
Other	1	0	0	0	0	0	1
Unknown	1	0	0	0	0	0	1
TOTAL	29	20	16	13	7	5	69

**WATER-RELATED DEATHS
FISCAL YEAR 2007-2008**

There were 30 water-related deaths compared to 38 last year. Twenty-four victims died while engaged in ocean-related activities, the same as last year.

<u>Location and Activity</u>	<u>MALE</u>		<u>FEMALE</u>		<u>Total</u>
	<u>2007 July-Dec</u>	<u>2008 Jan-Jun</u>	<u>2007 July-Dec</u>	<u>2008 Jan-Jun</u>	
Ocean					
Boogie Boarding	1	0	0	0	1
Diving	2	0	0	0	2
SCUBA diving	0	0	1	0	1
Snorkeling	2	3	1	2	8
Surfing	0	2	0	0	2
Swimming	6	4	0	0	10
Swimming Pool	1	2	0	0	3
Bathtub	0	1	0	1	2
Hot tub	1	0	0	0	1
TOTAL	13	12	2	3	30

**INDUSTRIAL DEATHS
FISCAL YEAR 2007-2008**

There were nine job-related deaths this year, the same as the previous year. Five were construction workers.

<u>Age</u>	<u>Synopsis</u>
49	Air conditioning technician sustained craniocerebral injuries when he fell and struck his head at a job site.
56	Construction foreman sustained multiple blunt force injuries when he was struck by a motor vehicle while working at a street corner.
51	Laborer sustained multiple internal injuries when he was run over and crushed by a pneumatic roller at a job site.
69	Ground maintenance worker sustained craniocerebral injuries when he fell and struck his head at a job site.
34	Construction worker died of asphyxia due to being entrapped in a cesspool that caved in.
39	Construction worker sustained multiple internal injuries when he fell from a roof at a job site.
65	Mechanic sustained blunt force injuries to his head and neck when he was pinned under the hydraulic boom of a large dump truck.
34	Construction worker sustained blunt force injuries when a wooden plank suddenly ejected from a sanding machine and struck him in the abdomen.
50	Construction worker sustained craniocerebral injuries when he was struck on the head by heavy equipment.

**OTHER ACCIDENTAL DEATHS
FISCAL YEAR 2007-2008**

<u>Method</u>	<u>MALE</u>		<u>FEMALE</u>		<u>Total</u>
	<u>2007 July-Dec</u>	<u>2008 Jan-Jun</u>	<u>2007 July-Dec</u>	<u>2008 Jan-Jun</u>	
Asphyxia	3	2	0	1	6
Blunt Trauma	1	1	0	0	2
Fall	23	24	29	23	99
Fire	3	0	0	0	3
Hanging		1	0	0	1
Poisoning	34	27	8	8	77
Other	3	2	0	0	5
TOTAL	67	57	37	32	193

**UNDETERMINED DEATHS (MANNER)
FISCAL YEAR 2007-2008**

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". Twenty-nine 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 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>2007 July-Dec</u>	<u>2008 Jan-June</u>	<u>2007 July-Dec</u>	<u>2008 Jan-June</u>	
Asphyxia	0	1	1	0	2
Fall	2	0	0	0	2
Gunshot	0	1	0	0	1
Poisoning	5	1	1	3	10
Sharp force trauma	0	1	0	0	1
Traffic	1	0	0	0	1
Unknown	3	6	1	0	10
Other	0	0	2	0	2
TOTAL	11	10	5	3	29