

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 immediately to 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 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 to practice and 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.

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 is 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, 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

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) identifying hazardous environmental conditions in the workplace, home and elsewhere. The MED conducts educational seminars with emphasis on child abuse and identification of risk factors of sudden unexplained infant deaths for law enforcement personnel, social workers of the Child Protective Services and physicians. The department similarly conducts educational seminars focusing on prevention of elderly neglect/abuse to increase the public awareness in identification, intervention, and treatment for elders and their caregivers. Our community outreach program also includes prevention of deaths through morgue tours for high school students 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 MED actively participates in a multi-disciplinary Child Death Review System, thereby generating recommendations for decreasing the number of child deaths 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 participants. Scientific death investigation additionally provides factual material and evidence for agencies involved in worker's compensation, public health hazards, and community health and disease.

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 2009

The office investigated 1924 deaths this past year as compared to 1930 in Fiscal Year 2008. The MED assumed jurisdiction in 677 cases and performed autopsies in 438 cases. Non-autopsied cases comprised complete external examinations and toxicological testing of body fluids.

The number of deaths due to homicide and drowning increased slightly in comparison to FY 2008, while the number of drowning deaths decreased slightly.

Next-of-kin authorized organ donation in 41 cases. Of the 677 jurisdiction cases, the MED investigators visited 324 original death scenes. 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 MED investigator goes to the original scene of the incident.

Number of deaths investigated	1924
Jurisdiction assumed in	677
Violent deaths	388
Autopsied	275
Not autopsied.....	113
Violent deaths (undetermined manner) .	30
Autopsied	27
Not autopsied	3
Non-violent deaths..	251
Autopsied	135
Not autopsied.....	116
Historical remains...	0
Non-human artifacts	5
Human remains	3
Jurisdiction released to private physician (death within 24 hours).....	736
Attended/other deaths reported....	511
Total autopsies performed by Medical Examiner	438
Total number of bodies transported to Morgue .	682
Total organ/tissue harvesting	41
Total original scene of incident visited	324
Total no body, no autopsy (DC jurisdiction).....	36
Total unidentified skeletal remains.....	0

**LABORATORY PROCEDURES CONDUCTED
FISCAL YEAR 2009**

Laboratory Chemical Tests	767
Ethanol Tests	651
Toxicology Screen	1157
Toxicology Sent Out	235
Hematoxylin and Eosin Slides Prepared	2097
Special Slides Prepared	10

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 2009**

Investigation and Autopsy Reports	772
Fees Collected	\$3,093

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 2009**

Budget Expenditures	\$1,438,999
..... Salaries	\$1,191,360
..... Current Expenses	247,639
..... Equipment	0
..... Positions	19

CLASSIFICATION OF VIOLENT DEATHS FISCAL YEAR 2009

The number of violent deaths remained the same as Fiscal Year 2008. There were 204 other accidental deaths this past year compared to 193 in FY 2008. Falls (88) and poisoning (85) comprised the majority of the 204 victims. There was also a slight increase in the number of homicides, 23 this year compared to 17 the previous year.

Violent Deaths.....		431
..... Homicide		23
..... Asphyxia	1	
..... Blunt trauma	5	
..... Child abuse..	2	
..... Drowning	1	
..... Fire	1	
..... Gunshot.....	7	
..... Knife wounds/stabbing	6	
..... Suicide		74
..... Asphyxia	3	
..... Drowning	1	
..... Fall.....	10	
..... Gunshot.....	8	
..... Hanging	42	
..... Poisoning.....	7	
..... Sharp force trauma	3	
..... Traffic		60
..... Water-Related		33
..... Industrial.....		7
..... Other Accident		204
..... Undetermined.....		30
..... Drowning	3	
..... Fall.....	1	
..... Fire	1	
..... Poisoning.....	6	
..... Sharp force trauma	1	
..... Traffic	3	
..... Unknown.....	13	
..... Other	2	

NOTE: Some deaths are reported in 2 different categories.

**BREAKDOWN OF HOMICIDE VICTIMS BY RACE
FISCAL YEAR 2009**

<u>Race</u>	<u>2008 July-December</u>	<u>2009 January-June</u>	<u>Total</u>
Chinese	1	0	1
Filipino	3	2	5
Hawn/Part-Hawn	2	5	7
Japanese	1	0	1
Samoan	0	1	1
All Other	5	3	8
TOTAL	12	11	23

**BREAKDOWN OF HOMICIDE METHODS USED
FISCAL YEAR 2009**

<u>Methods Used</u>	<u>2008 July-December</u>	<u>2009 January-June</u>	<u>Total</u>
Asphyxia	1	0	1
Blunt trauma	2	3	5
Child Abuse	0	2	2
Drowning	1	0	1
Fire	0	1	1
Gunshot	3	4	7
Knife wounds/ Stabbing	5	1	6
TOTAL	12	11	23

**SUICIDE STATISTICS
FISCAL YEAR 2009**

<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					1					3
Drowning	1														1
Fall	3		1					1	1	2		1		1	10
Gunshot	4						1		2					1	8
Hanging	8	3			5	1	8	3	2	1	1	1	7	2	42
Sharp Force Trauma	1	1						1							3
Poisoning	3		1					1	1				1		7
TOTAL	21	4	2	0	6	1	9	6	6	4	1	2	9	3	74

**SUICIDE VICTIMS
FISCAL YEAR 2009**

<u>Age</u>	<u>Male</u>	<u>Female</u>	<u>Total</u>
10 thru 19	4	3	7
20 thru 29	9	2	11
30 thru 39	11	2	13
40 thru 49	9	4	13
50 thru 59	9	5	14
Over 60	12	4	16
TOTAL	54	20	74

**SUMMARY OF SUICIDES
FISCAL YEAR 2009**

<u>2008</u>	<u>Male</u>	<u>Female</u>	<u>Total</u>
July	3	1	4
August	4	2	6
September	6	2	8
October	4	2	6
November	3	1	4
December	3	2	5
Sub-Total	23	10	33
<u>2009</u>			
January	3	2	5
February	8	0	8
March	3	0	3
April	3	4	7
May	8	2	10
June	6	2	8
Sub-Total	31	10	41
TOTAL	54	20	74

**TRAFFIC FATALITIES
FISCAL YEAR 2009**

Type of Occupant	<u>MALE</u>			<u>FEMALE</u>			<u>Total</u>
	<u>2008 July-Dec</u>	<u>2009 Jan-Jun</u>	<u>(With Alc.)</u>	<u>2008 July-Dec</u>	<u>2009 Jan-Jun</u>	<u>(With Alc.)</u>	
Operator	5	6	(4)	2	1	(0)	14
Passenger	2	2	(1)	2	1	(2)	7
Pedestrian	5	1	(2)	3	6	(1)	15
Motorcyclist	3	13	(4)	0	1	(0)	17
Moped Rider	2	1	(2)	0	0	(0)	3
Bicyclist	1	2	(1)	0	0	(0)	3
Unknown	0	0	(0)	1	0	(0)	1
TOTAL	18	25	(14)	8	9	(3)	60

WATER-RELATED DEATHS FISCAL YEAR 2009

There were 33 water-related deaths compared to 30 last year. Twenty-one victims died while engaged in ocean-related activities.

<u>Location and Activity</u>	<u>MALE</u>		<u>FEMALE</u>		<u>Total</u>
	<u>2008 July-Dec</u>	<u>2009 Jan-Jun</u>	<u>2008 July-Dec</u>	<u>2009 Jan-Jun</u>	
Ocean					
Diving	1	0	0	0	1
Fishing	1	2	0	0	3
Sailing	1	0	0	0	1
SCUBA diving	1	0	0	0	1
Snorkeling	2	1	0	0	3
Surfing	1	0	0	0	1
Swimming	3	5	2	1	11
Harbor/Pier/Canal	1	0	0	0	1
Pond/Stream	0	1	0	0	1
Swimming Pool	0	3	1	0	4
Hot tub	0	0	0	1	1
Non-accidental	1	3	1	0	5
TOTAL	12	15	4	2	33

INDUSTRIAL DEATHS FISCAL YEAR 2009

There were seven job-related deaths this year compared to nine the previous year.

<u>Age</u>	<u>Synopsis</u>
68	This construction worker sustained multiple blunt force injuries when he fell through the roof onto a concrete floor.
54	A store owner was shot in the head by an employee following a confrontation.
23	This apprentice welder sustained multiple internal injuries on the job when he was ejected following an oil cylinder explosion.
79	This security guard sustained intracranial injuries when a rolling gate fell on his head as he was trying to move it.
24	This parasailing instructor fell into the ocean and drowned as he tried to slide down a rope onto a boat when the rope disengaged.
54	This laborer was crushed when a water tower he was demolishing collapsed on him.
51	This truck driver broke his neck when his truck overturned on an off-ramp.

**OTHER ACCIDENTAL DEATHS
FISCAL YEAR 2009**

<u>Method</u>	<u>MALE</u>		<u>FEMALE</u>		<u>Total</u>
	<u>2008 July-Dec</u>	<u>2009 Jan-Jun</u>	<u>2008 July-Dec</u>	<u>2009 Jan-Jun</u>	
Asphyxia	5	9	3	2	19
Blunt Trauma	2	1	0	1	4
Fall	28	25	19	16	88
Poisoning	36	33	11	5	85
Other	4	3	0	1	8
TOTAL	75	71	33	25	204

**UNDETERMINED DEATHS (MANNER)
FISCAL YEAR 2009**

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 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>2008 July-Dec</u>	<u>2009 Jan-June</u>	<u>2008 July-Dec</u>	<u>2009 Jan-June</u>	
Drowning	0	2	1	0	3
Fall	1	0	0	0	1
Fire	0	0	0	1	1
Poisoning	1	1	3	1	6
Stab/ Sharp force trauma	0	1	0	0	1
Traffic	0	0	1	2	3
Unknown	5	2	3	3	13
Other	0	0	1	1	2
TOTAL	7	6	9	8	30