



GARFIELD COUNTY CORONER'S OFFICE

2023 Annual Report

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Garfield County Coroner's Office

This report provides a summary and statistical analysis of deaths that were investigated by the Garfield County Coroner's Office in 2023.

Garfield County consists of about 3,000 square miles of rugged alpine vistas, high desert mountains, and major river ways. Outdoor recreation opportunities include skiing, hunting, fishing, hiking, rafting, and many more. Garfield County is home to the second largest designated wilderness area in Colorado – the Flattops Wilderness. The estimated 2023 population in Garfield County was 62,707 making it the 13th most populated county in Colorado. Municipalities in Garfield County include Carbondale, Glenwood Springs, New Castle, Silt, Rifle, Parachute, and the unincorporated community of Battlement Mesa.

The coroner and his staff must be available 24 hours a day, 365 days a year. The primary task of the coroner's office is to establish cause and manner of death of those who die in Garfield County or where the event that led to their death occurred in Garfield County.

Colorado Revised Statute 30-10-606 states that the coroner, in cooperation with law enforcement, shall make all proper inquiry to determine the cause and manner of death of any person in his or her jurisdiction who has died under any of the following circumstances:

- If the death is or may be unnatural as a result of external influences, violence, or injury;
- Due to the influence of or the result of intoxication by alcohol, drugs, or poison;
- As a result of an accident, including at the workplace;
- When the death of an infant or child is unexpected or unexplained;
- When no physician is in attendance or when, though in attendance, the physician is unable to certify the cause of death;
- From a death that occurs within twenty-four hours of admission to a hospital;
- From a disease which may be hazardous or contagious or which may constitute a threat to the health of the general public;
- If the death occurs from the action of a peace officer or while in the custody of law enforcement officials or while incarcerated in a public institution;
- When the death was sudden and happened to a person who was in apparent good health; When a body is unidentifiable, decomposed, charred, or skeletonized; or
- Circumstances that the coroner otherwise determines may warrant further inquiry to determine cause and manner of death or further law enforcement investigation.

Other Services:

The Garfield County Coroner's Office provides additional services as needed that include:

- Assistance to neighboring counties.
- Community Service roles such as speaking to community groups, students, and participating in mock DUI incidents.
- Participation in the Garfield County Sheriff's Office Trauma Team.
- Participation in the Garfield County Child Fatality & Prevention Team.
- Participation in the Suicide Prevention Coalition of Garfield County.

Staff

Robert M. Glassmire	Coroner
Danica Pruitt	Senior Medicolegal Death Investigator
Cassidy Blackard Weeks	Medicolegal Death Investigator
Lanny Grant	Medicolegal Death Investigator (part-time as needed)
Sage Castine	Medicolegal Death Investigator (part-time as needed)

Contact

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General Statistics

The following information pertains only to deaths that were investigated or reported to the Garfield County Coroner's Office.

2023 estimated Garfield County Population 62,707

2023 total estimated Garfield County Deaths and non-Garfield

County deaths transferred to the jurisdiction of the

Garfield County Coroner's Office 396

Coroner's office Death Investigations & Death Notifications * 404

- Investigated by coroner's office: 153
 - Transferred to other jurisdictions 7
 - Scene Investigations 135
 - Body Transports to Coroner's Office 130
- In Custody Deaths: 0
- Deaths reported to the coroner's office with no investigation.
 - limited inquiry (Hospice/Hospital/Transfer out/or inquires) 251

*The coroner's office will occasionally take reports on deaths that occur in other counties where the incident that led to the death occurred in Garfield County.

Percentage of Garfield County deaths investigated by coroner: 39%

Number of postmortem examinations (autopsies with toxicology): 70

Percentage of all Garfield County deaths having an autopsy. 18%

Percentage of coroner's office investigations having an autopsy: 45%

Gender of deaths investigated by the coroner:

Males 110

Females 43

Race/Ethnicity of deaths investigated:

White 132

Hispanic origin 17

Asian 2

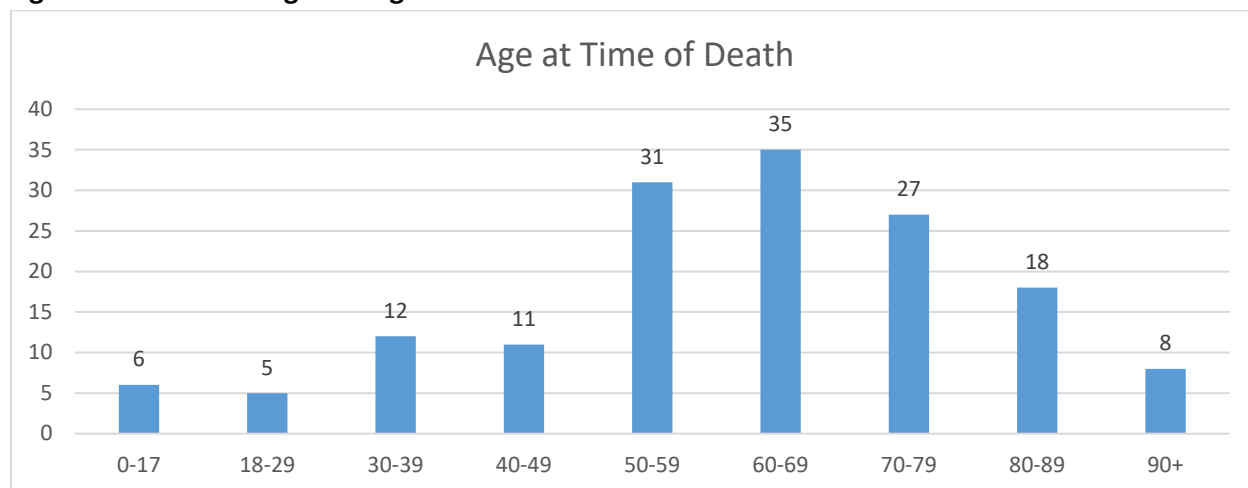
African American 1

Other/Mixed Race 1

Coroner's office Investigated Deaths Data

The data contained in this report from this point forward represents the deaths that were investigated by the Garfield County Coroner's Office. The data does not include information regarding the natural deaths that were not investigated. This data may differ from public health data as public health agencies may report on the residence of the decedent. The coroner's office will investigate a death regardless of the decedent's residence if the death (or the incident that caused death) occurred in Garfield County.

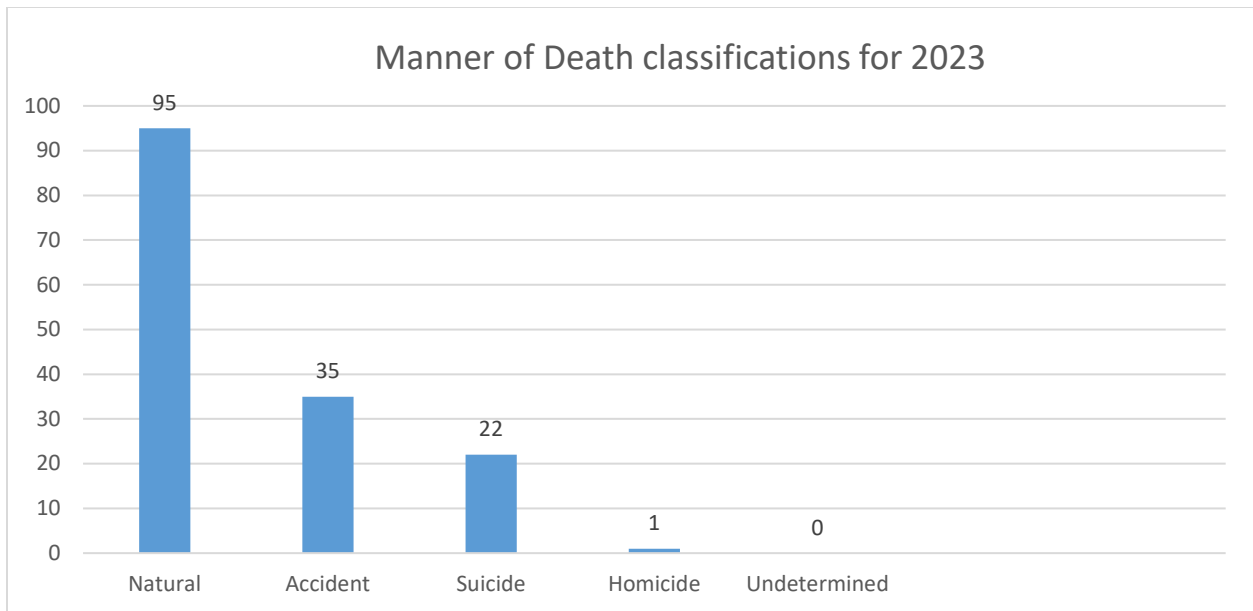
Age at Death involving investigated deaths:



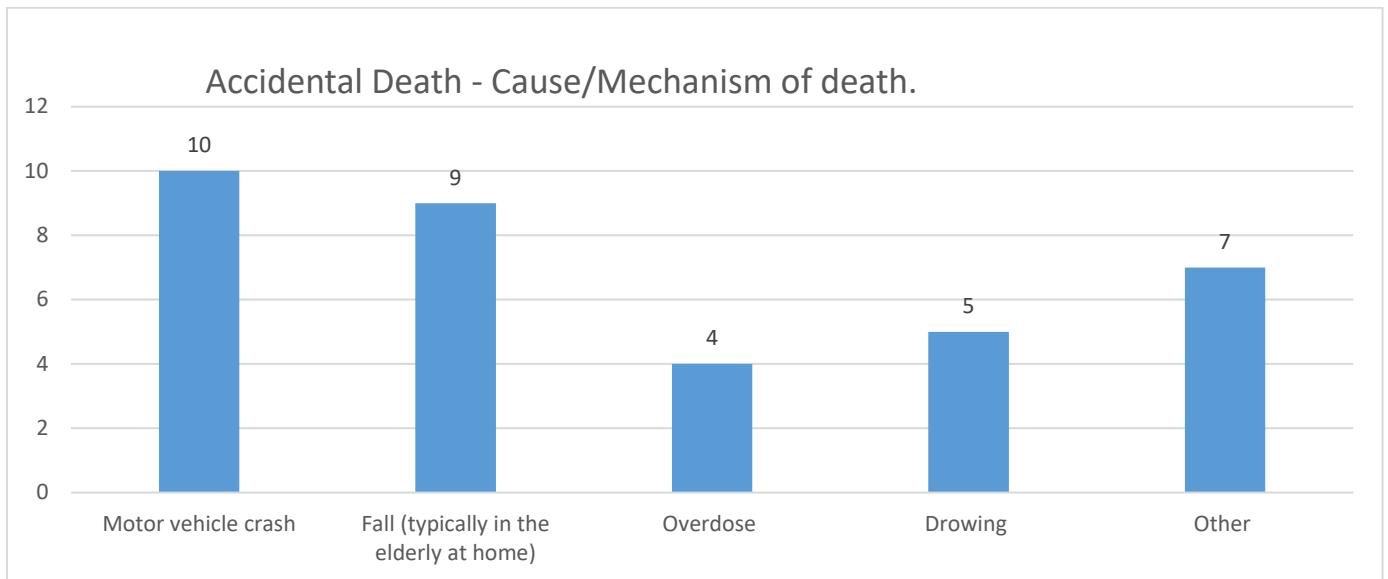
Manner of Death

The National Association of Medical Examiners general "rules" for classifying manner of death:

- Natural Deaths are due solely or nearly totally to disease and/or aging process.
- Accident applies when an injury or poisoning causes death and there is little or no evidence that the injury or poisoning occurred with intent to harm or cause death. In essence, the fatal outcome was unintentional.
- Suicide results from an injury or poisoning as a result of an intentional, self-inflicted act committed to do self-harm or cause the death of oneself.
- Homicide occurs when death results from a volitional act committed by another person to cause fear, harm, or death. Intent to cause death is a common element but is not required for classification as homicide. It is to be emphasized that the classification of Homicide for the purposes of death certification is a "neutral" term and neither indicates nor implies criminal intent, which remains a determination within the province of legal processes.
- Undetermined or "could not be determined" is a classification used when the information pointing to one manner of death is no more compelling than one or more other competing manners of death in thorough consideration of all available information.
- In general, when death involves a combination of natural processes and external factors such as injury or poisoning, preference is given to the non-natural manner of death.



Accidental Deaths



Drugs and/or alcohol intoxication was proven to be a significant factor in 11 of the 35 accidental deaths.

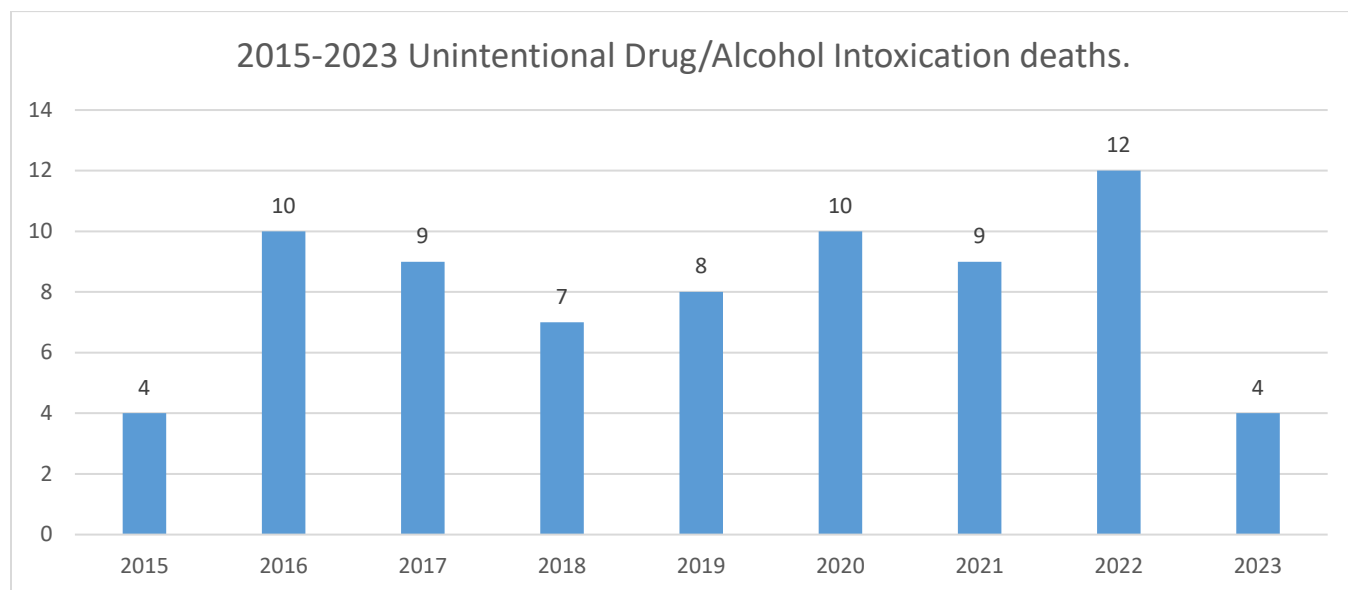
Unintentional drug/alcohol overdose deaths

In 2023, the Garfield County Coroner's Office investigated four deaths where the "immediate cause of death" was determined to be due to the intoxication of drugs or alcohol. Many times, when there is more than one drug or alcohol combination, the cause of death is classified as a mixed drug intoxication. These four deaths represent deaths where the primary cause of death is due to drugs or alcohol. There are several other deaths that involve drugs/alcohol, and the primary cause of death is due to other causes such as blunt force injury. See page seven, accidental deaths, for more information.

Characteristics of the four deaths reported in the accidental drug/alcohol overdose deaths include:

- There were two deaths that were due to mixed drug intoxication and two deaths were due to the intoxication of one drug.
 - One mixed drug (oxycodone and gabapentin) intoxication.
 - Two drug (fentanyl) intoxication.
 - One mixed alcohol and drug (bupropion and quetiapine) intoxication.

The below chart details recent years where drugs or alcohol was certified as the immediate cause of death.

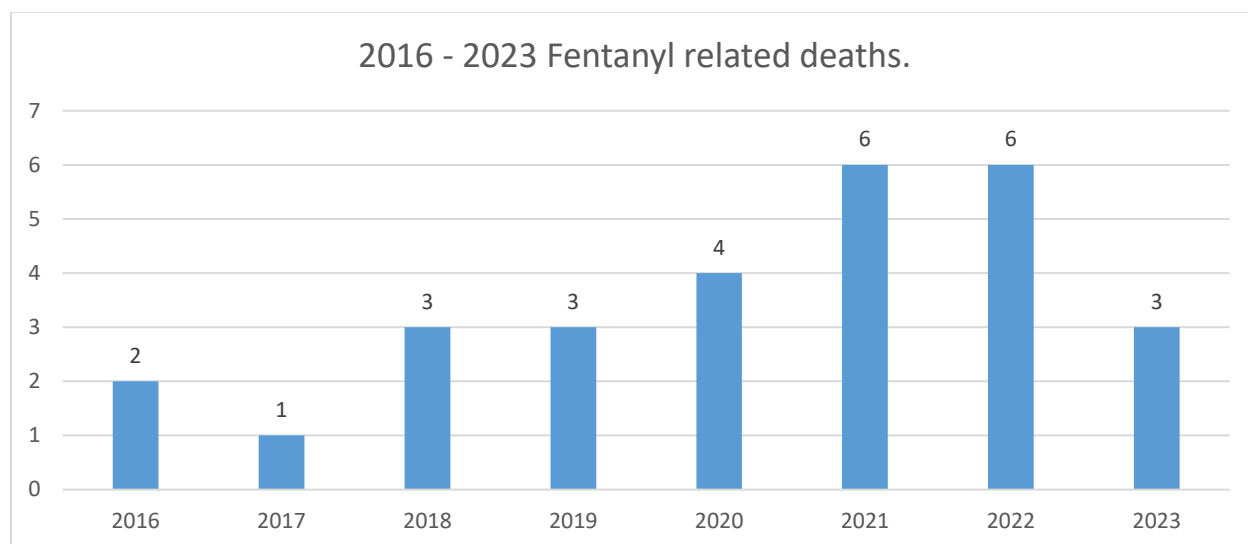


Fentanyl Related Deaths

Often, the Garfield County Coroner's Office is asked about the increase in fentanyl related deaths in Garfield County and its impact to our community. While deaths remain at a lower level, on average, there was an increase of fentanyl related deaths from 2017-2022 with a slight decrease in 2023. Additionally, coroner's office staff anecdotally hear of fentanyl related incidents where a person is suspected to be under the influence of fentanyl or other opioids and the person experiences an overdose related medical event only to be saved by first responders and with the aid of naloxone (Narcan).

Fentanyl is in Garfield County. In one death in 2022, the Garfield County Coroner's Office located over 75 illicit fentanyl pills in the decedent's possession.

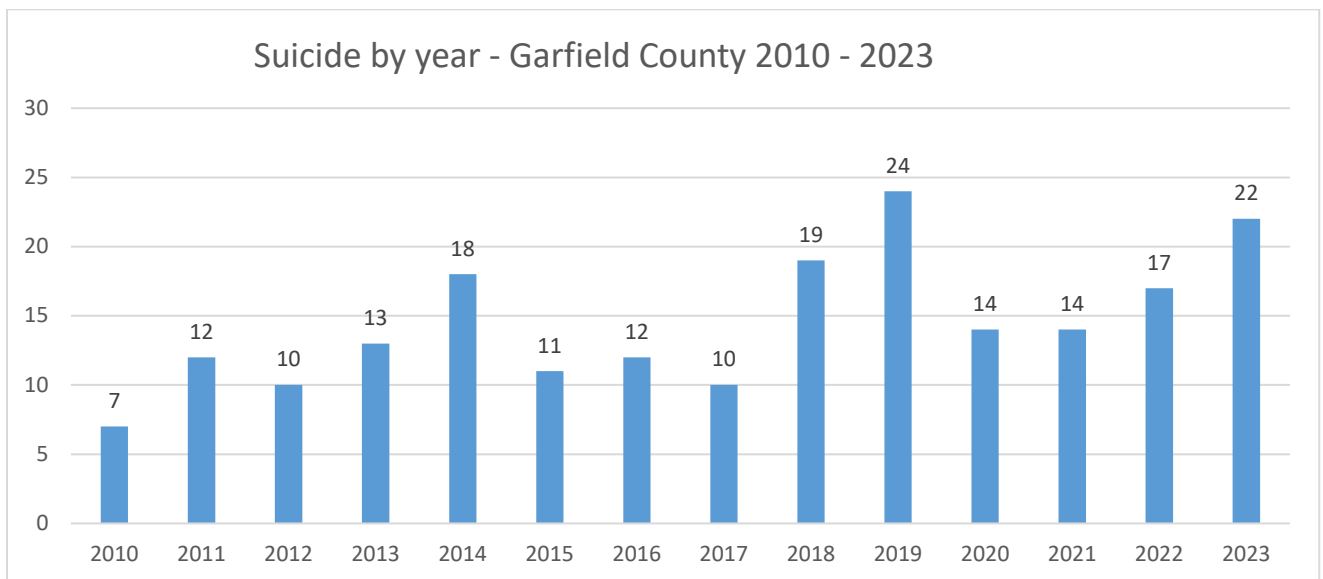
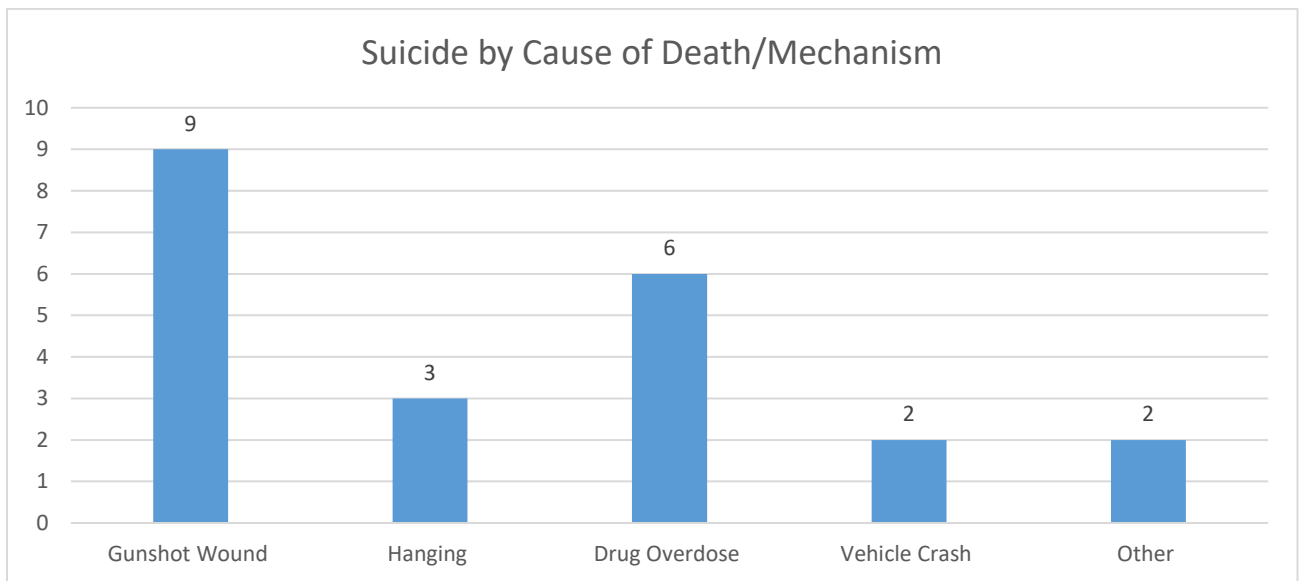
The below chart details recent years where fentanyl was either listed in the cause of death or as a "other significant condition" (Also known as Part B of a death certificate).



Suicide Deaths

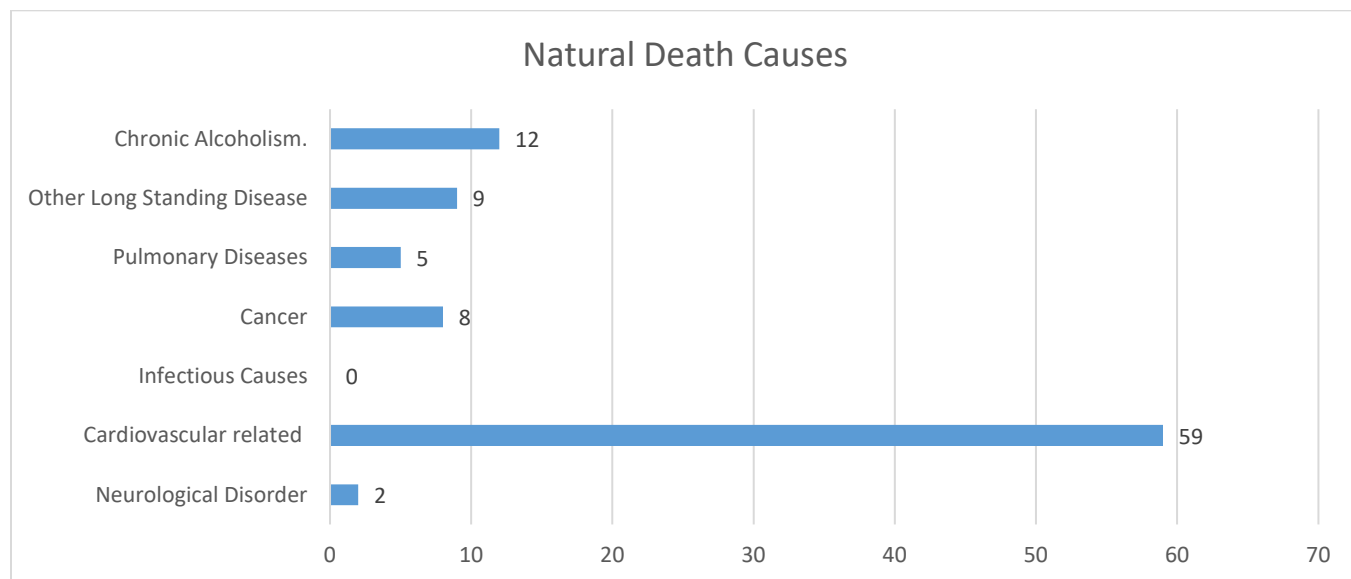
In 2023 there were 22 deaths that were certified with manner of death as suicide. Below are the characteristics of those 22 deaths.

- Males = 16 and Females = 6.
- Males ranged in age from 17-76 years old.
- Females ranged in age from 44-71 years old.



Natural Deaths

The Garfield County Coroner's Office investigated 95 deaths that were determined to be natural. Of the 95 natural deaths, 59 were cardiovascular related. Cardiovascular related deaths included myocardial infarcts (heart attacks), heart arrhythmias, strokes, and aneurysms. There were five deaths related to chronic pulmonary disease. Two deaths were related to complications of a neurological disorder such as dementia. There were twelve deaths due to chronic alcoholism. There were eight deaths where the cause of death was due to cancer. The remaining nine deaths were primarily from complications of other long-standing diseases.



*Only natural deaths investigated by the Garfield County Coroner's Office are represented. Most natural deaths occur at a skilled nursing facility to include nursing homes and hospitals and do not require a coroner's office inquiry.

Homicide Deaths

There was one homicide death in Garfield County in 2023. A male was found deceased in December of 2023 and the law enforcement investigation revealed the decedent was shot multiple times earlier in the year. The forensic examination was consistent with a homicide.

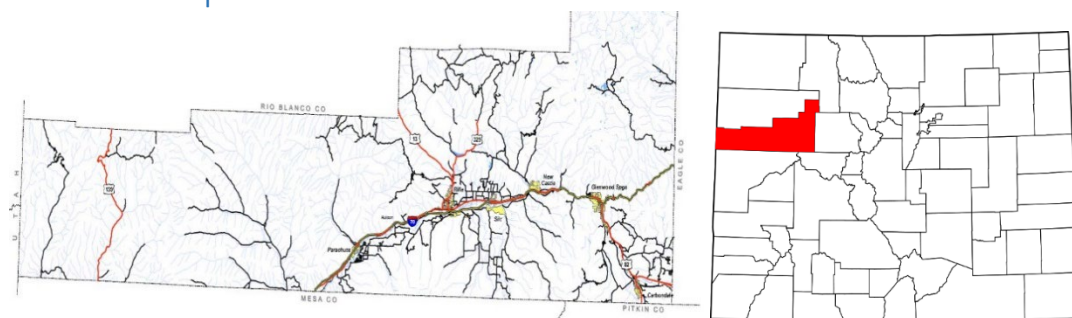
Undetermined Deaths

Undetermined or “could not be determined” is a classification used when the information pointing to one manner of death is no more compelling than one or more other competing manners of death in thorough consideration of all available information. In 2023 there were no “undetermined” manner of death classifications.

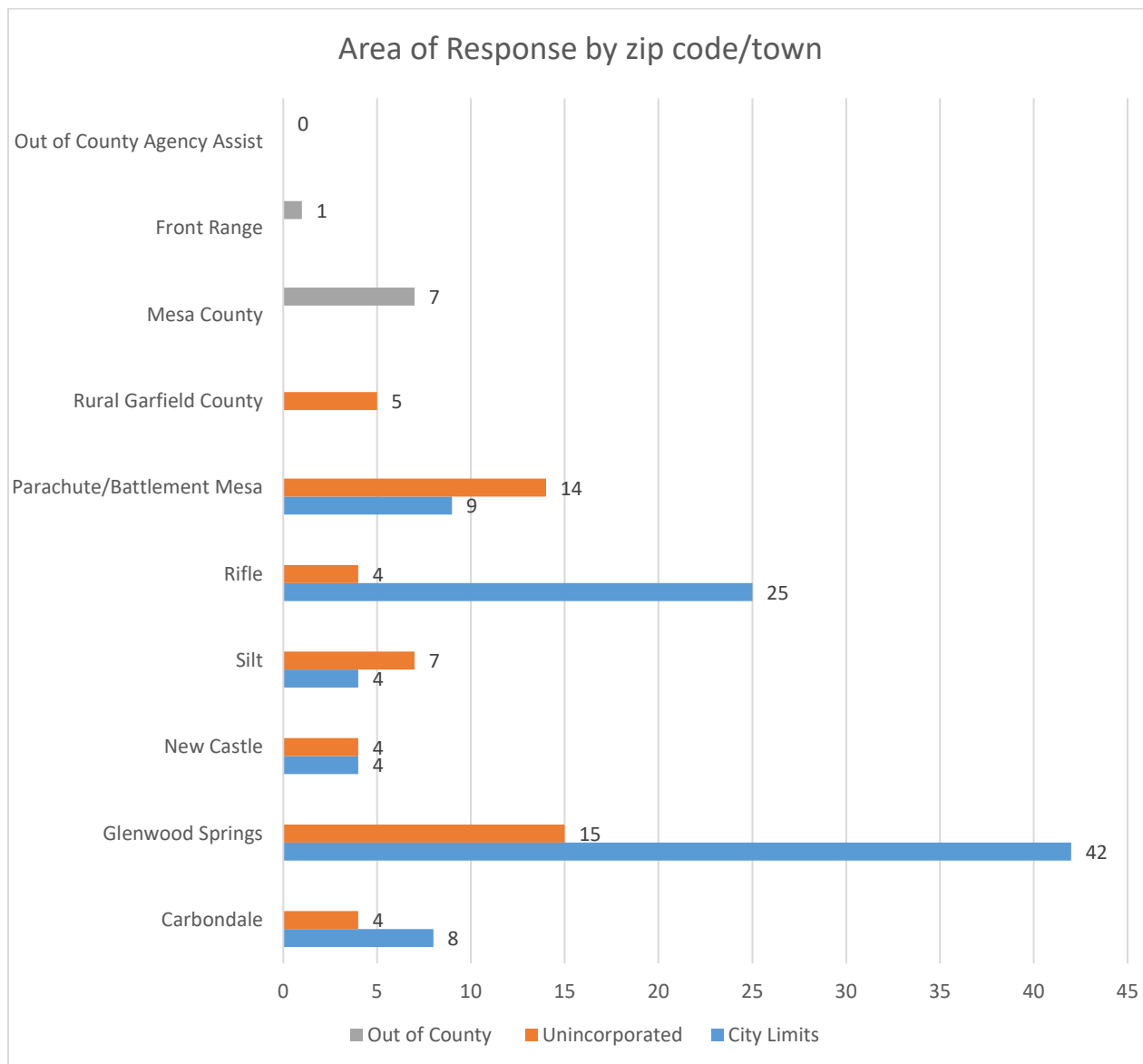
Deaths involving Children:

The Garfield County Coroner’s Office investigated six deaths involving children aged 0-17 years old. Two of the deaths were determined to be natural. These two deaths involved one infant with a RSV infection, and one infant with complications at birth dying shortly after. Three of the children’s deaths were certified with a manner of death as accident. In one death, a five-year-old died after complications from neurological impairment after he was involved in a motor vehicle crash in utero and was born prematurely because of the traumatic car crash. Another child, a toddler, drowned in the family pond. In the third accident death, an infant died because of an unsafe sleep environment. One death of a minor, a 17-year-old was certified as a suicide.

Area of Response



The Garfield County Coroner’s Office responds to death investigations throughout Garfield County. Garfield County serves the communities of Carbondale, Glenwood Springs, New Castle, Silt, Rifle, Parachute, and the unincorporated community of Battlement Mesa. In addition, there are several rural areas of Garfield County. In two instances investigators were flown to the location of death utilizing Care flight helicopters. Twice in 2023 investigators had to travel to the far Western portion of Garfield County near the Utah state line.



- Of the 25 deaths investigated in the city limits of Rifle, 6 were at Grand River Hospital.
- Of the 42 deaths investigated in the city limits of Glenwood Springs, 20 were at Valley View Hospital.
- There were seven deaths at St. Mary's Hospital or other care facilities in Mesa County, CO. The incident causing these deaths occurred in Garfield County. Therefore, jurisdiction was transferred to the Garfield County Coroner's Office. None of the seven deaths required a response and the decedents were released directly to a funeral home.

- One death occurred at Metro Denver area hospital. The incident causing the death occurred in Garfield County. Therefore, the jurisdiction was transferred to the Garfield County Coroner's Office. The death did not require a response and the decedent was released directly to a funeral home.

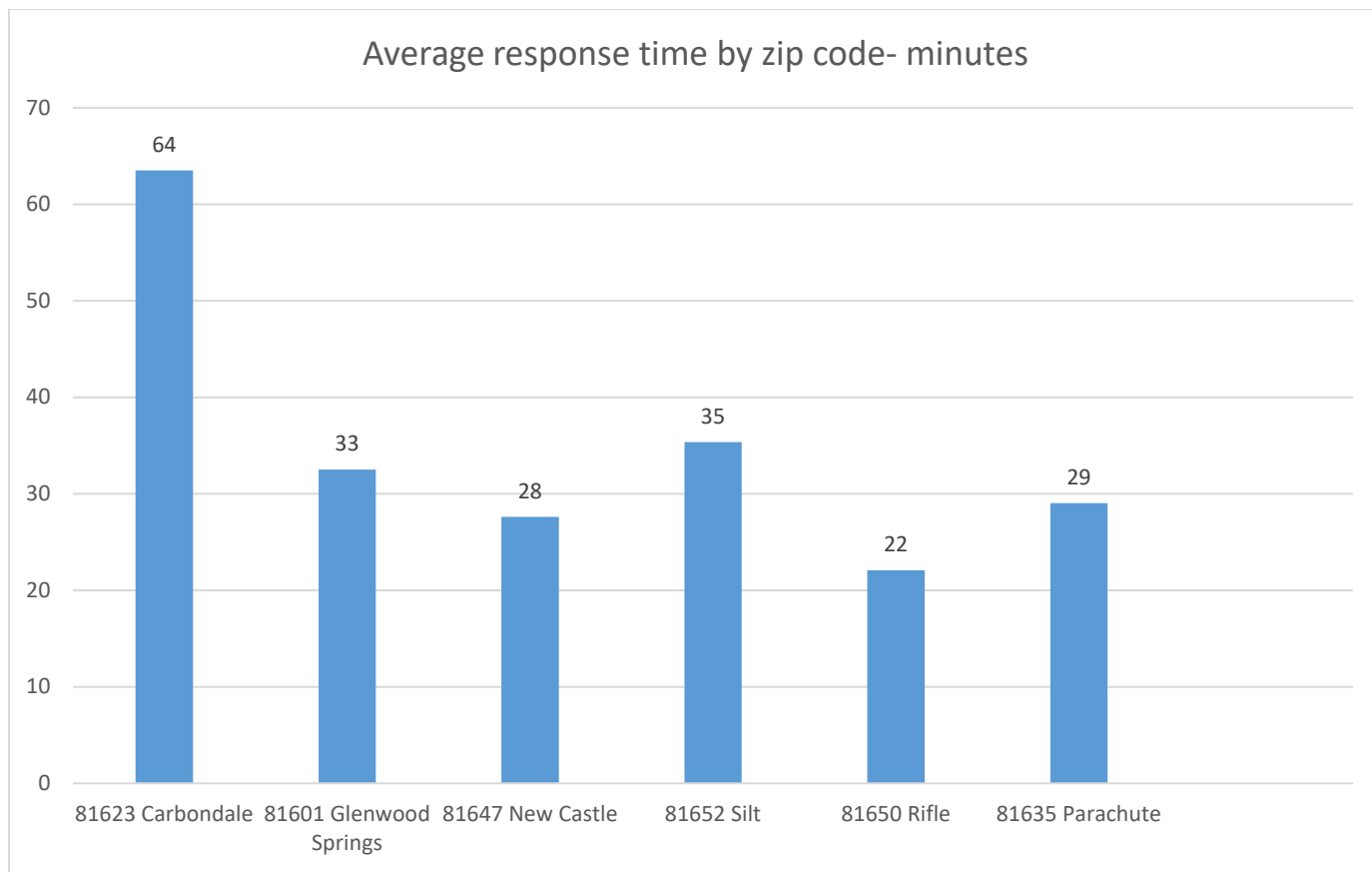
Response Times

The coroner's office is required to respond to death investigations in a timely manner. The body of a deceased person cannot be removed until the coroner completes their investigation. The family of the decedent depends on the coroner's office timely response to complete the investigation and to care for their loved one.

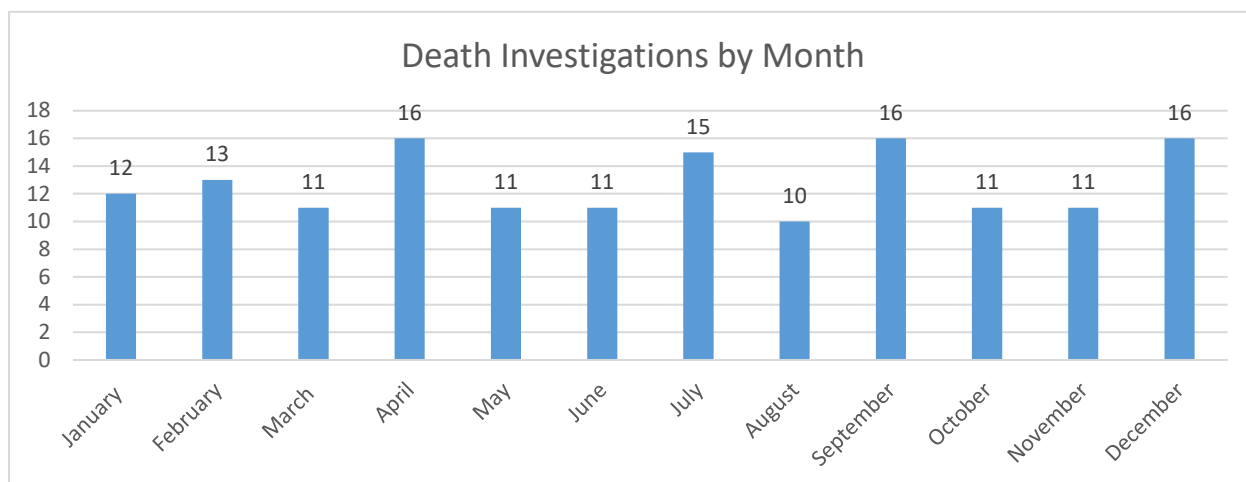
Moreover, important resources depend on the timely response of the coroner's office. Law enforcement, emergency department staff, fire fighters, and EMS staff may be required to remain on scene until the coroner's office responds. In addition, trauma rooms, equipment, and roads are another consideration of the coroner's office timely response.

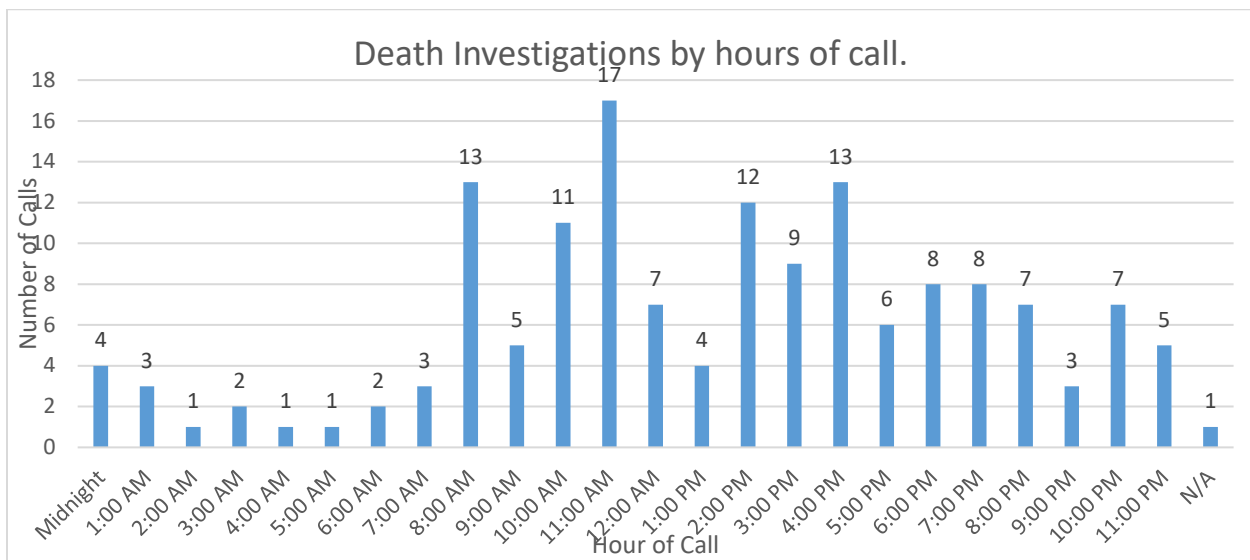
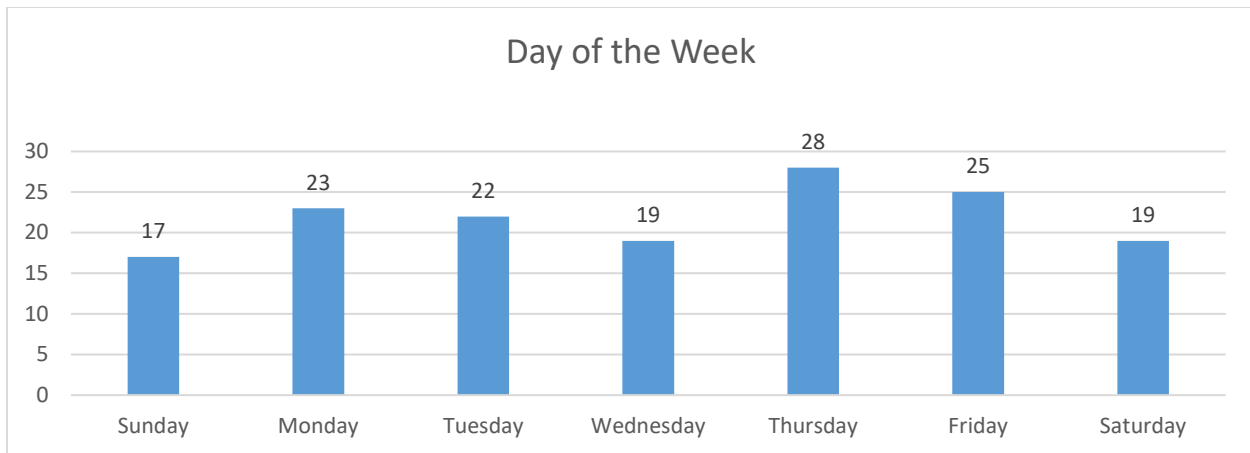
The coroner and medicolegal death investigators are on call 24 hours a day. Depending on the time of the call, the location of their response may vary. Coroner's office staff may respond from their home, the coroner's office, while on a hike, or while attending a child's school event.

The following graph represents average response times to the Garfield County's communities by zip code. The coroner's office is in Silt, CO and most the coroner's office staff lives west of New Castle, CO. Therefore, when an investigator is responding from their home their response time will be longer to Carbondale than if they respond from the coroner's office.

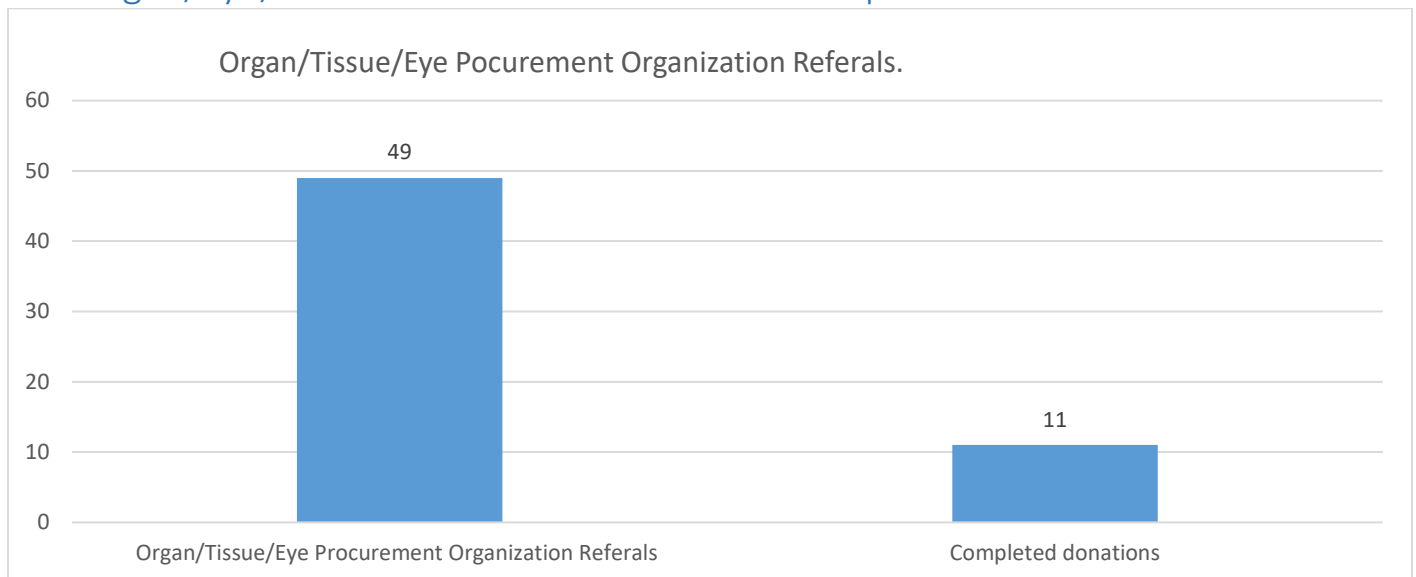


Additional Statistics and Graphs





Organ/Eye/Tissue Procurement Referrals and procurements.



Unclaimed decedents, unidentified decedents, and exhumations.

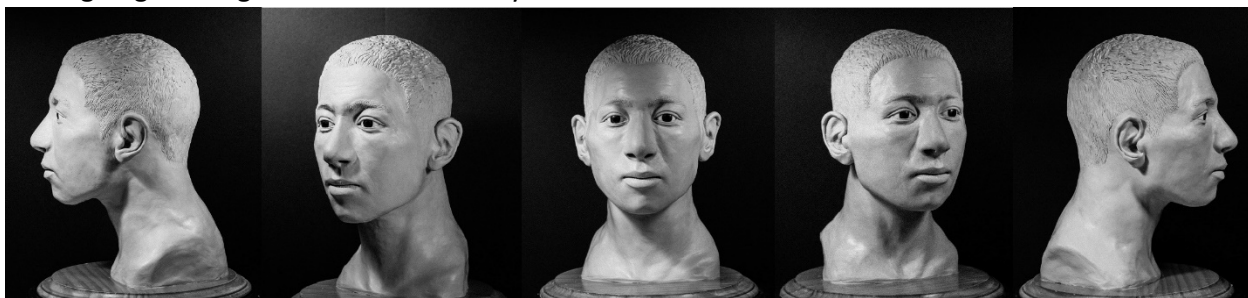
In 2023, the Garfield County Coroner's Office investigated several deaths and of all the deaths the decedent's body was identified and claimed by next of kin. In 2023 there were zero exhumations of decedent's performed by the coroner's office.

The coroner's office continues to investigate two unidentified remains from previous years. Both unidentified remains cases are reviewed at minimum on an annual basis.

Case 2003-07-07, Namus UP#15492 – Adult male, of African ancestry or Latino/Hispanic ancestry

On July 7, 2003, a person fishing on the banks of the Colorado River near Silt, CO found a human skull. Over the course of several years the sheriff's office and the coroner's office after 2015, obtained DNA, X-rays, and dental charting. The information has been entered and maintained into the appropriate databases including CODIS, UNT Center for Human Identification, NCIC, and Namus.

A facial reconstruction of the skull was completed and images were rendered and provided for ongoing investigation into the identity of the decedent.



Case 2004-09-09 – Namus UP#15487 – Adult male, 27-65 years old, 5'10" (approximately) tall, of Caucasian race.

On September 9, 2004, hikers located the skeletal remains in a campsite in the upper No Name Creek area near Glenwood Springs, CO. The remains as well as campsite artifacts are located. Over the course of several years the sheriff's office and the coroner's office after 2015, obtained DNA, X-rays, and dental charting. The information has been entered and maintained into the appropriate databases including CODIS, UNT Center for Human Identification, NCIC, and Namus.

A facial reconstruction of the skull was completed and images were rendered and provided for ongoing investigation into the identity of the decedent.



Closing

This concludes the 2023 Garfield County Coroner's Office Annual Report. Compiling the data, seeing the decedent's names again, and remembering that while our investigators and I will be moving on to another year with new families and new names, we will not forget that the names, people, and families represented in the 2023 annual report are more than just "numbers," they are the loved ones of families who are learning to navigate their lives without their loved one. To those families and friends who lost their loved ones in 2023, the Garfield County Coroner's Office extends our deepest condolences to you and your families. Whether you worked with Cassie, Dani, or me, we are all honored and humbled to be chosen to perform this difficult job in serving you and the Garfield County community.

Please do not hesitate to contact me for questions regarding this report or anything pertaining to the coroner's office.

Respectfully,



Rob Glassmire
Garfield County Coroner