

**WHATCOM COUNTY MEDICAL EXAMINER  
1500 NORTH STATE STREET  
BELLINGHAM, WA 98225**

**2008 ANNUAL REPORT**

During 2008 the Whatcom County Medical Examiner's office assumed jurisdiction in 129 death investigations that involved forensic autopsies, toxicological examinations, viewing and summary reporting. In addition, 160 other additional cases were reported and investigated and no jurisdiction was assumed (NJA).

Medical evidence collected on 21 reported sexual assault cases in Whatcom County was processed by the Medical Examiner's office and summary reports were provided to the involved agencies. As of June 2008, the Medical Examiner's office was no longer directly involved in processing evidence on sexual assault cases due to a change in St. Joseph's Hospital protocol, which occurred without MEO or Whatcom County Prosecuting Attorney's Office participation.

From time to time local agencies brought miscellaneous bones to the Medical Examiner to determine if they were of human origin.

Teaching and public relations are also an important part of the Medical Examiner's office. Consulting was ongoing with the fire and police departments of the county and St. Joseph's Hospital. In addition, college and high school classes toured the morgue facility. The Medical Examiner also represented the office on numerous occasions to various civic organizations and gave multiple lectures.

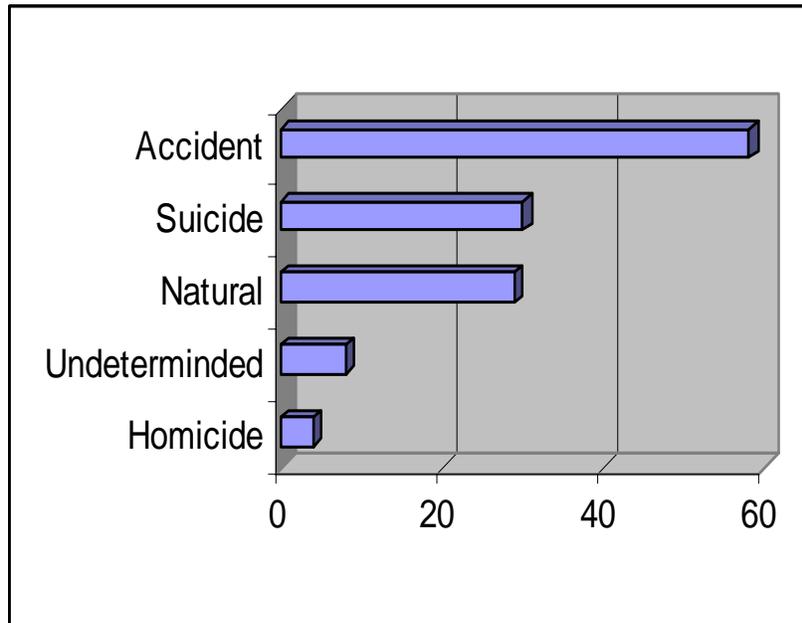
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**Gary Goldfogel, MD  
Whatcom County Medical Examiner**

## MEO Annual Report 2008

During 2008 the Whatcom County Medical Examiner's Office conducted 129 forensic death investigations as stated on the previous page. The following statistics and graphs show the breakdown of the various causes of the deaths and the ages and sex of those who died.

### Whatcom County MEO Death Investigations 2008



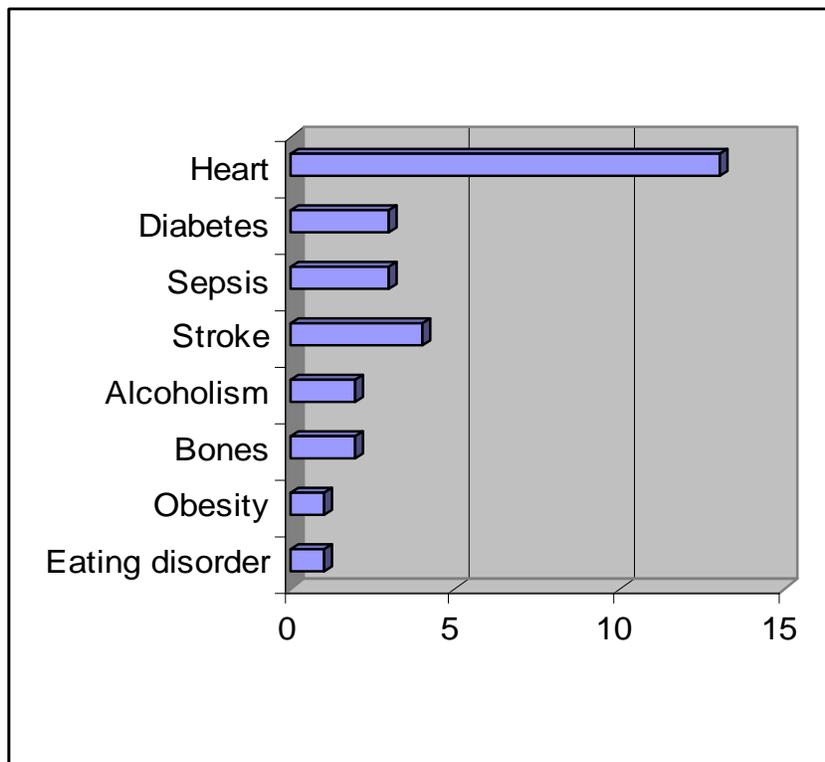
The causes of death shown in the above table are further broken down and displayed on the following pages.

## NATURAL:

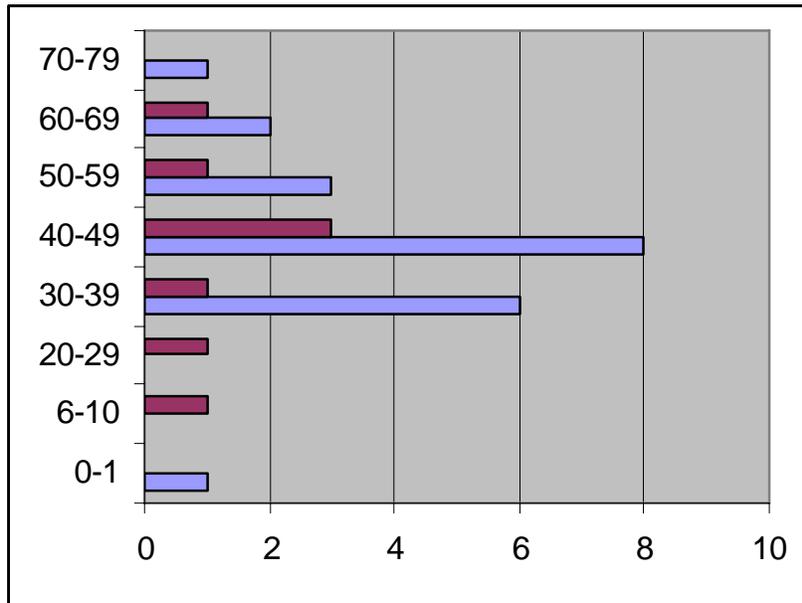
There were 29 total natural deaths of which 21 were male and 8 female. The cause of death was as follows: Heart (13), Stroke (4), Alcoholism (2), Diabetes (3) Sepsis (3), Bone/s examination (2), Obesity (1), Eating disorder (1).

By age, approximately 3% were between birth and 1 year of age, 3% between 6-10, 3% between 20-29, 23% between 30-39, 38% between 40-49, 13% between 50-59, 19% between 60-69 and 3% between 70-79 years of age.

### Natural Deaths by Cause



## Natural Deaths by Age and Sex



\*Blue bars are male and red bars are female.

## ACCIDENTAL:

There were 58 total investigated accidental deaths of which 45 were male and 13 female. The cause of death was as follows: Traffic accidents (25), Drugs (20), Drowning (5), Falls (3), Avalanche (2), Farming (1), Fire (1) and Exposure (1).

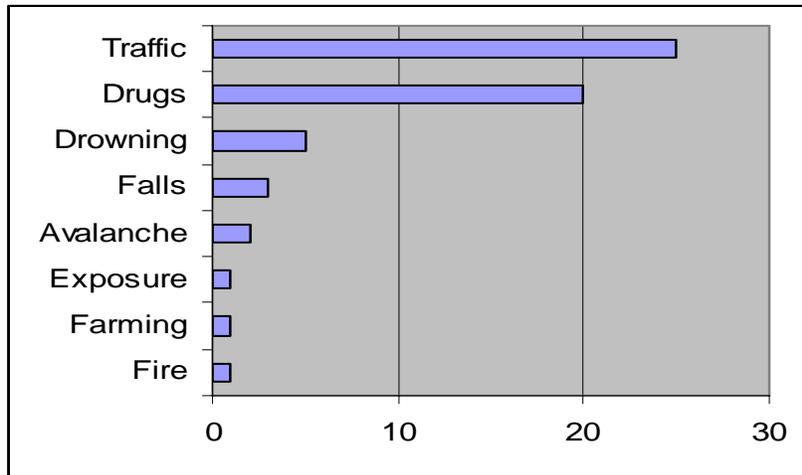
By age, approximately 1% were between 1-5 years old, 3% between 16-19, 29% between 20-29, 12% between 30-39, 19% between 40-49, 14% between 50-59, 17% between 60-69, 1% between 70-79 and 3% between 80-89 years of age.

In the traffic deaths, alcohol was present 40% of the time with an average blood alcohol concentration of 0.14 gm%. Seatbelts were not worn in 24% of the deaths. Helmets were worn in all of the five motorcycle deaths. Alcohol was present in 40% of the drowning deaths with an average 0.24 gm% reading. In the traffic deaths, opiates were present five times, cocaine four times and marijuana two times.

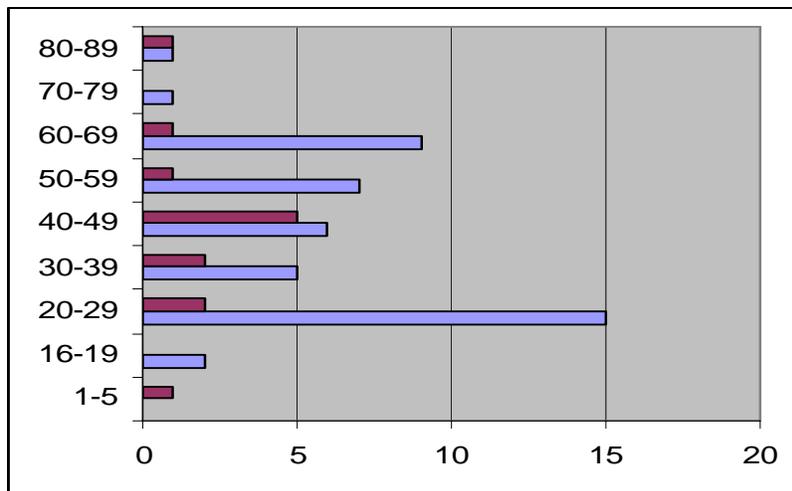
## MEO Annual Report 2008

In the drug deaths, methadone was present 40% of the time, heroin 40%, prescription opiates 15%, cocaine 15%, methamphetamine 5%, benzodiazepine 5% and marijuana 5%

### Accidental Deaths



### Accidental Deaths by Age and Sex



\* Blue bars are male and red bars are female.

## **SUICIDE:**

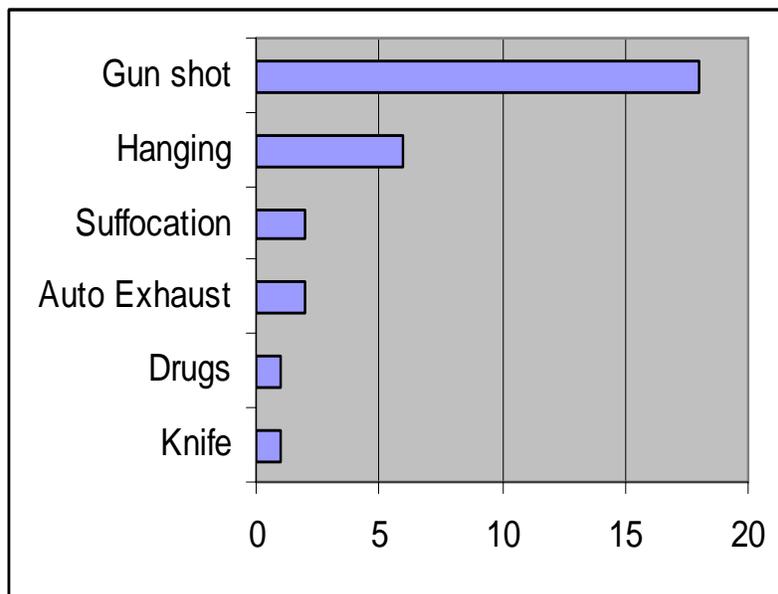
There were 30 total suicide deaths of which 26 were male and 4 female. The cause of death was as follows: Gunshot (18), Hanging (6) Suffocation (2), Auto exhaust (2), Drugs (1) and knife (1).

By age, approximately 3% were between 16-19, 30% between 20-29, 20% between 30-39, 17% between 40-49, 10% between 50-59, 13% between 60-69, 3% between 70-79 and 3% between 80-89 years of age.

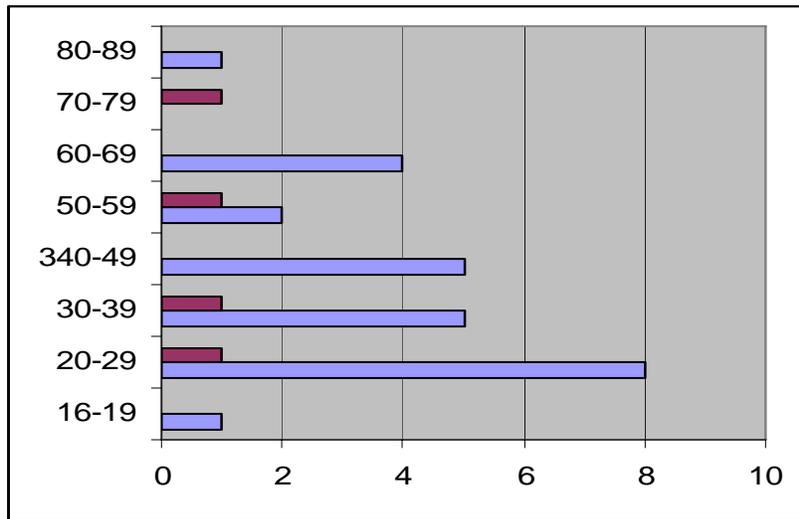
Alcohol was a factor in 63% of all suicide deaths with an average blood alcohol reading of 0.17 gm%.

In the gunshot suicides, handguns were used 45% of the time, shotguns 45% and rifles 10%. Alcohol was present in 67% of the gunshot suicides with an average reading of 0.15 gm%.

### **Suicide Deaths by Mechanism of Injury**



## Suicide Deaths by Age and Sex



\*Blue bars are male and red bars female.

## UNDETERMINED:

There were eight deaths whose manner of death was listed as undetermined. Three were listed as Sudden Unexplained Infant Deaths (SUID). Two died of auto exhaust inside a residence. One was due to drugs (fentanyl patch). One from exposure. One was found dead, burned in proximity to a boat fire on land.

## HOMICIDE:

There were four homicide cases: Two by knife wounds, one by gunshot and one by physical assault.