



# 2021 ANNUAL REPORT

Texas County Coroner's Office

Marie Lasater, F-ABMDI

Coroner

## 2021 Texas County Coroner's Report

Marie Lasater, RN, MSN, F-ABMDI – Texas County Coroner

2021 has been a very busy year with 305 cases, including marked increases in number of accidental deaths, strokes, cancer, and a stunning increase of 500% in deaths due to drug overdose, with non-pharmaceutical fentanyl being the main toxic substance. The coroner budget for 2021 was \$33,400, including the coroner's salary of \$15,000 per year. In 2021, the budget was exceeded in the amount of \$1,159, mainly due to increased toxicology expense. I was able to recoup \$4,789 for the County in the form of 3 grants – Opioid Death, Toxicology Expense and Sudden Unexpected Violent Death. In addition, I have been able to cover cremation costs for indigents via grants from Community Foundation of the Ozarks, and working with our local funeral homes. This is typically a cost borne by the County. A dedicated Coroner's vehicle was put into use this year, purchased with Covid funds.

This year, I have testified at two hearings, and was qualified as an expert witness at both. I have completed training as a Pediatric Sexual Assault Nurse Examiner, and I am qualified to perform sexual assault exams on infants, children and teens.

84% of Missouri's coroner's offices do not have a computerized system to file and manage cases. In 2019, I put in to place a secure database to enable information sharing with law enforcement, and I've been busy uploading cases beginning from the time of Coroner Jim Gentry; 1960 – present, spending hundreds of hours in this endeavor. My goal this year is to hire and train at least two deputy coroners to work on a per diem basis, as I don't anticipate returning to the average caseload of 220 cases anytime soon.

In 2021, I investigated 174 deaths, and completed 170 death certificates. (Hospice and nursing home deaths are reported to the Coroner, but don't usually require investigation.) I plan to set up deputy coroner training locally.

Statistics: In 2021 there were 304 deaths referred to the coroner, consisting of 259 Natural, 35 accidental, 1 homicide and 9 suicides. Since 2018, caseload is up 45%, accidental deaths from all causes are up 150%, overdose deaths are up 500%, and cancer deaths are up 29%. Ischemic strokes are up 62% from 2019.

I can always be reached at 573-247-1672 with any questions. It is my honor to serve the citizens of Texas County.

# MISSION STATEMENT

The mission of the Texas County Coroner's office is to provide a thorough and unbiased death investigation for all deaths occurring or originating in Texas County. The coroner is on call 24 hours a day, every day of the year and is fully accountable to the citizens of Texas County. An essential part of the coroner's duties includes being accessible to family members of the deceased, assisting them not only at the time of death, but in the months following for any matters that may arise. Forensic sciences are ever evolving, and continuing education is an absolute necessity. The Texas County Coroners Office seeks out education opportunities each year to bring the latest information in the forensic community back to ours.

The Coroner serves the jurisdictional region of Texas County, covering 1,179 square miles, and a population of 24,487 as of the 2020 census. The jurisdictional area includes the South Central Correctional Center in Licking.

Deaths shall be reported and investigated by the coroner when any person dies as a result of: Violence by homicide, suicide, or accident; Criminal abortion, including those self-induced; some unforeseen sudden occurrence and the deceased had not been attended by a physician during the thirty-six hour period preceding the death; in any unusual or suspicious manner; any injury or illness while in custody of the law or while an inmate in a public institution; the death of a child under the age of eighteen years old, and eligible to receive a certificate of live birth; any resident of a residential care facility who dies at the facility; and when death occurs outside a licensed health facility.

The Office of the County Coroner is established by the Constitution of the State of Missouri. The Coroner is elected to serve by the citizens of Texas County for a term of 4 years.

The Coroner's Office is a separate and independent division of the Texas County Government and is funded through the Texas County General Fund.

The Coroner recognizes the tragedy surrounding an untimely death and performs investigations, in part, to assist the grieving family who are often seeking answers as to cause and manner of death. A complete forensic investigation provides for the expeditious settling of insurance claims and estates, as well the implementation of civil and criminal actions. Questions which seem irrelevant in the initial hours after death can become significant in the following months. The surviving family and general public can have the peace of mind that a complete investigation was done.

The Coroner works in cooperation with the law enforcement community, but conducts a separate and unbiased investigation.

Although criminal death investigations constitute a small portion of deaths investigated by the Coroner, these deaths are studied in great detail because of the issues and legal consequences involved. In this way, the criminal justice system is offered the best support. The public health dimension of the Coroner's function is designed to isolate and identify causes of sudden unexpected death.

# DUTIES OF THE CORONER

The Coroner's Office is a statutory office, which is mandated to establish the cause and manner of death. The manner of death refers to the circumstances in which the cause of death arose (suicide, natural causes, accident and homicide).

## **Other Duties**

Operate efficient Coroner's Office

Prepare a budget for income and expenditures

To be Conservator of Peace (throughout his/her county)

To execute process when the Sheriff is disqualified (when sheriff is a party)

To perform duties of Sheriff when office is vacant (by death or otherwise)

To hold Coroner's Inquest/Coroner's Jury

To issue Warrant to Summon Coroner's Jury (Coroner Inquest)

Coroner to administer oath to jurors

Coroner to issue subpoenas (witnesses)

Order postmortem examination (autopsy)

Certify cause and manner of death (death certificate)

Order blood sample test for alcohol and drug content (all motor vehicle fatalities)

Report toxicology results in writing to Missouri State Highway Patrol

Procure organ donations (procurement of cadaver organ and tissue donation)

# Coroner Goals

The following goals for 2021 have been accomplished:

1. Continue to actively participate in emergency planning in conjunction with the Emergency Managing Director, particularly in regard to mass fatality events or deaths due to contagious disease.
2. Continue to pursue grant opportunities with priority of funding for toxicology. \$4789.00 obtained from grants in 2021 that went into the General Revenue,
3. The coroner is fully trained as a pediatric Sexual Assault Nurse Examiner.
4. Coroner Office accreditation process initiated.

## 2022 Goals

1. Obtain Texas County Coroner office accreditation by the American Board of Medicolegal Death Investigators.
2. Continue to actively participate in emergency planning in conjunction with the Emergency Managing Director, particularly in regard to mass fatality events or deaths due to contagious disease.
3. Act as sentinel on emerging causes of death, with reports to appropriate authorities, including the FDA, Missouri Department of Epidemiology, Sudden, unexpected Violent Death database, and Opioid Overdose database.
4. Continue to pursue grant opportunities with priority of funding for toxicology and a digital x-ray machine minimize autopsy expense.
5. Hire per diem Deputy Coroners to assist with increasing workload in the Coroner's office and meet accreditation requirements.
6. Complete uploading of at least 10 years of coroner's reports to the Coronerme database.

# 2021 CASES

TOTAL CASES: 305

INVESTIGATIONS: 174

HOSPICE/NURSING HOME: 131

AUTOPSIED CASES: 6

TOXICOLOGY CASES: 32

COVID TESTS: 5

FLU A/FLU B TESTS: 2

DECEASED TRANSPORTS: 27

MORGUE USED: 6

EXTERNAL EXAMS: 121

DONOR REFERRALS: 12

ORGAN DONORS: 0

TISSUE DONORS: 5

WHOLE BODY DONORS: 2

EXHUMATIONS: 0

UNIDENTIFIED: 0

UNCLAIMED: 1

## **MANNERS OF DEATH:**

NATURAL: 260

ACCIDENTAL: 35

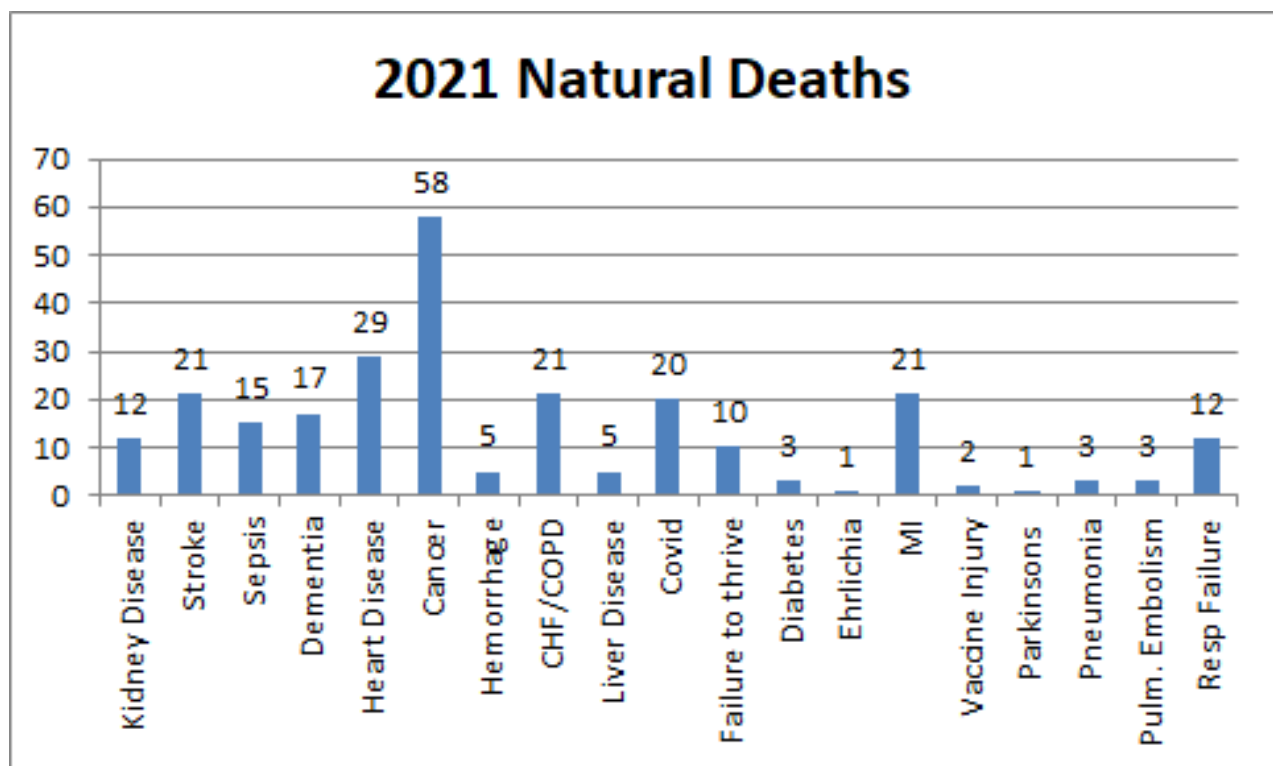
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SUICIDE: 9

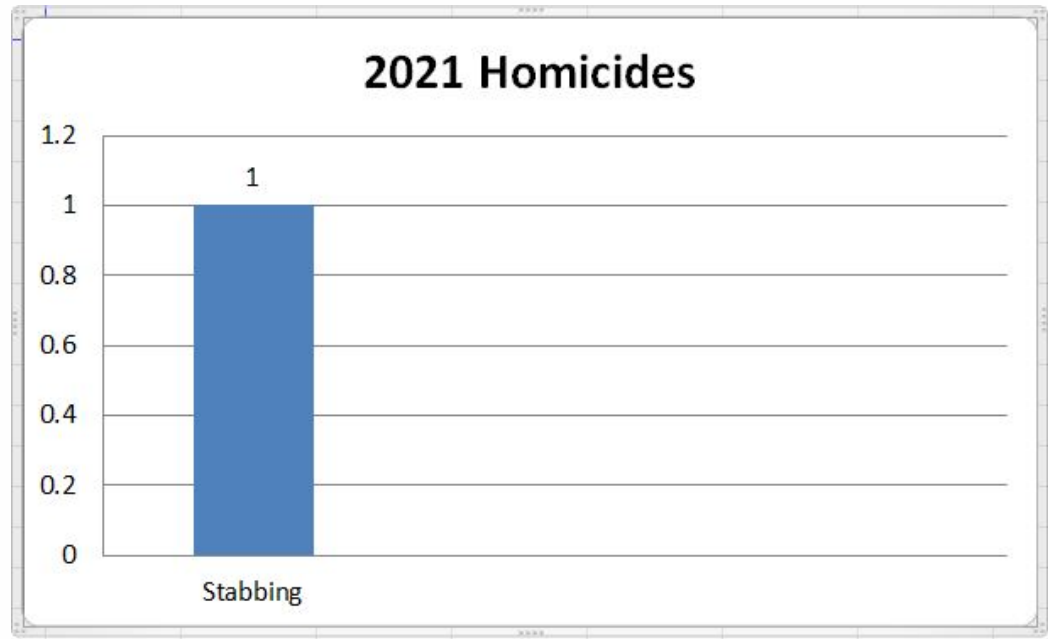
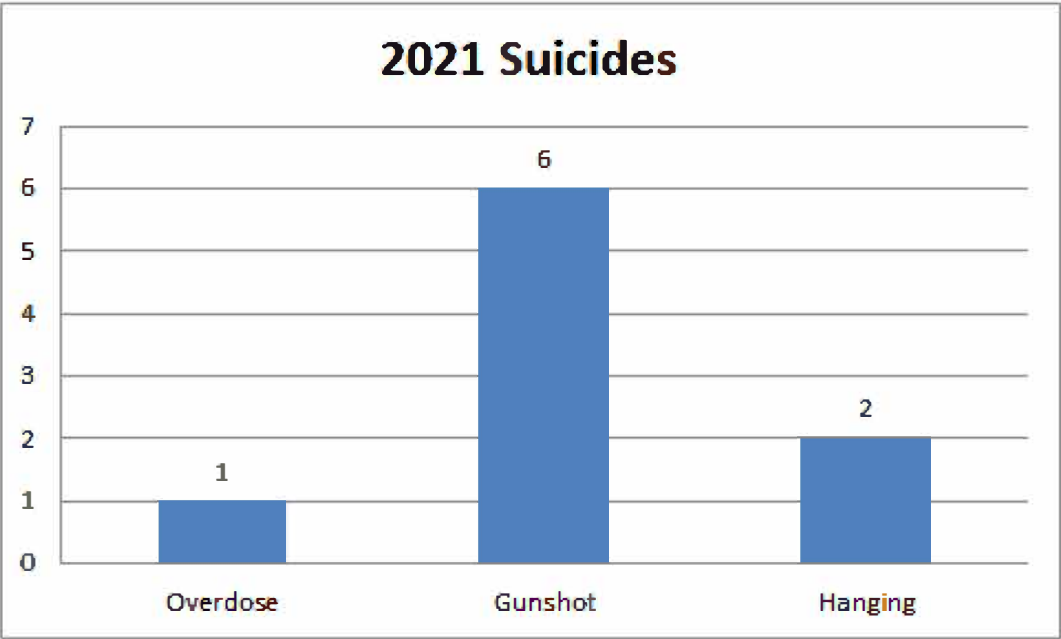
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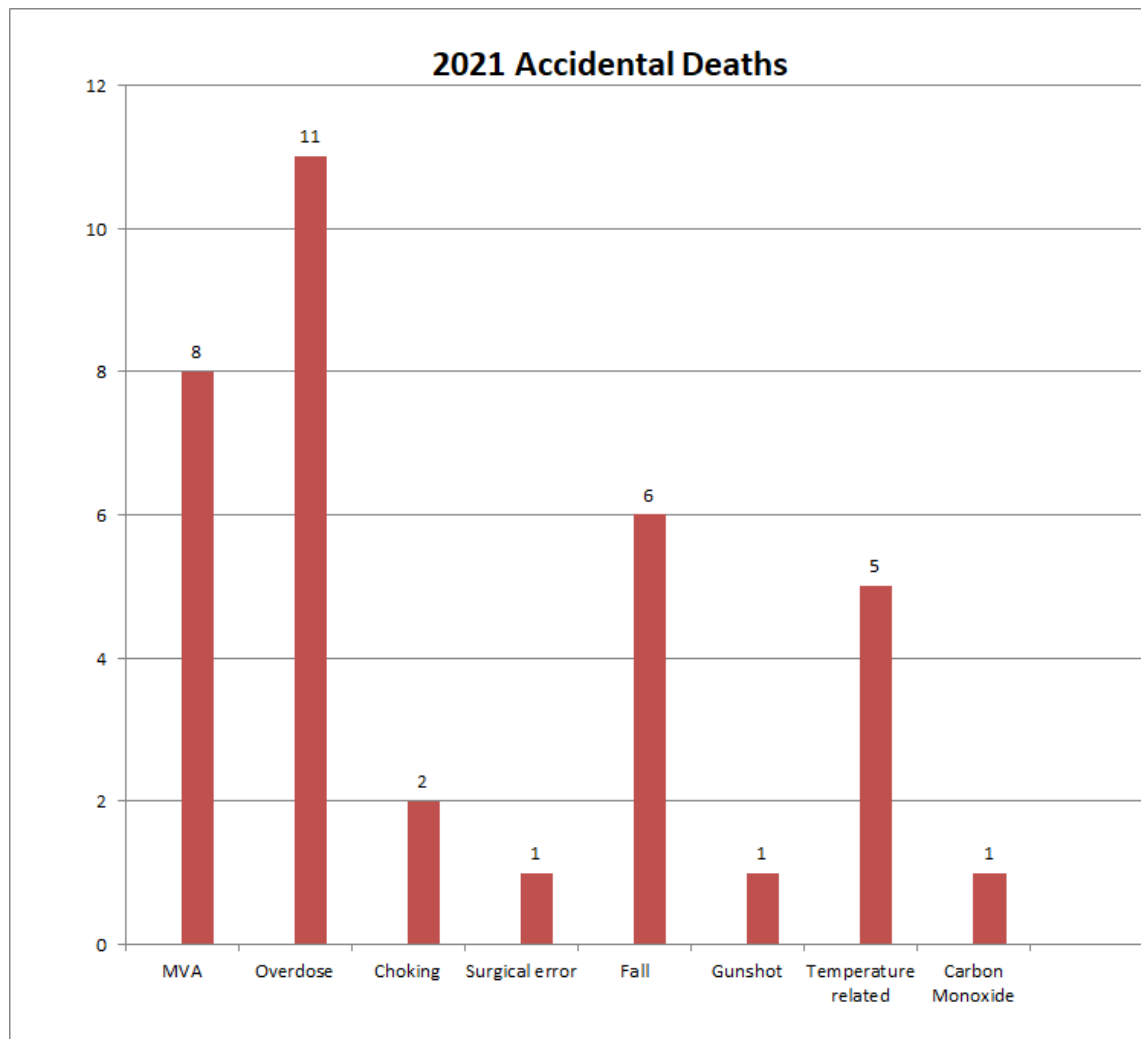
# Cause of death by Manner

Cancer remains the leading cause of death in Texas County, increasing by approximately 10% annually, followed by heart disease. Ischemic strokes have increased by 62% since 2019, with 7 of those following Sars Co-V2 vaccination.









**\* 55% OF THE OVERDOSE DEATHS INVOLVED FENTANYL.**