

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

2014 ANNUAL REPORT

During 2014 the Whatcom County Medical Examiner's office assumed jurisdiction in 101 death investigations that involved forensic autopsies, toxicological examinations, viewing and summary reporting. In addition, 220 other additional cases were reported and investigated and no jurisdiction was assumed (NJA).

Local agencies brought miscellaneous bones on five occasions to the Medical Examiner to determine if they were of human origin.

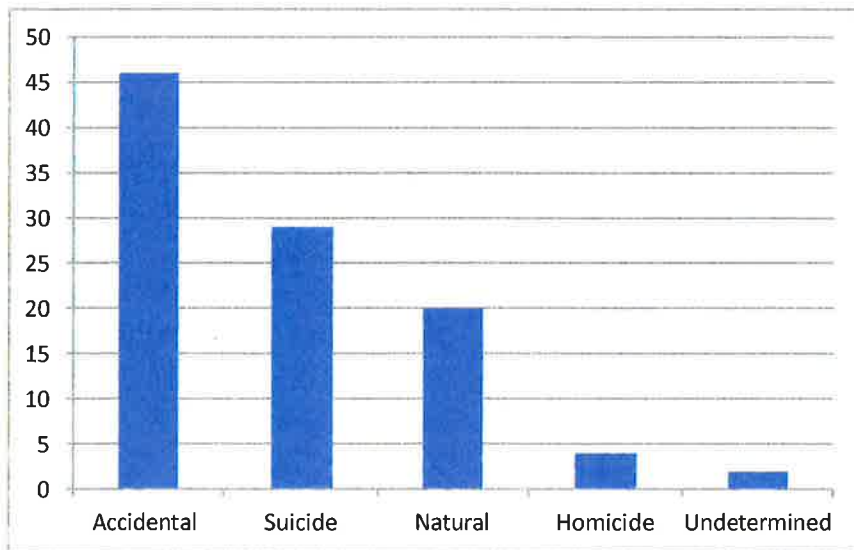
Teaching and public relations are also an important part of the Medical Examiner's office. Consulting was ongoing with the fire and police departments of the county and St. Joseph's Hospital. In addition, college and high school classes toured the morgue facility. The Medical Examiner also represented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



Gary Goldfogel, MD
Whatcom County Medical Examiner

During 2014 the Whatcom County Medical Examiner's Office conducted 101 forensic death investigations. The manner of death was certified as 46 Accident, 29 Suicide, 20 Natural, 4 Homicides and 2 Undetermined. The statistics and graphs on the following pages show the breakdown of the various causes of the deaths and the age and sex of those who died.

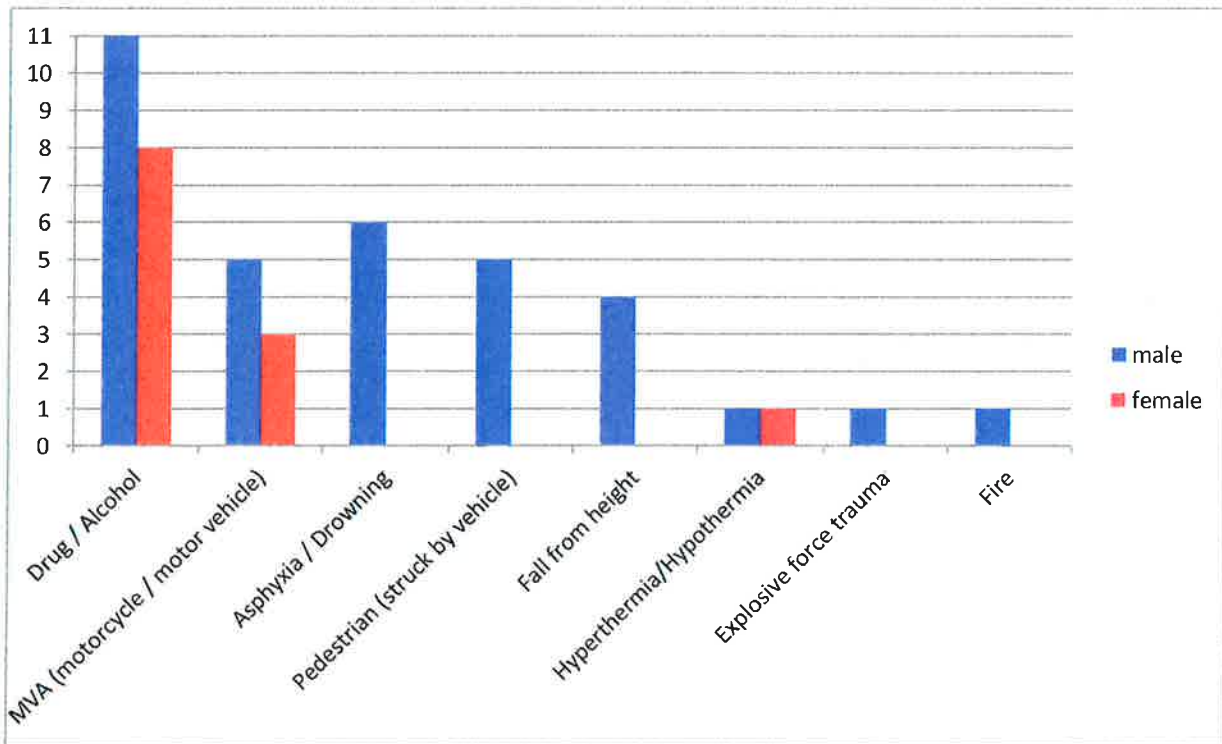
Whatcom County Medical Examiner's Office Death Investigations 2014



ACCIDENT:

There were 46 total investigated accident deaths in which 34 of the victims were male and 12 were female. The circumstances of death were as follows: Drug/Alcohol (19), Motorcycle/Motor vehicle (8), Asphyxia/Drowning (6), Pedestrians struck by vehicles (5), Falls from height (4), Hypothermia/Hyperthermia (2), Explosive force trauma (1) and Fire (1).

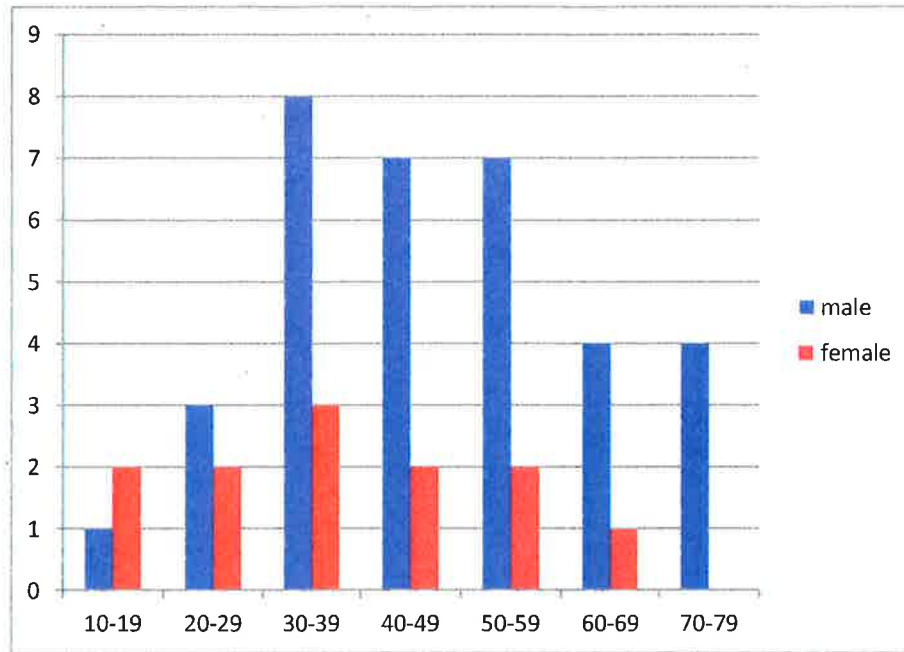
Accidental Deaths



* Blue bars are male and red bars are female.

By age, approximately (7 %) of accidental deaths were between 10-19 years of age, (11 %) between 20-29, (24 %) between 30-39, (20 %) between 40-49, (20 %) between 50-59, (11 %) between 60-69, and (7 %) between 70-79 years of age.

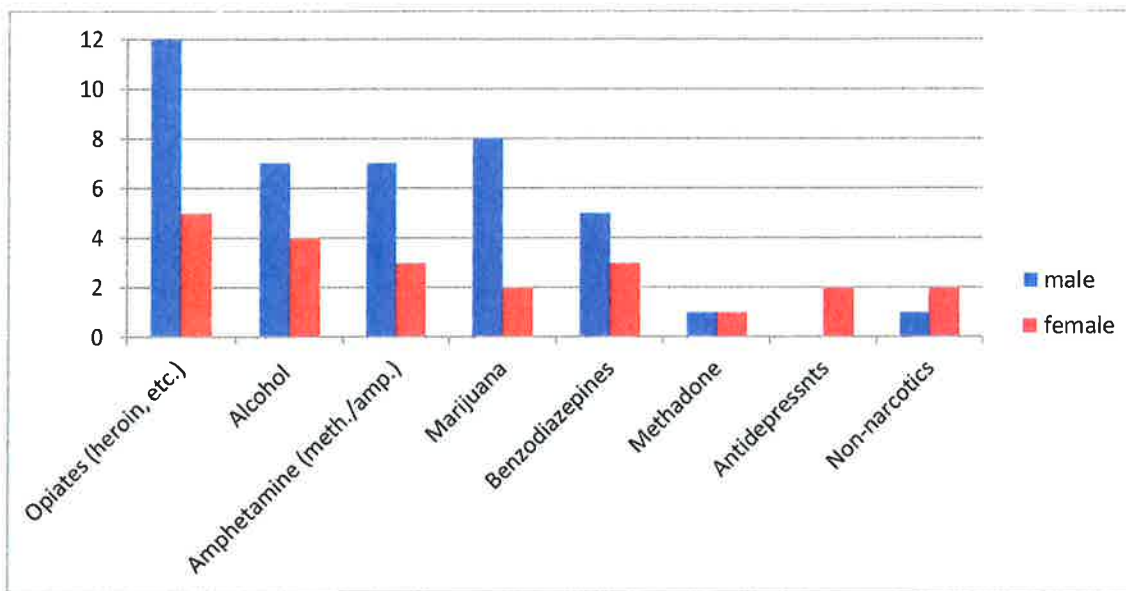
Accidental Deaths by Age and Sex



* Blue bars are male and red bars are female.

Drugs and alcohol accounted for 41 % of all accidental deaths and included opiates (predominately heroin), amphetamines (methamphetamine and amphetamine), marijuana, benzodiazepines, and to a lesser degree methadone, antidepressants and non-narcotics such as Benadryl, Tramadol and Tylenol. Usually a combination of drugs and/or alcohol was involved in the accidental death.

Alcohol was a contributing factor in 11 of the 46 deaths.



* Blue bars are male and red bars are female.

Seatbelts were worn in 3 out of the 5 motor vehicle accidents.

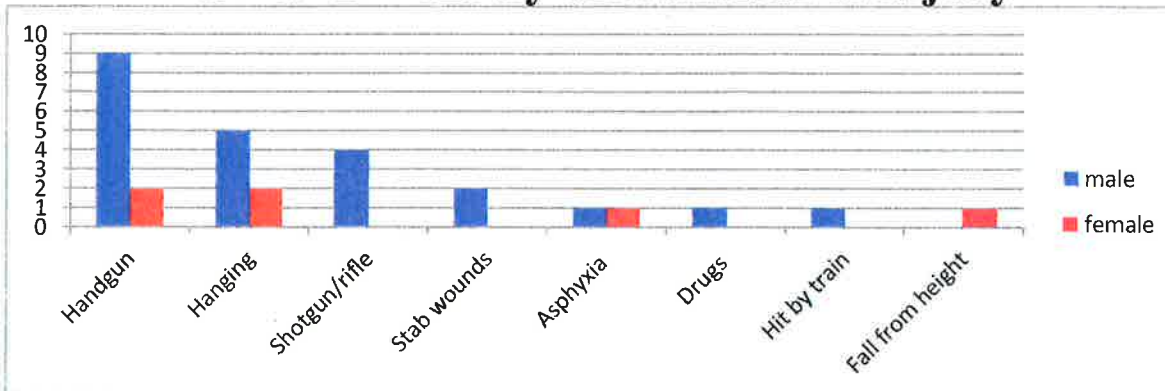
Unfortunately, reflective gear such as headlights and/or visible clothing and an appropriate DOT helmet were not worn for the motorcycle, bicycle and pedestrian accidental deaths.

In the drowning accidental death a personal floatation device was not utilized.

SUICIDE:

There were 29 total investigated suicide deaths of which 23 were male and 6 were female. The causes of death were as follows: Handgun (11), Hanging (7), Shotgun/Rifle (4), Self-inflicted stab wounds (2), Asphyxia (2), Drugs (1), Hit by Train (1) and Fall from height (1).

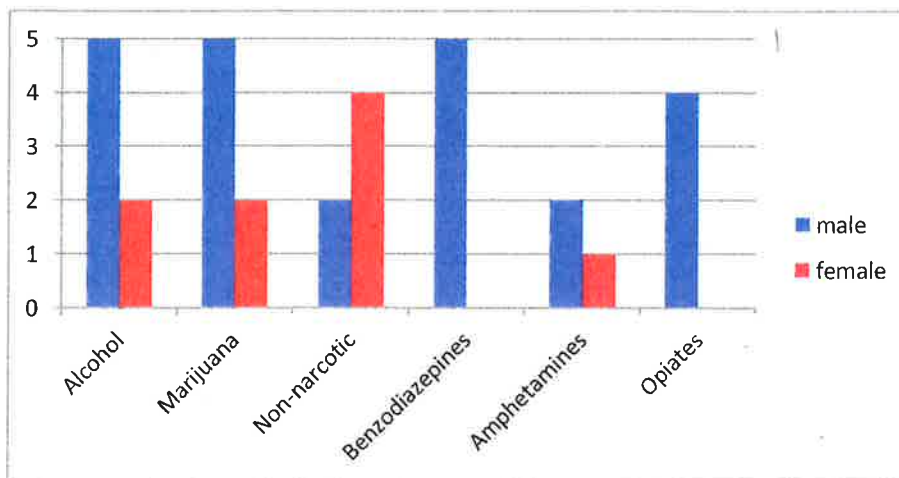
Suicide Deaths by Mechanism of Injury



* Blue bars are male and red bars are female.

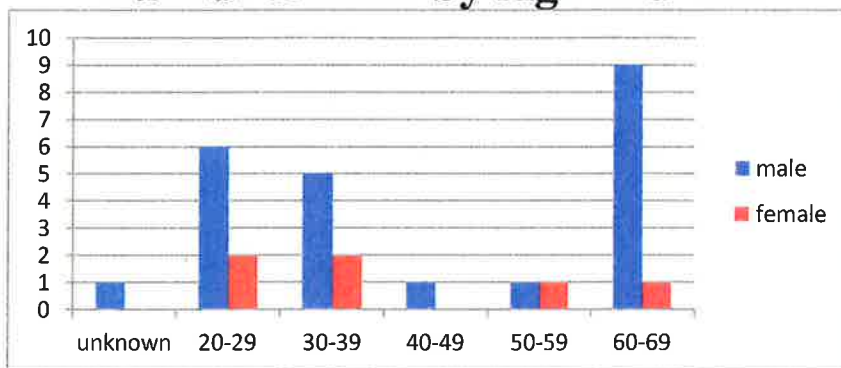
Alcohol was present in 24% of the suicide deaths.

Narcotic drugs were present in 55% of the suicide deaths and included: Marijuana (24%), benzodiazepines (14%), amphetamines (10%) and opiates (7%). Non-narcotics such as antidepressants, antipsychotics, over the counter and prescription drugs accounted for 21% of suicide deaths. Usually more than one drug was involved in the suicide death.



By age, approximately (28%) of our suicide deaths were between 20-29 years of age, (24%) between 30-39, (3%) between 40-49, (7%) between 50-59, and (35%) between 60-69 years of age. Of note due to decomposition we do not have the exact age of one of our deceased, estimated as a white male between 33-55 years of age.

Suicide Deaths by Age and Sex

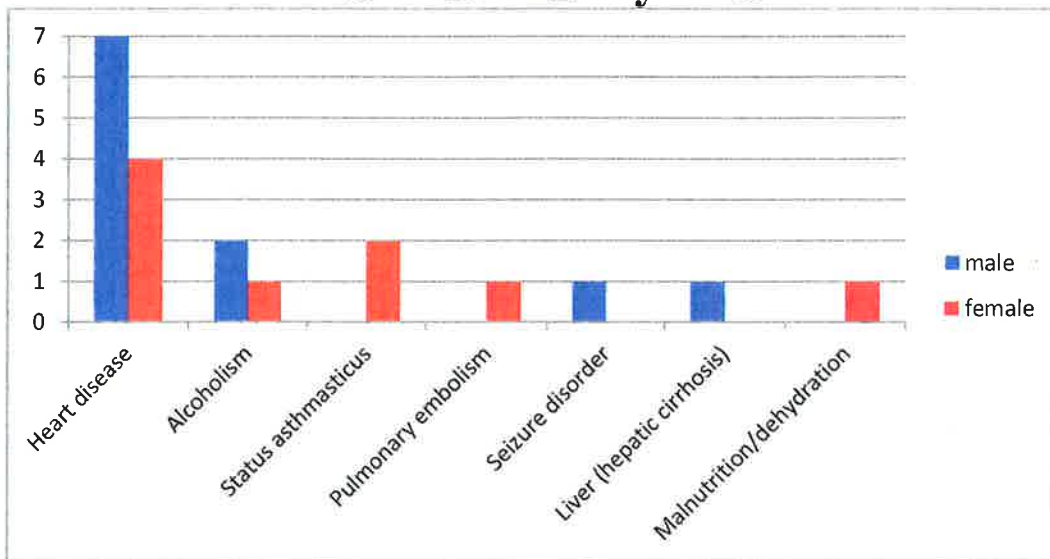


*Blue bars are male and red bars female.

NATURAL:

There were 20 total investigated and autopsied natural unexpected/unexplained deaths of which 11 were male and 9 were female. The causes of death were as follows: Heart disease (11), Alcoholism (3), Status asthmaticus (2), Pulmonary embolism (1), Seizure disorder (1), Liver/hepatic cirrhosis (1) and Malnutrition/dehydration (1). In addition, 6 of the 20 natural deaths were mild to morbidly obese.

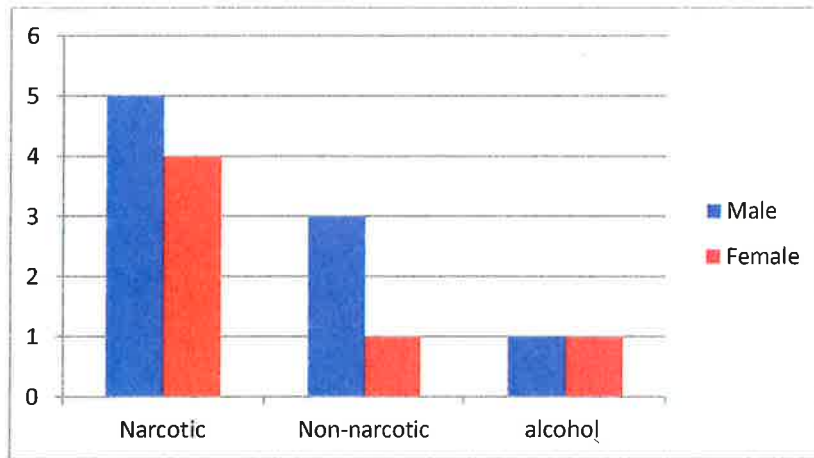
Natural Deaths by Cause



*Blue bars are male and red bars are female.

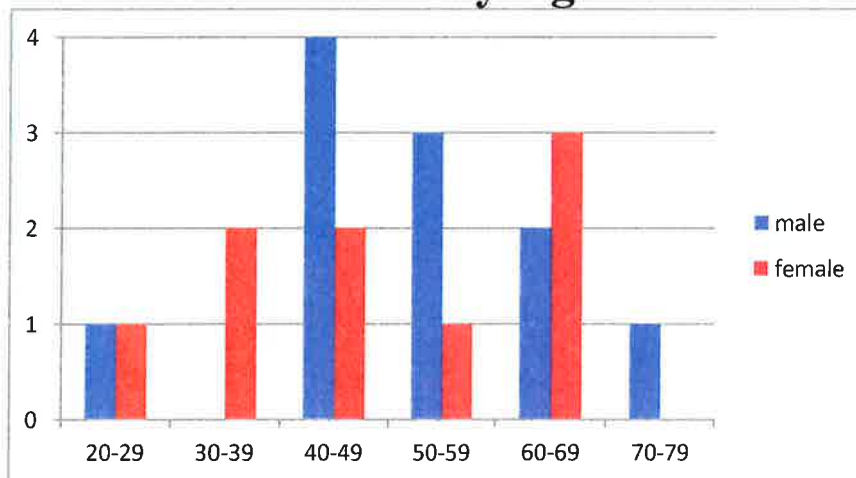
Alcohol was present in 10% of the natural deaths.

Narcotic drugs were present in 45% of the natural death cases and included one or a combination of the following: Benzodiazepines, methadone, opiates, amphetamines and marijuana. Non-narcotic drugs were present in 20% of the cases and included one or a combination of the following: Antidepressants, anti-seizure medications and Benadryl.



By age, approximately (10%) of natural deaths were between 20-29 years of age, (10%) between 30-39, (30%) between 40-49, (20%) between 50-59, (25%) between 60-69, and (5%) between 70-79 years of age.

Natural Deaths by Age and Sex

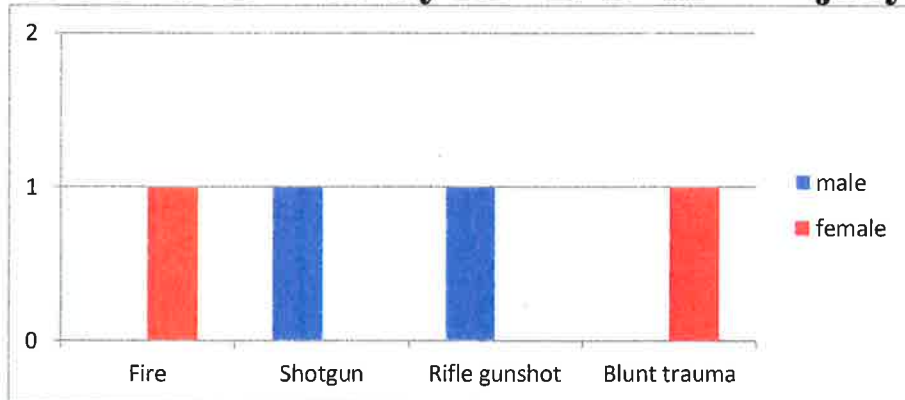


*Blue bars are male and red bars are female.

HOMICIDE:

There were four homicide manner of death cases, two male and two female. There was one fire, one shotgun, one rifle gunshot and one blunt trauma.

Homicide Deaths by Mechanism of Injury

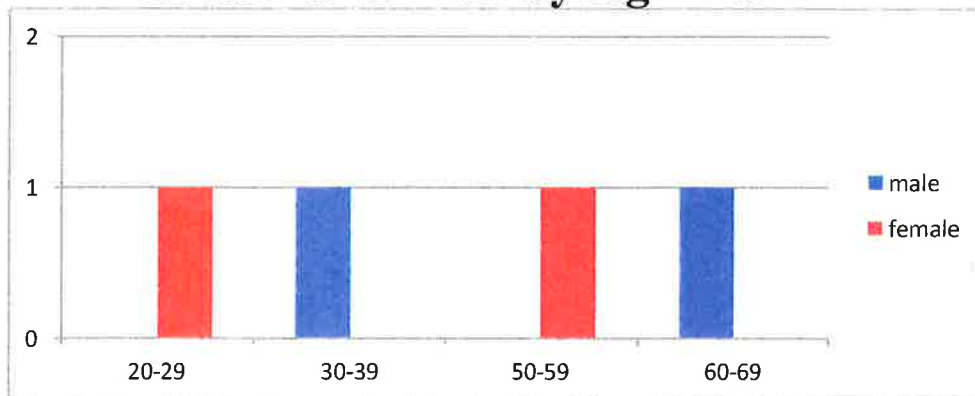


*Blue bars are male and red bars are female.

Toxicology testing revealed alcohol and an antidepressant were involved in one case, amphetamines in another, and marijuana in another. One case yielded no drugs detected.

By age, 25% of homicidal deaths were between 20-29 years of age, 25% between 30-39, 25% between 50-59, 25% between 60-69 years of age.

Homicide Deaths by Age and Sex



*Blue bars are male and red bars are female.

UNDETERMINED:

There were two investigated deaths whose manner of death after complete forensic autopsy and investigation were listed as undetermined of which one was male and one was female. One is a potential homicide versus suicide by ethylene glycol poisoning of a middle aged female and the other is a young male discovered in Whatcom Creek with a history of chronic homelessness and substance abuse.

IDENTIFICATION:

All decedents in Whatcom County during the period were identified with exception of skeletal remains of a remote suicide by hanging. His bones are being extensively categorized and studied in consultation with Kathleen Taylor, Ph.D., the Washington State Forensic Anthropologist in hope of obtaining his identity.