



**NORTH DAKOTA**  
DEPARTMENT *of* HEALTH

## **Office of the State Forensic Examiner**

### **Annual Activity Report January 1, 2008, to December 31, 2008**

The authority and responsibilities of the Office of the State Forensic Examiner are provided in Chapter 11-19, Sections 11-19.1-18 through 11.19.1-20 of the North Dakota Century Code. The Office of the State Forensic Examiner accepts cases referred from county coroners or acting county coroners, performs postmortem examinations on the bodies, and signs Certificates of Death. It is the goal of the state forensic examiner to provide vital information needed by the county coroner, the family of the deceased, the North Dakota Department of Health, law enforcement, and many other agencies involved in the investigation of deaths.

Cases are referred to the forensic examiner when there are significant questions regarding cause and manner of death, if there is the potential for criminal charges, for assistance with ongoing investigations, and if there are other significant issues or questions that will remain unanswered if an autopsy is not done. The county coroner referring the case is responsible for transporting the case to the forensic examiner's morgue facility in Bismarck, N.D.

During this reporting period, 274 cases were referred to the state forensic examiner. Complete autopsies were done on 273 of these referrals. An external examination without an autopsy was done on one individual. Toxicology studies consisting of blood alcohols and at least a basic drug screen are a routine component of the autopsy. Thirty three of the individuals referred to this office died as a result of combined prescription drugs and/or combined prescription drugs and alcohol poisoning. The classification/manner and number of the 2008 referrals are categorized as follows: **Natural Cause – 96; Accident – 103; Suicide – 55; Homicide – 5; Undetermined – 12.** Three referrals are pending investigation. The forensic examiner office experienced a 14 percent increase in the number of referrals received this reporting period.

In addition to the referrals discussed above, the Office of the State Forensic Examiner provided consultations to county coroners on 81 cases. Anthropological evaluations of osseous material were provided on three occasions. Requests for solid organs, eyes and tissue were made by

organ-procurement programs on 34 referrals. Solid organ procurement was authorized on one individual, and procurement of eyes and other tissue was authorized on the remaining 33 individuals. Referrals to the office continue to come from all regions of the state (e.g., northwest, southwest, northeast, southeast and central).

The Office of the State Forensic Examiner is staffed by three full-time employees: the state forensic examiner, the administrator to the state forensic examiner, and an administrative assistant. Support personnel for the office include four part-time autopsy assistant. After hours and weekend coverage is provided by this office. A member of our staff is available via State Radio's dispatcher to the county coroners or law enforcement agencies needing assistance with a referral or consultation.

The state forensic examiner is actively involved in death investigation training. The office routinely conducts educational seminars and provides lectures designed to improve death investigation to county coroners, law enforcement agencies, medical personnel, state and local government agencies, and other groups involved with death investigations. The state forensic examiner also participates in Child Fatality Review Committee activities and provides reports and guidelines in child death investigations to this committee.

**Referrals and Consultations to the State Forensic Examiner  
January 1, 2008 to December 31, 2008**

**Referrals** consist of cases referred to the forensic examiner by county coroners for an examination or autopsy.

**Consultations** consist of discussing the circumstances surrounding a death with the county coroners and advising them about handling the case locally.

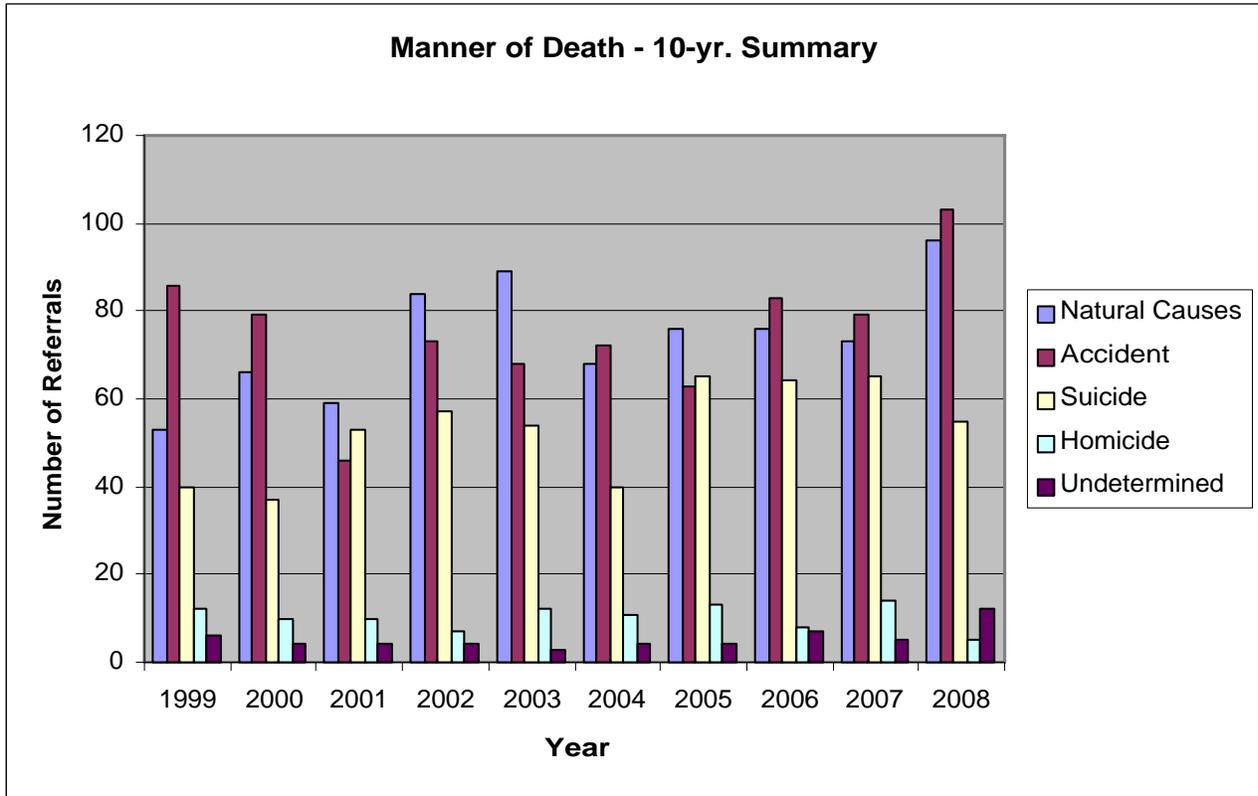
| COUNTY        | REFERRALS | CONSULTATIONS |
|---------------|-----------|---------------|
| Adams         | 2         | 1             |
| Barnes        | 6         | 2             |
| Benson        | 4         | 2             |
| Billings      | 1         | 1             |
| Bottineau     | 4         | 0             |
| Bowman        | 2         | 1             |
| Burke         | 1         | 2             |
| Burleigh      | 49        | 7             |
| Cass          | 41        | 12            |
| Cavalier      | 3         | 1             |
| Dickey        | 0         | 0             |
| Divide        | 0         | 0             |
| Dunn          | 1         | 0             |
| Eddy          | 1         | 0             |
| Emmons        | 3         | 1             |
| Foster        | 2         | 0             |
| Golden Valley | 2         | 0             |
| Grand Forks   | 4         | 1             |
| Grant         | 0         | 0             |
| Griggs        | 2         | 0             |
| Hettinger     | 0         | 0             |
| Kidder        | 1         | 0             |
| LaMoure       | 0         | 1             |
| Logan         | 0         | 1             |
| McHenry       | 4         | 1             |
| McIntosh      | 0         | 1             |
| McKenzie      | 7         | 0             |
| McLean        | 9         | 2             |
| Mercer        | 4         | 0             |
| Morton        | 15        | 0             |

| COUNTY    | REFERRALS | CONSULTATIONS |
|-----------|-----------|---------------|
| Mountrail | 9         | 6             |
| Nelson    | 1         | 1             |
| Oliver    | 2         | 0             |
| Pembina   | 3         | 0             |
| Pierce    | 4         | 1             |
| Ramsey    | 3         | 2             |
| Ransom    | 2         | 0             |
| Renville  | 1         | 1             |
| Richland  | 7         | 0             |
| Rolette   | 4         | 1             |
| Sargent   | 2         | 0             |
| Sheridan  | 1         | 2             |
| Sioux     | 10        | 1             |
| Slope     | 0         | 0             |
| Stark     | 13        | 1             |
| Steele    | 1         | 0             |
| Stutsman  | 18        | 1             |
| Towner    | 0         | 1             |
| Traill    | 5         | 1             |
| Walsh     | 1         | 2             |
| Ward      | 16        | 23            |
| Wells     | 0         | 0             |
| Williams  | 3         | 0             |
| Totals    | 274       | 81            |

**Operating Expenses**  
**January 1, 2008, to December 31, 2008**

|   |                    |
|---|--------------------|
| Morgue supplies and equipment               | \$ 13,766.11       |
| Laboratory and radiology services           | \$ 20,105.50       |
| Camera equipment, film, and film processing | \$ 299.69          |
| Professional consultations:                 |                    |
| Toxicology                                  | \$ 15,100.00       |
| Odontology                                  | \$ 295.40          |
| Pathology                                   | \$ 300.00          |
| Mobile phone and paging                     | \$ 1,127.69        |
| Travel – local                              | \$ 100.35          |
| Professional memberships                    | \$ 330.00          |
| Professional meetings                       | \$ 3,599.26        |
| Office supplies and equipment               | \$ 2,861.30        |
| Contract services:                          |                    |
| Linen service                               | \$ 3,435.86        |
| Infectious waste disposal                   | \$ 2,801.54        |
| After-hours admissions                      | \$ 5,586.00        |
| Janitorial services                         | \$ 3,850.00        |
| Utilities                                   |                    |
| Montana Dakota Utilities                    | \$ 29,108.24       |
| City of Bismarck, Water Department          | \$ 1,741.33        |
| Building and grounds                        | \$ 5,765.95        |
| Miscellaneous expenses                      | <u>\$ 3,718.56</u> |
|   | \$113,892.78       |

### Manner of Death - 10-yr. Summary



|                | 1999 | 2000 | 2001 | 2002 | 2003 | 2004 | 2005 | 2006 | 2007 | 2008 |
|----------------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|
| Natural Causes | 53   | 66   | 59   | 84   | 89   | 68   | 76   | 76   | 73   | 96   |
| Accident       | 86   | 79   | 46   | 73   | 68   | 72   | 63   | 83   | 79   | 103  |
| Suicide        | 40   | 37   | 53   | 57   | 54   | 40   | 65   | 64   | 65   | 55   |
| Homicide       | 12   | 10   | 10   | 7    | 12   | 11   | 13   | 8    | 14   | 5    |
| Undetermined   | 6    | 4    | 4    | 4    | 3    | 4    | 4    | 7    | 5    | 12   |
| Total          | 197  | 196  | 172  | 225  | 226  | 195  | 221  | 238  | 236  | 271  |



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