



2023

ANNUAL REPORT

PREPARED BY: MICHAEL R RATLIFF, CHIEF INVESTIGATOR

Office of the Coroner Ross County, Ohio

Jurisdiction Served and ORC Statues

We provide twenty-four hour/ seven days a week death investigation for Ross County with a total staff of 8; 1 coroner, 1 deputy coroner, 1 chief investigator and 5 investigators. We serve an increasing population of 78, 064 according to the 2010 census and responsible for coverage of 693.02 square miles. Ross County is the second largest county in Ohio, after Ashtabula County.

The coroner and all appointed staff have authority through the Ohio Revised Code, Section/Chapter 313:

Chapter 313: CORONER

****The Ross County Coroner's Office is accredited with the International Association of Coroners & Medical Examiners.***



Ross County Coroner's Office Mission Statement

The mission of the Ross County Coroner's Office is to serve and protect the health and safety of the community by maintaining the highest standard of professionalism and integrity in determining the cause and manner of death. We are dedicated as a team to conduct independent investigations with the intent to ensure that the circumstances surrounding the death are understood and explained. We seek to enhance the health, safety and well-being of the citizens and guests of Ross County.

“We speak for those who can no longer speak for themselves”

Ross County Coroner:

Annual Report

Each year it seems we are faced with new challenges. This year was no different. Our office continues to cover nearly 1000 cases a year and provide support to families throughout our region. The rising costs endured by our community make the challenges of losing a family member harder than ever before. Our office stands strong, working to make sure we are always a resource to the people of Ross County.

The continued support of the Ross County Commissioners gives us the ability to be a resource to all of southern Ohio. We maintain our national accreditation for forensic death investigation. That means our community is protected by investigators who are trained at the national level and meet national and international standards. Our team is highly trained in all aspects of death investigation. This is an area of pride for our group. We're only one of three coroner offices accredited to this level in the state of Ohio without a pathology lab tied affiliated to it. The residents of Ross County deserve this level of service. The only way that we are able to provide this level of care comes from our ability to keep a strong team of Death Investigators. After many years of service to the City of Chillicothe, and Ross County, Dave Russell has decided to retire. He has been a wonderful member of our team and will be dearly missed. Fortunately, we have been able to fill his vacancy with another member of our EMS and Fire community. Nate Freeman has moved into his position and is currently learning this craft. By keeping a solid team, we have maintained a healthy work environment for everyone. Nate will be attending his national training this fall and working himself in as an integral member of our team.

This office would be nothing without the great group of people that work here. Mike Ratliff remains our operational leader. Mike has had opportunities this year to work with outside agency identifying remains that have been unidentified for years. It is amazing how technology is allowing us to connect families with long lost members of their family. Mark Gray, Scotty LaGard, Scottie Cyrus, Alan Gossman and Dr. Amy Luckeydoo remain as dedicated investigators to our county. Each of them has gone above and beyond in their service to the people of Ross County. The recurring theme of our office is that each year the work gets harder but the support of our team makes it worth doing. Because of the great people that work here, we are able to be a constant support to the people of our community. We are ever focused on the service we provide to our community and will always be a resource to anyone who needs us.

Thank you for the continued support,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Ben Trotter DO". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, stylized "B" and "T".

Ben Trotter DO FACEP

Ross County Coroner



2023 Ross County Coroner Stats

Total Requests for Investigation – 628

Cases Deferred to PCP/Attending-199 COVID-4 Drug Related-4

Hospice Deaths – 201 COVID-

Nursing Home Deaths –87 COVID-3 Drug Related-

Other-11

Coroner Cases / Manner of Death

Cases-130

Natural-43 Drug Related-2 COVID-3

Accidental-71 Drug OD-50 Drug Related-2 COVID-0 **LE Involvement/In-Custody-1**

Suicide-12 Drug OD- Drug Related-2 COVID-0 **LE Involvement/In-Custody-1**

Homicide-2 Drug Related-1 **LE Involvement/In-Custody-1**

Active/Pending-0

Undetermined-3 Drug OD- Drug Related-

Total Autopsies- (24) Montgomery County (24)

Total Toxicology (78) Tox Only (56) AXIS (4) NMS (50) MCCO Lab (23) OSP Lab (2)

Scene Responses/External Exams- (98) Scene Removals/Transports (48)

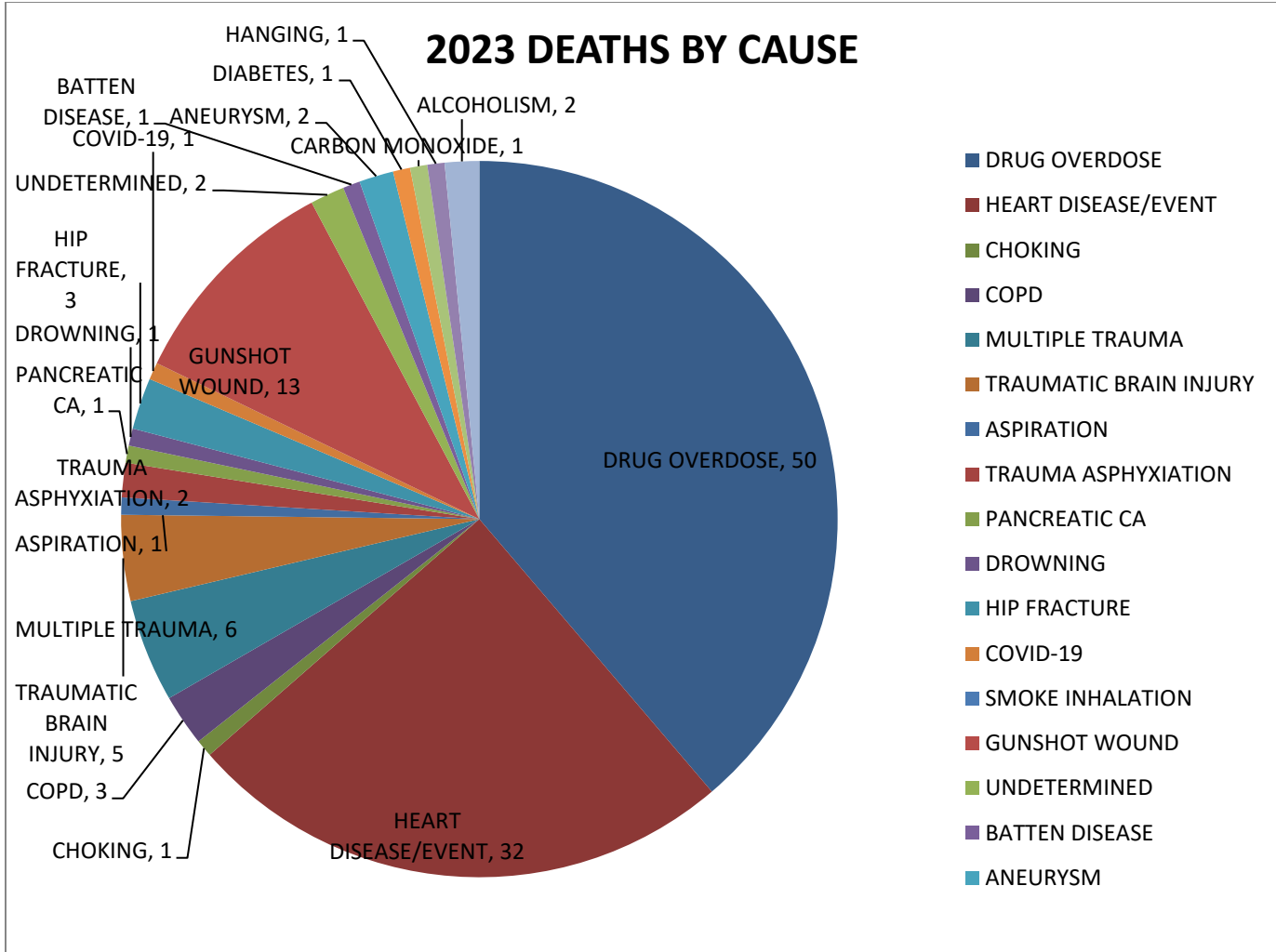
Advanced Decomps (17)

Unclaimed/Indigent- (6) Unidentified Bodies-(0) Exhumations-()

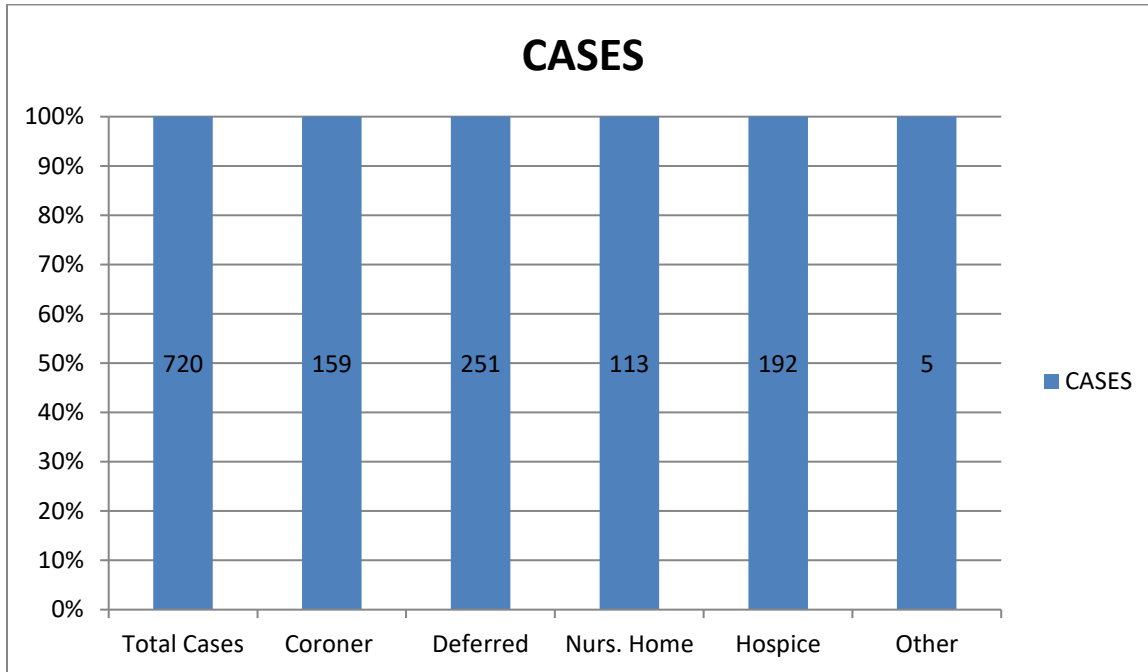
Cremation Authorizations (3) Initial Death Notifications (0)

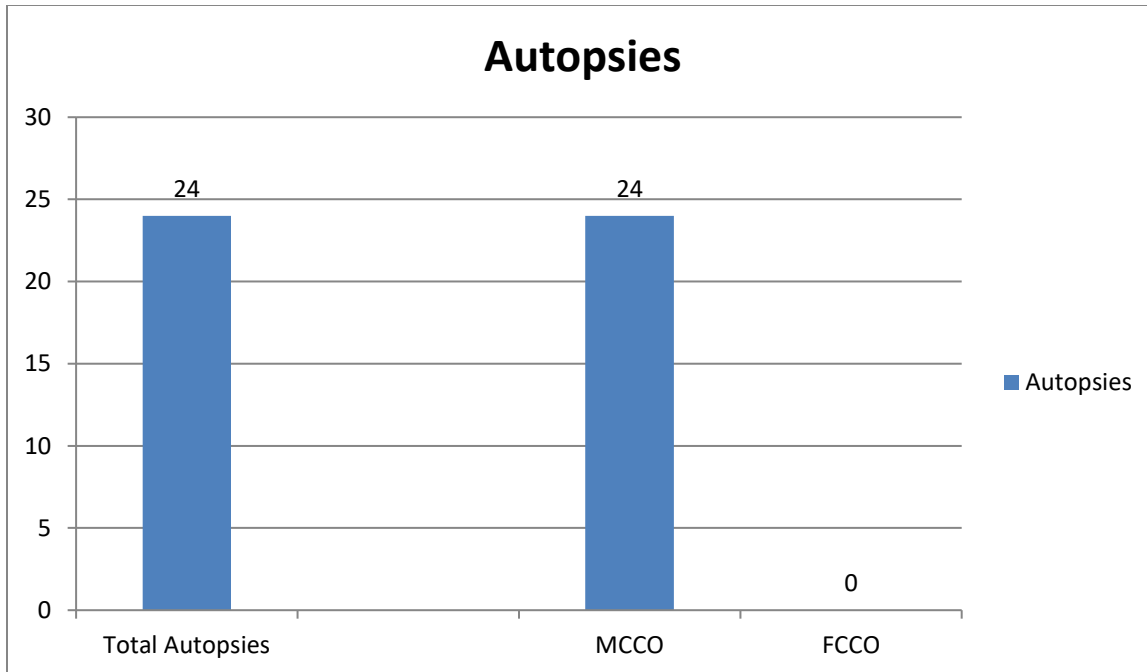
Organ/Tissue Donation- (4) Eye Donations- (1) Body Donations(3)

2023 DEATHS BY CAUSE



Types Of Cases





Cost to County Per Case/Autopsy

(Forensic) Montgomery County= \$1600.00 plus transport

Franklin County= \$1500

*Per ORC County financially responsible for incidents that occur in Ross County but patient is transported to another county and dies.



2021-2023 CASE STATS COMPARISON

	2021	2022	2023
TOTAL CASES	760	720	628
DEFERRED	283	251	199
HOSPICE	195	192	201
NURSING HOME	104	113	87
OTHER	5	5	11
CORONER CASES	162	159	130
NATURAL	68	48	43
ACCIDENTAL	92	83	71
DRUG OVERDOSES/Related	63/22	60/13	50/ 11
SUICIDES	8	13	12
HOMICIDES	2	4	2
UNDETERMINED	3	8	3
PENDING	x	x	x
AUTOPSIES	39	33	24
TOXICOLOGY CASES	106	91	78
SCENE RESPONSES	127	120	98
REMOVALS	78	69	48
UNCLAIMED/INDIGENT	17	6	6
ADVANCED DECOMP	13	19	17



AUTOPSY AND TOXICOLOGY YEARLY COMPARISON

YEAR	#CONTRACT	#ORC	MEDICAL	TOX ONLY
2009	16	2	43	27
2010	12	8	35	20
2011	17	10	31	23
2012	12	8	37	29
2013	15	7	28	11
2014	24	5	0	36
2015	36	8	0	47
2016	28	8	0	69
2017	30	2	*1	44
2018	24	3	0	61
2019	29	2	0	55
2020	30	2	0	74
2021	42	2	0	67
2022	33	3	x	69
2023	24	0	x	56

Contract= autopsies on cases we have jurisdiction and request.

ORC= autopsies our county is responsible for on individuals that die in neighboring counties but the incident occurred in Ross County

Medical= autopsies that were done at Adena per our request

***Performed at OSU and paid for by Adena**

Tox only= cases that toxicology was done but no autopsy



DRUG OVERDOSE DEATH COMPARISON CHART

YEAR	OD DEATHS	DRUG RELATED	HEROIN (Included)	FENTANYL (Included)	OTHER OPIATES (Included)	Carfentanil and Other Fentanyl Analogs	METH	XYLAZINE
2009	19	n/a	0	N/A	14			
2010	19	n/a	2	N/A	11			
2011	19	7	1	N/A	16			
2012	13	7	n/a	N/A	8			
2013	11	11	n/a	N/A	n/a			
2014	31	6	19	N/A	n/a			
2015	40	11	20	11	16			
2016	44	6	19	20	12	1	4	
2017	34	12	11	14	15	9	6	
2018	32	14	16	26	4	2	12	
2019	37	8	10	29	8	5	17	
2020	56	16	2	46	7	28	21	
2021	64	18	3	55	9	23	29	
2022	60	11	1	49	3	2	31	
2023	50	11	0	42	11	28	28	4



TRENDS IN CASES IN 2023

- 1. The total number of cases were down slightly.**
- 2. Hospice and Nursing Home Deaths remained about the same as 2022.**
- 3. Drug Overdose deaths were down from 2022, while overall accidental deaths were down from 2021.**
- 4. Suicides were back to the typical number for the year, but up from 2021.**
- 5. Homicides were down by 50% from 4 to 2 for the year.**
- 6. Undetermined deaths were down but the number of advanced decomposition cases remained consistent.**
- 7. The number of Unclaimed/Indigent cases remained low, which is encouraging but doesn't take into account all of the city's indigent cases as there are handled directly by the funeral homes in most cases.**



GOALS FOR 2024

Our main goal will be to continue to provide the best possible death investigation for the citizens and visitors to our county. We will strive to continue to provide medicolegal death investigation that meets or exceeds the national and international standards for death investigation. Our goal is to be able to answer the tough questions families and friends, as well as the general public, may have when a death occurs under our jurisdiction.

We will continue to work with law enforcement, local emergency medical services, and the health community, to do our part in keeping Ross County safe. We will continue to provide any needed and/or requested education while striving to better educate ourselves in the ever so fast changing field of medicolegal death investigation.

We end 2023 with (2) two open cases involving skeletal remains that we are working with the DNA Doe Project in hopes of using DNA Genealogy to make identification and to be able to return them to their families. These cases are working their way through the process with hopes of a positive outcome in early 2024.

2024 is our year for re-accreditation with the International Association of Coroners and Medical Examiners, which will make for a busy time but also is a great check-up on how we are meeting the standards for death investigation.

Our goal is to be better than 2023.