



2024

ANNUAL REPORT

PREPARED BY: MICHAEL R RATLIFF, CHIEF INVESTIGATOR

Ross County Coroner:

Annual Report

Growth and development have been the focus of our group over the last year. We have added team members and provided them with continued education needed to perform this difficult job. We are continually focused on providing the highest level of service to the people of Ross County. Because of the dedication to the community, we have seen a change in number of people dying from overdose and suicide. We can proudly say that our numbers have declined over the last year and that is a true testament to the involvement of our community and community officials.

Our continued support from the Ross County Commissioners provides us with the ability work with organizations locally and state wide. This year we were able to close two cases that have been considered "cold cases" for years. We participated in the DNA Doe project which is an organization focused on connecting the DNA information from cases to real life families. With their help, we were able to lay a military veteran to rest and connect a family with remains found years ago. The day-to-day work load of our office has not changed. In fact, we are working harder than ever. Our office was again awarded accreditation for providing the highest level of forensic death investigation. That means that we are providing a level of service at, or above, the national standard for death investigation.

This level of service would not be achievable without the amazing group of people who work for our office. Mike Ratliff continues to provide the leadership and experience to our group. His years of service provide us with the foundation of knowledge needed to maintain the standard of service we provide. Our team remains strong with Mark Gray, Scotty LaGard, Scottie Cyrus, Alan Gossman, Nate Freeman and Dr. Amy Luckeydoo still providing service to our community. Without them, we would not have the success we have seen over the last year. Each one of our team have been nationally trained and certified in work pertaining to death investigation.

As I alluded to, growth and development are our focus. We will stay focused on the development of team members so that our community continues to be protected by this office. We will continue to be a resource to the people of Ross County in all matters associated with the death of a family member. Our commitment is to never stop working for our community.

Thank you for your continued support,

Ben Trotter DO FACEP
Ross County Coroner

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”



2024 Ross County Coroner Stats

Total Requests for Investigation –670

Cases Deferred to PCP/Attending- 207 Drug Related-3

Hospice Deaths –185 COVID-

Nursing Home Deaths –139 COVID-3 Drug Related-

Other-3

Coroner Cases / Manner of Death

Cases-137

Natural-56 Drug Related- 5 COVID- LE Involvement/In-Custody- 5

Accidental-70 Drug OD-36 Drug Related-4 MVC-12 LE Involvement/In-Custody-2

Suicide-3 Drug OD- Drug Related- LE Involvement/In-Custody-1

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

Active/Pending-1 LE Involvement/In-Custody- 0

Undetermined-6 Drug OD- Drug Related-2 LE Involvement/In-Custody- 3

Total Autopsies- (39) Montgomery County (39)

Total Toxicology (78) Tox Only (41) NMS (41) MCCO Lab (38)

Scene Responses/External Exams- (83) Scene Removals/Transports (71)

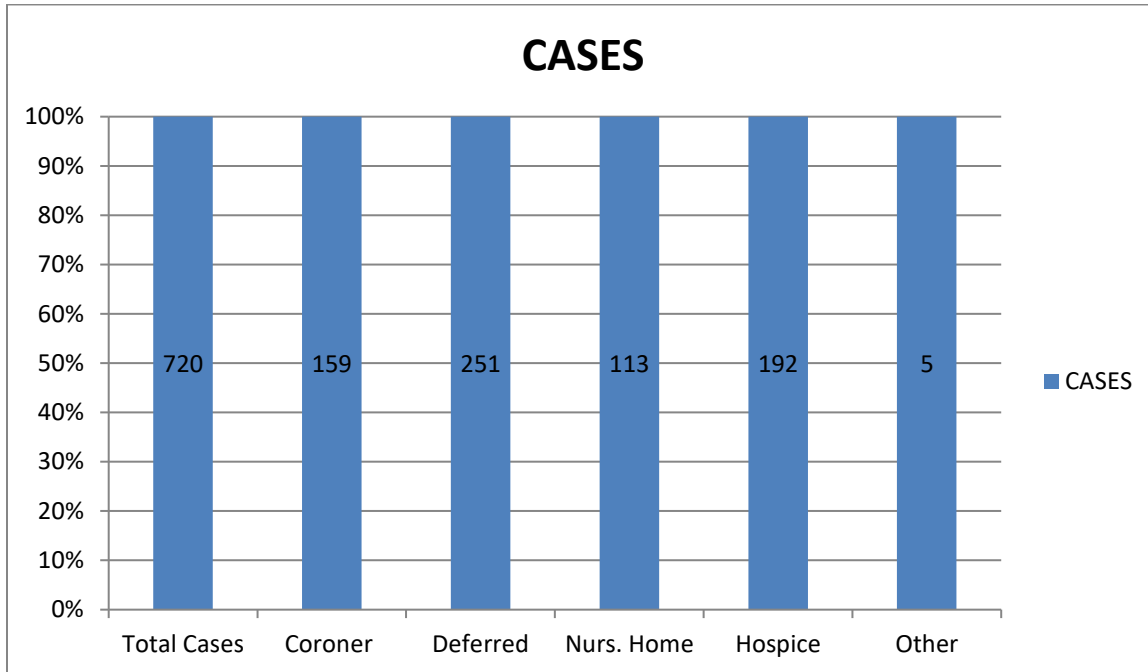
Advanced Decomps (14)

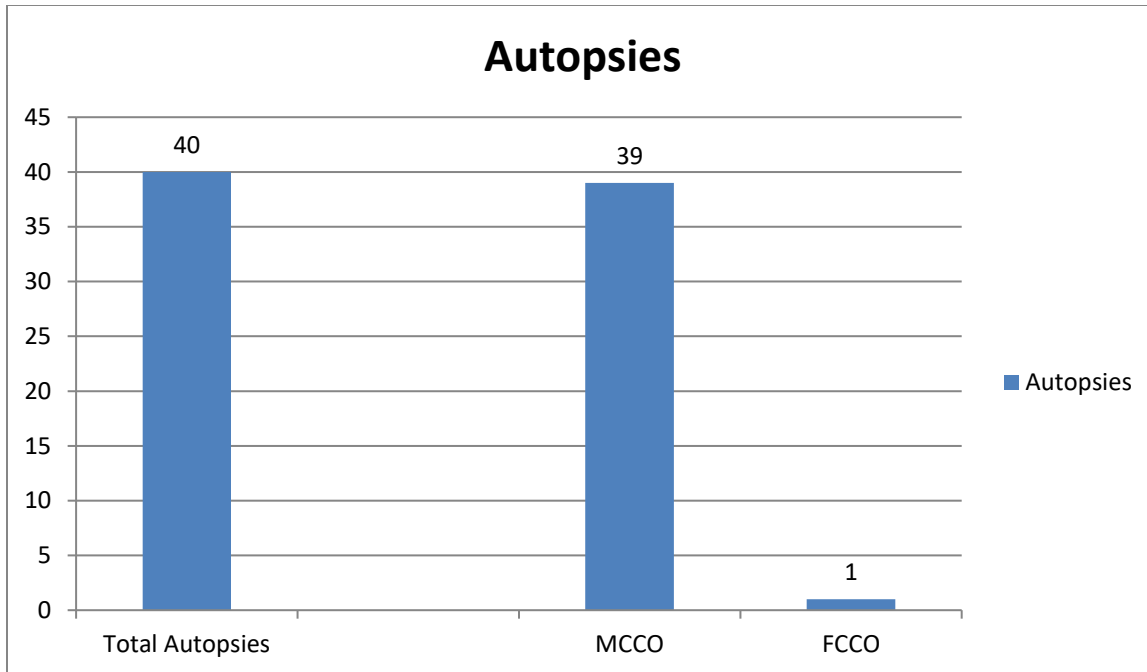
Unclaimed/Indigent- (17) Unidentified Bodies-(1) Exhumations-()

Cremation Authorizations (5) Initial Death Notifications (4)

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

Types Of Cases





Cost to County Per Case/Autopsy

(Forensic) Montgomery County= \$1750.00 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.



2022-2024 CASE STATS COMPARISON

	2022	2023	2024
TOTAL CASES	720	628	670
DEFERRED	251	199	207
HOSPICE	192	201	185
NURSING HOME	113	87	139
OTHER	5	11	3
CORONER CASES	159	130	137
NATURAL	48	43	56
ACCIDENTAL	83	71	70
DRUG OVERDOSES/Related	60/13	50/11	36/10
SUICIDES	13	12	3
HOMICIDES	4	2	1
UNDETERMINED	8	3	6
PENDING	x	x	1
AUTOPSIES	33	24	39
TOXICOLOGY CASES	91	78	78
SCENE RESPONSES	120	98	83
REMOVALS	69	48	71
UNCLAIMED/INDIGENT	6	6	17
ADVANCED DECOMP	19	17	14
IN CUSTODY DEATHS	X	X	12



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
2024	39	1	x	41

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
2024	36	8		26	6	16	25	2



TRENDS IN CASES IN 2024

- 1. The total number of cases increased from 2023**
- 2. Hospice deaths were down, and Nursing Home Deaths were up from 2023. This is a new trend that we haven't seen for several years.**
- 3. Drug Overdose deaths were much lower from previous years, while overall accidental deaths were about the same.**
- 4. Suicides were pleasantly much lower than previous years.**
- 5. Homicides were down by 50% from 2 to 1 for the year. This does not include any incidents that occurred in our county, but the victim died in another county.**
- 6. Undetermined deaths were about the same with advanced decomposition cases consistently high. We had a record number of cases that needed DNA to make positive identification.**
- 7. The number of Unclaimed/Indigent cases increased and doesn't take into account all of the city's indigent cases as they are handled directly by the funeral homes in most cases.**
- 8. In-custody of law enforcement deaths, which includes the two state prisons, were greatly increased- which in-turn increased the number of autopsies that were performed.**



GOALS FOR 2025

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.

2024 saw several difficult cases, some with the need to use DNA to make positive identification. We are continuing to see a trend of individuals that have died alone and not found for several days later. This is a trend that we saw an increase with the pandemic but continues to be an issue in our county. We are discussing with our stakeholders on options to try preventing such deaths.

We end 2024 with (1) one open case that we are waiting on lab results from the Ohio Bureau of Criminal Investigation and Identification.

With our re-accreditation completed, we can concentrate on ways to make our office better and more efficient.

Our goal is to be better than in 2024.