

County of Lehigh | Office of the Coroner
County of Lehigh | Office of the Coroner



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Year End Report



DEDICATION:

IT IS RECOGNIZED THAT EACH STATISTIC LISTED IN THIS REPORT REPRESENTS THE DEATH OF A PERSON WHOSE LOSS IS GRIEVED BY FAMILY, FRIENDS, AND LOVED ONES. OUR COMPASSIONATE TEAM TAKES PRIDE IN EVERY PERSON WE SERVE, FROM THE DECEDENTS TO THEIR FAMILIES THAT MOURN THEIR LOSS.

TO THE PERSONS OF LEHIGH COUNTY AND BEYOND THIS COMMONWEALTH AND NATION THAT HAVE SUFFERED THE LOSS OF A FAMILY MEMBER, LOVED ONE, FRIEND, OR NEIGHBOR; THIS REPORT IS DEDICATED.

Sincerely;



Scott M. Grim, D-ABMDI
Coroner – County of Lehigh

INTRODUCTION

The Coroner's Office serves families by investigating sudden and unexpected deaths to determine the Cause and Manner of Death. Moreover, deaths that occur under violent or suspicious circumstances are what seem to make the top headlines. The Coroner's Office is tasked by Statutes of the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania to investigate all reportable deaths that occur within the geographical boundaries of the County of Lehigh.

The Lehigh County Coroner's Office staff recognizes that tragedy surrounds a premature death and performs their investigations, in part, to assist the grieving family. A complete and thorough investigation can simply serve to answer the question of what happened, or it may be able to provide insight for siblings and children to be evaluated and assist in dealing with any inherited problems they could potentially face.

Often questions and tasks performed by our investigators seem very irrelevant in the immediate hours following the death of a loved one; however, these can become significantly more important in the following months. The surviving families, friends, and general citizenry can be assured that a thorough investigation is completed by the Lehigh County Coroner's Office. It should be noted that the Lehigh County Coroner's Office annual report does not include **all** deaths occurring in Lehigh County, rather the cases investigated by the Lehigh County Coroner's Office. For a total description of deaths occurring in Lehigh County please consult:

Vital Records, Pennsylvania Department of Health
P.O. Box 1528
101 South Mercer Street
New Castle, PA 16101
(724)-656-3100

This annual report is presented in three sections; 1) Overview of the Coroner's Office, 2) Total Case Information, and 3) Cause and Manner of Death. Sections 2 & 3 are aimed at presenting data routinely collected by the Coroner's Office. The graphs, charts, and numbers are designed to be self-explanatory and provide a picture of the investigations the Lehigh County Coroner's Office performs.

OVERVIEW OF CORONER'S OFFICE

DESCRIPTION OF THE CORONER'S OFFICE

The Coroner's Office is an independent, investigative division of the Lehigh County Government. The citizens of Lehigh County fund us through the Office of the Lehigh County Executive and Board of Commissioners.

Under the direction of Coroner Scott M. Grim, D-ABMDI, our office provides Medicolegal Death Investigations, Authorization of Autopsies; as needed, and Administrative Support as well as many other family assistance services.

The six basic functions of the Lehigh County Coroner's Office are:

- ❖ Determine the Cause and Manner of Death for individuals in a timely fashion.
- ❖ Identify the deceased with the highest degree of certainty possible and provide written documentation of same.
- ❖ Proper and timely notification of the legal next of kin.
- ❖ Prepare, maintain, and safeguard thorough and timely reports regarding our investigations.
- ❖ Account for, maintain, and safeguard personal property of the decedent and evidence.
- ❖ Provide assistance to families involved in our investigations as applicable.

The Coroner is an elected position, voted by the citizens of Lehigh County; the elected Coroner, Scott M. Grim, D-ABMDI, is well respected among his peers. He has served many years as President of the Pennsylvania State Coroner's Association. Currently, he is the Committee Chair of the Strategic Planning Committee of the PA State Coroner's Association. He is Past President of International Association of Coroners and Medical Examiners, a member of the National Association of Medical Examiners, and serves on various Death Review Teams both at the local level as well as for the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania. Additionally, he serves on the Board of the American Board of Medicolegal Death Investigators, which is the only accrediting agency for Medicolegal Death Investigators around the world. Coroner Grim was a founding committee member of the Scientific Working Group for Medicolegal Death Investigators (SWGMDI), an FBI/NIJ sponsored group that is charged with developing new guidelines for Medicolegal Death Investigators across the Nation. Additionally, Coroner Grim is a Founding Member and currently the Secretary/Treasurer of the Society of Medicolegal Death Investigators, Inc. (SOMDI). In addition, Coroner Grim is an annual speaker at the Pennsylvania Attorney General's Basic Coroner Education program. Prior to being named Coroner and subsequent elections' Coroner Grim was a sworn Law Enforcement Officer.

OUR MISSION

The mission of the Lehigh County Coroner's Office is to investigate the Cause of Death and to determine the Manner of Death of individuals who die within the boundaries of the County, as a result of sudden, unattended, violent or suspicious circumstances.

PURPOSE OF THE CORONER'S OFFICE

The Coroner's Office is an independent investigatory office. We are charged with determining the Cause of Death, as well as the Manner of Death. We receive this directive based upon the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania Title 16 § 1237. Whereas, the Coroner having a view of the body shall investigate the facts and circumstances concerning deaths which appear to have happened within the county, regardless where the cause thereof may have occurred, for the purposes of determining whether or not an autopsy should be conducted or an inquest thereof should be had in the following cases:

- a) SUDDEN DEATHS NOT CAUSED BY READILY RECOGNIZABLE DISEASE, OR WHEREIN THE CAUSE OF DEATH CANNOT BE PROPERLY CERTIFIED BY A PHYSICIAN ON THE BASIS OF PRIOR MEDICAL ATTENDANCE.
- b) DEATHS OCCURRING UNDER SUSPICIOUS CIRCUMSTANCES, INCLUDING THOSE WHERE ALCOHOL, DRUGS OR OTHER TOXIC SUBSTANCES MAY HAVE HAD A DIRECT BEARING ON THE OUTCOME.
- c) DEATHS OCCURRING AS A RESULT OF VIOLENCE OR TRAUMA, WHETHER APPARENTLY HOMICIDAL, SUICIDAL, OR ACCIDENTAL.
- d) ANY DEATH IN WHICH TRAUMA, CHEMICAL INJURY, DRUG OVERDOSE OR REACTION TO DRUGS OR MEDICATION OR MEDICAL TREATMENT WAS A PRIMARY OR SECONDARY, DIRECT OR INDIRECT, CONTRIBUTORY, AGGRAVATING OR PRECIPITATING CAUSE OF DEATH.
- e) OPERATIVE AND/OR PERI-OPERATIVE DEATHS IN WHICH THE DEATH IS NOT READILY EXPLAINABLE ON THE BASIS OF PRIOR DISEASE.
- f) ANY DEATH WHEREIN THE BODY IS UNIDENTIFIED OR UNCLAIMED.

- g) DEATHS KNOWN OR SUSPECTED AS DUE TO CONTAGIOUS DISEASE AND CONSTITUTING A PUBLIC HEALTH HAZARD.
- h) DEATHS OCCURRING IN PRISON OR A PENAL INSTITUTION OR WHILE IN THE CUSTODY OF POLICE.
- i) DEATHS OF PERSONS WHOSE BODIES ARE TO BE CREMATED, BURIED AT SEA OR OTHERWISE DISPOSED OF SO AS TO BE THEREAFTER UNAVAILABLE FOR EXAMINATION.
- j) SUDDEN INFANT DEATH SYNDROME
- k) STILLBIRTHS

As part of this investigation, the coroner shall determine the identity of the deceased and notify the next of kin of the deceased.

CORONER ACTIVITY

The staff of the Coroner's Office is involved in a wide variety of activities commensurate with the mission of the office. This includes responding to and investigating deaths at various locations throughout the geographic boundaries of the County, attending postmortem examinations, reviewing the detailed findings in order for the certification of the Cause and Manner of Death, and providing assistance to the families that we serve.

Staff members are well versed in dealing with families and assisting them in their time of need. Some details that the Deputy Coroner / Medicolegal Death Investigator assist families with are; office procedures, release of remains following an investigation, and release of property of the deceased that may have come into the possession of the Office of the Coroner. Additional duties include, reviewing investigative findings with the legal next of kin, and coordinating release of the deceased and/or any materials to the funeral home of the families choosing.

The Coroner's Office staff provides testimony both in court and in depositions. This can be for civil and/or criminal matters. Investigators routinely interact with police officers/investigators, attorneys, laboratory personnel, etc. Staff provides a wide range of services through the entire process of dealing with death and/or crimes related to a death.

Reporting is provided by the Office of the Coroner to Pennsylvania Department of Labor and Industry, Occupational Safety and Health Administration, U.S. Consumer Products Safety Commission, Pennsylvania Department of Transportation, and many other government and regulatory agencies. As part of efforts to keep the public safe and informed of the dangers of many items in public use this practice is continued, in hopes that it will make a difference correcting issues with certain products. We cooperate routinely and are actively involved in the Local and State Child Death Reporting Systems, where various members of the present health care systems as well as local health bureau review all children's deaths under the age of 21 to assist in various programs and needs ranging from suicide prevention to pandemic preparedness. Staff is active with the Methadone Death and Incident Review Team, where Coroner Grim has been appointed by Governor Tom Corbett. Additionally, the staff is routinely active in other entities of death investigation, whether it is for education, guidelines, or resources to assist with current trends in investigation procedures. Annually, at least four of our investigators serve on various committees with National Organizations to advance the field of Medicolegal Death Investigation. Some of these agencies are American Board of Medicolegal Death Investigators (ABMDI), Society of Medicolegal Death Investigators (SOMDI), International Association for Identification (IAI), National Association of Medical Examiners (NAME), and many others.

The Lehigh County Coroner's Office is the first Coroner's Office in the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania and the second worldwide to have received accreditation from the International Association of Coroners and Medical Examiners (IACME). We are currently certified. We have complied with recertification; continue to uphold the highest standards to maintain this accreditation and we are slated to be recertified again in 2016.

Death investigations today are on the forefront of some government programs that are calling for major changes. This shall include certification of the medicolegal death investigators, updated standards, increased education requirements, and increased continuing education requirements annually. Currently, 89% (16/18) of our investigators have attained the certifications that will become standard, to include every full time investigator in our office. All of our investigators attend annual training to attain and maintain the continuing education requirements, as well as attaining certification by the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania – Office of the Attorney General/Coroner's Education Board.

As you can tell by our advances, our office is prepared, trained, extremely motivated, and highly educated to meet the needs of this demanding field and serve the deceased and their loved ones in their time of need.

STAFF MEMBERS



SCOTT M. GRIM, D-ABMDI
LEHIGH COUNTY
CORONER



PAUL F. HOFFMAN, SR., D-
ABMDI
CHIEF DEPUTY
CORONER



ERIC D. MINNICH, D-ABMDI
FIRST DEPUTY CORONER
OPERATIONS MANAGER



MARIANNE GRANITZ
ADMINISTRATIVE
ASSISTANT



RAYMOND W. ANTHONY, III,
D-ABMDI
SENIOR INVESTIGATOR
DEPUTY CORONER



DANIEL A. BUGLIO, D-ABMDI
SENIOR INVESTIGATOR
DEPUTY CORONER



WENDY BRANTLEY, D-ABMDI
SENIOR INVESTIGATOR
DEPUTY CORONER



CRAIG HANZL, D-ABMDI
SENIOR INVESTIGATOR
DEPUTY CORONER



DAVID M. KRAUSE, D-ABMDI
SENIOR INVESTIGATOR
DEPUTY CORONER



RICHARD KROON, D-ABMDI
SENIOR INVESTIGATOR
DEPUTY CORONER



RICHARD B. PENDER, D-ABMDI
DEPUTY CORONER



JASON A. NICHOLAS, D-ABMDI
SENIOR INVESTIGATOR
DEPUTY CORONER



EDWARD ZUCAL, D-ABMDI
DEPUTY CORONER



MICHAEL BARTHOLOMEW
DEPUTY CORONER



ELISABETH CASCINO, D-ABMDI
DEPUTY CORONER



JACK A. FLITER, JR., D-ABMDI
DEPUTY CORONER



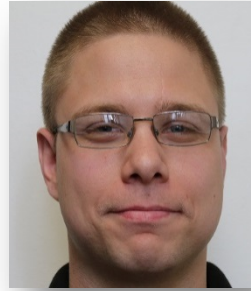
KELLY E. GILLIS, M.A., F-ABMDI
DEPUTY CORONER



DANIEL HALL
DEPUTY CORONER



ANDREW KEHM, D-ABMDI
DEPUTY CORONER



GEORGE C. WIRTH
DEPUTY CORONER

EXPLANATION OF DATA

The information provided in this report was compiled on deaths that were reported to the Lehigh County Coroner’s Office and occurred during the calendar year 2013. The report will review routinely collected data in a way to answer questions regarding mortality and public health; the implication of alcohol, medications, drugs of abuse, and firearms in violent deaths is emphasized. If there is to be a change in the quality of life amongst Lehigh County, perhaps this report can be the precipitating factor.

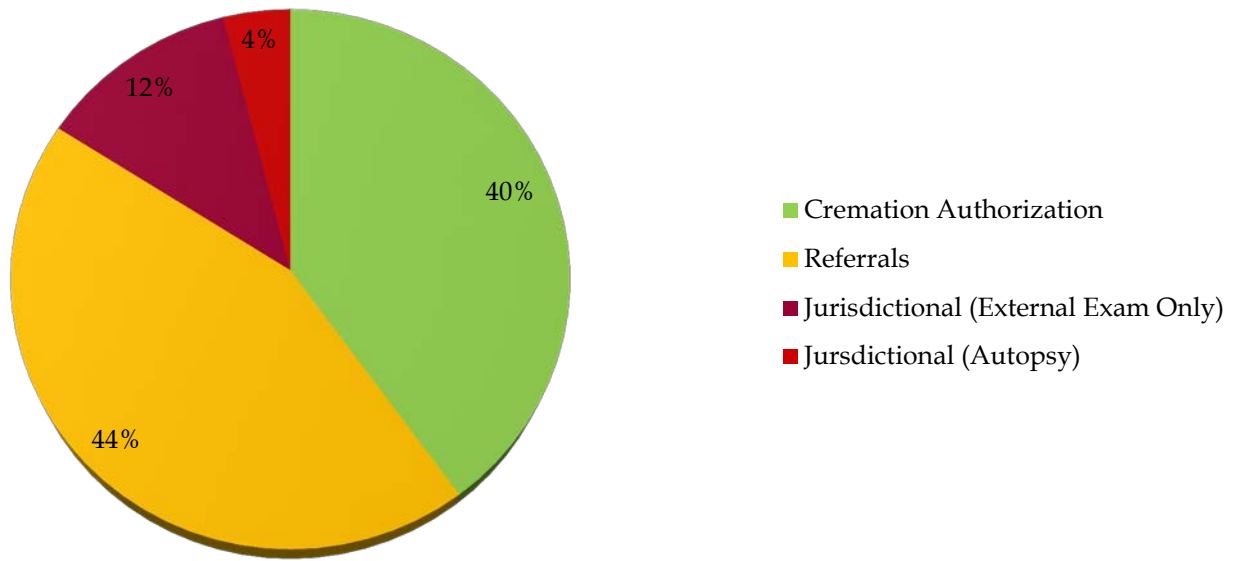
The County of Lehigh encompasses some 347 square miles, with U.S. Census figures showing the current estimated population of Lehigh County at just over 355 thousand people. Information that is available shows an estimated growth of approximately 14,000 for daytime population, which brings the total estimated population daily to 379,000 people. Please keep in mind that with the two regional trauma centers (St. Luke’s Hospital – Fountain Hill and Lehigh Valley Hospital – Cedar Crest) our office technically, does not only serve Lehigh County citizenry. We are also responsible to investigate the deaths of individuals at either of these two facilities that may have been brought here because of their specialty services; such as trauma care, burn care, and pediatric care. In all, there are ten (10) hospitals located in Lehigh County.

TOTAL CASE INFORMATION

In 2013, there were 5,446 investigations reported to our office. This is an approximate 10% increase in the number of investigations as compared to 2012. Of these investigations, 2,410 deaths did not require scene investigation or external examinations. Additionally, 2,195 of them were for authorizations to cremate. 841 of the death investigations required the Office of the Coroner to provide scene investigations as well as external examinations. Autopsies, in non-criminal cases, were not performed where scene investigation, circumstances, medical history, and external examination provided enough detail for death certification. In the 831 deaths, that the office provided detailed investigations of, we autopsied approximately 29% of those cases, or 240 autopsies.

The tables and figures summarize the manner of death in all cases reported to the Coroner’s Office. Of the cases that fell under the jurisdiction of the Coroner, a majority of 49% were natural, 51% were non-natural. While homicides seem to make up the spotlight of the news reporting for our investigations, these death investigations only comprised 2%.

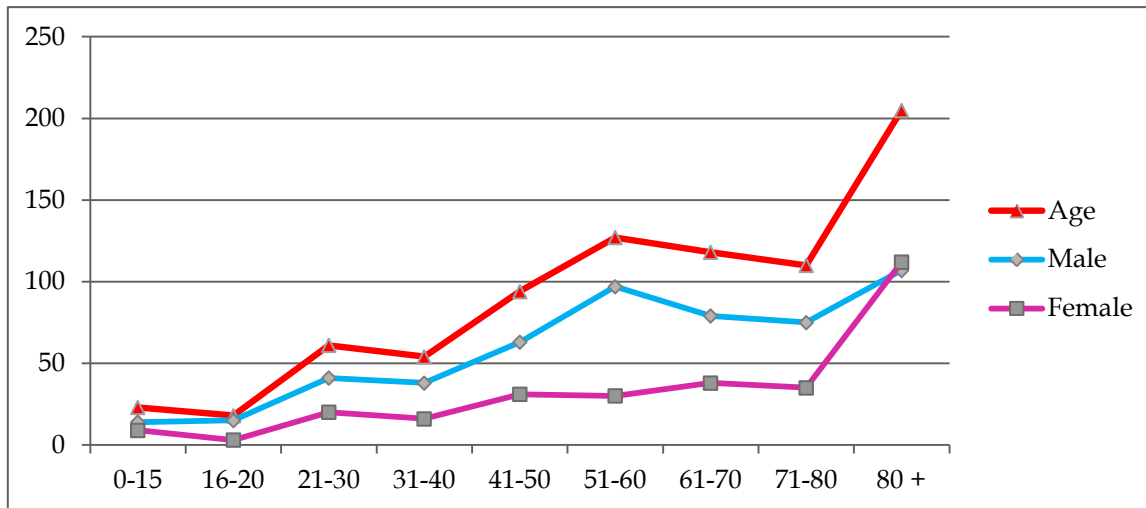
Investigations



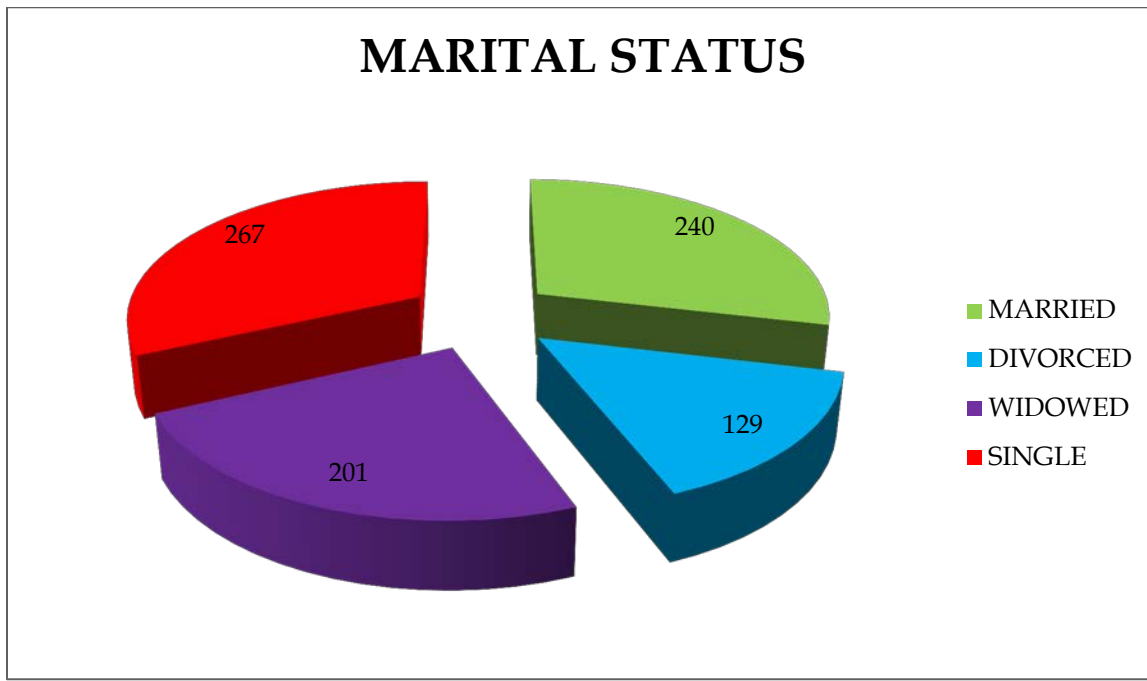
DEMOGRAPHIC BREAKDOWN

During 2013, there was a vast breakdown of demographic characteristics. Please refer to charts below for information on age groups, male vs. female, marital status, race, and more. Obviously, we are well-diversified society and these numbers only reaffirm this information.

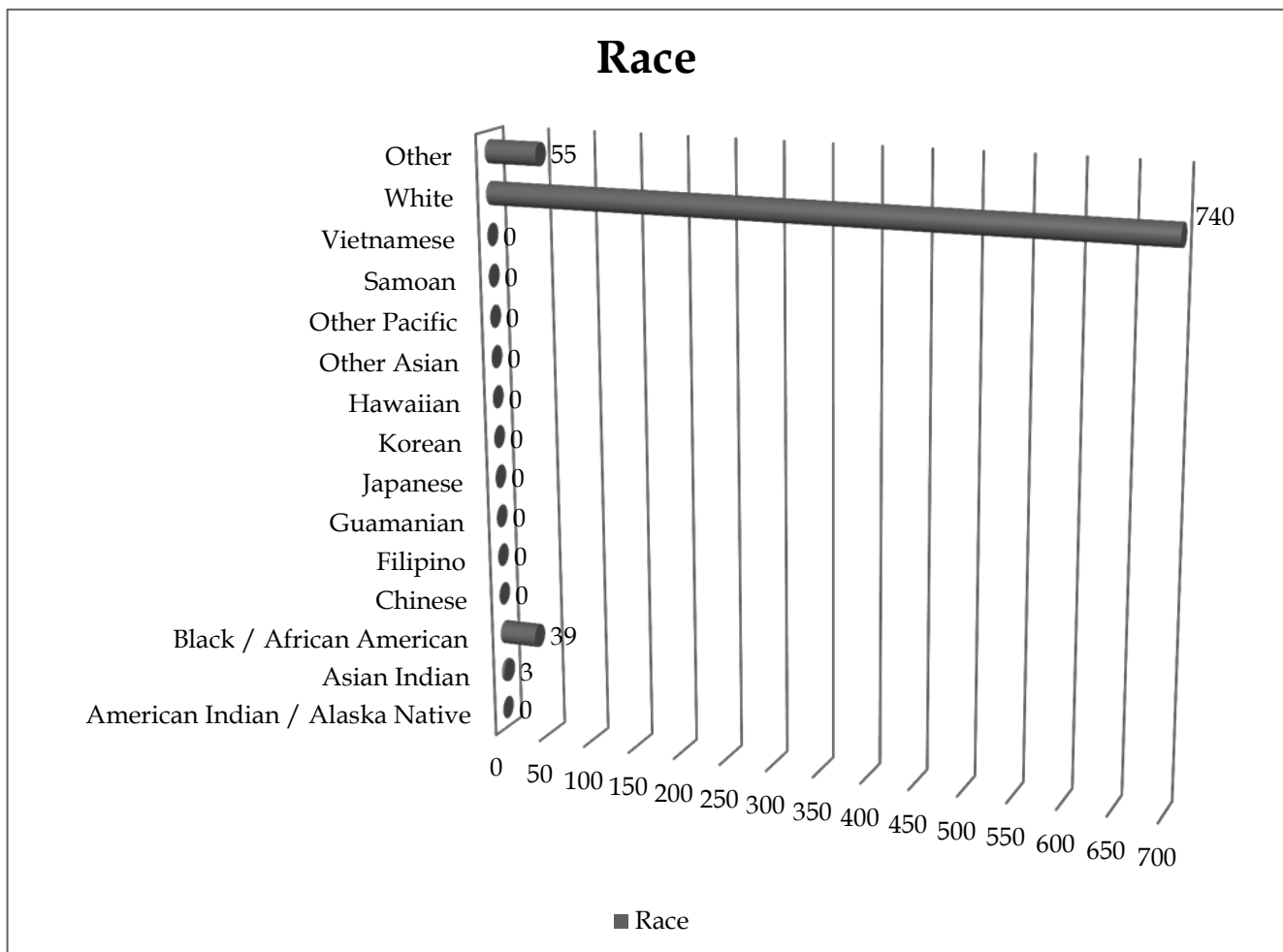
AGE GROUPS / MALE VS. FEMALE



MARITAL STATUS

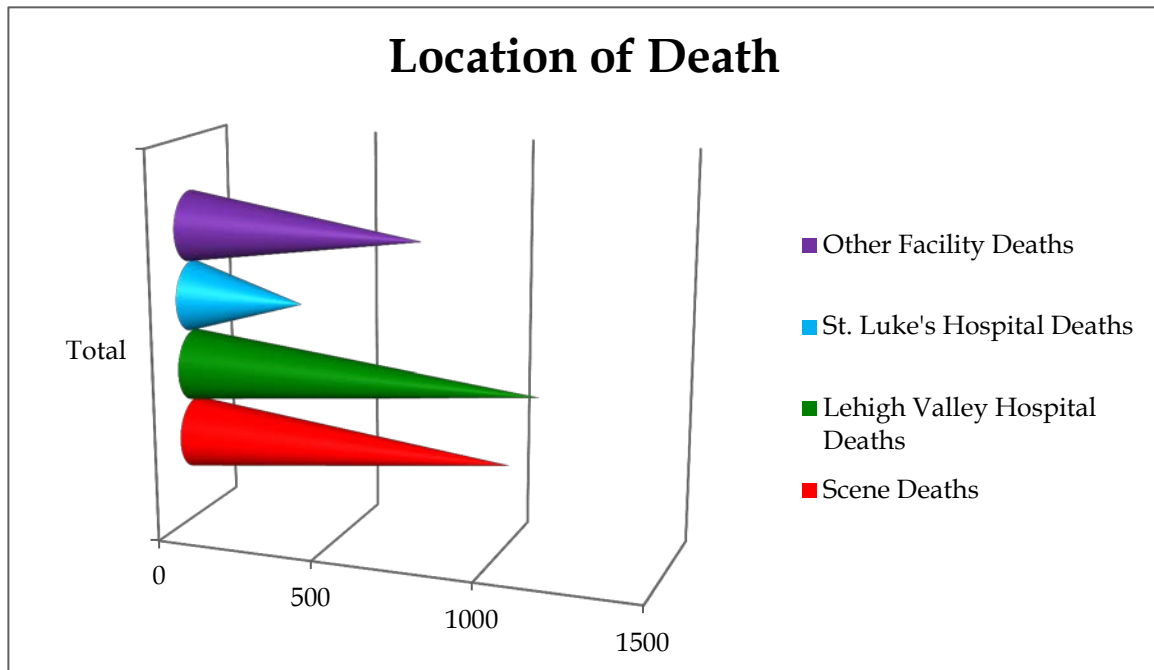
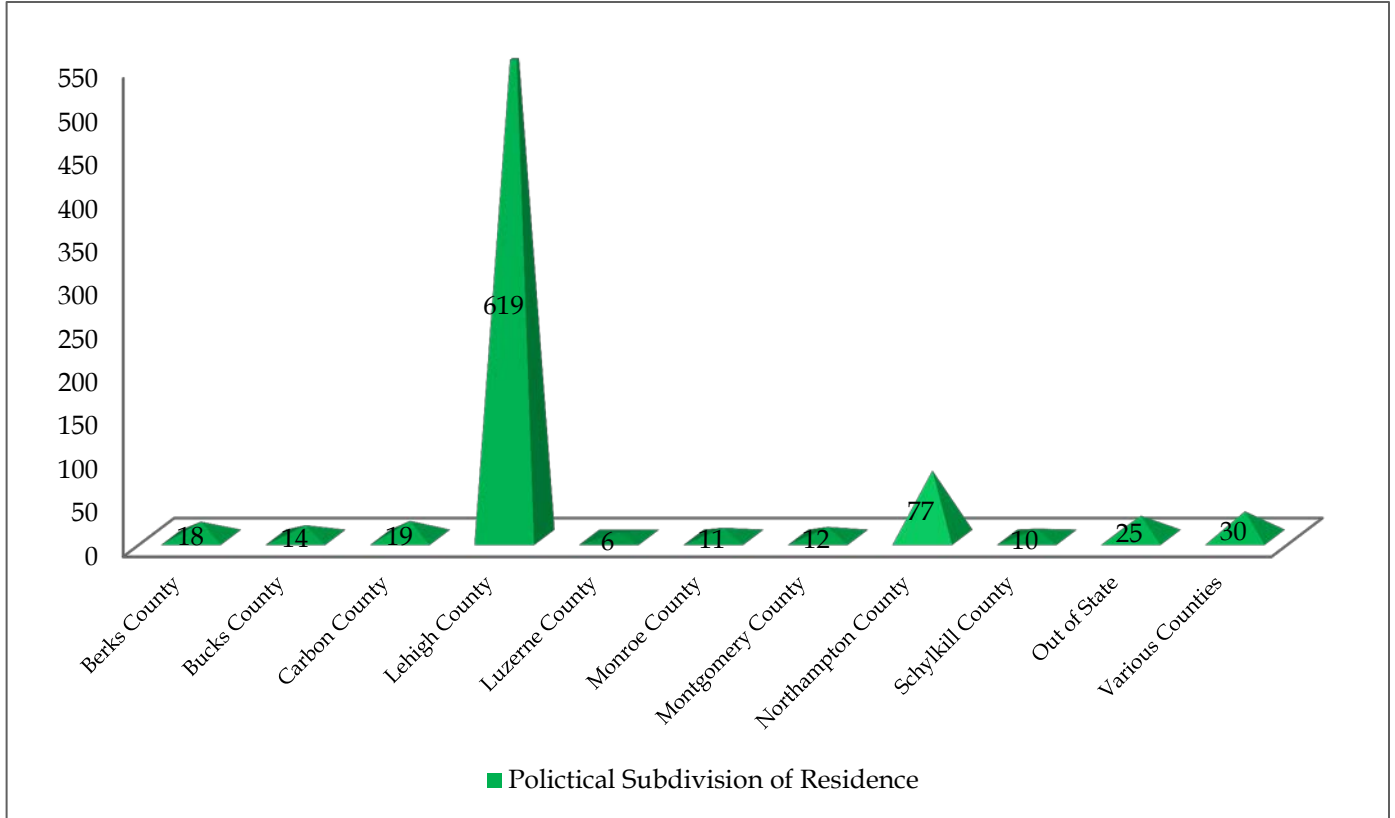


RACE

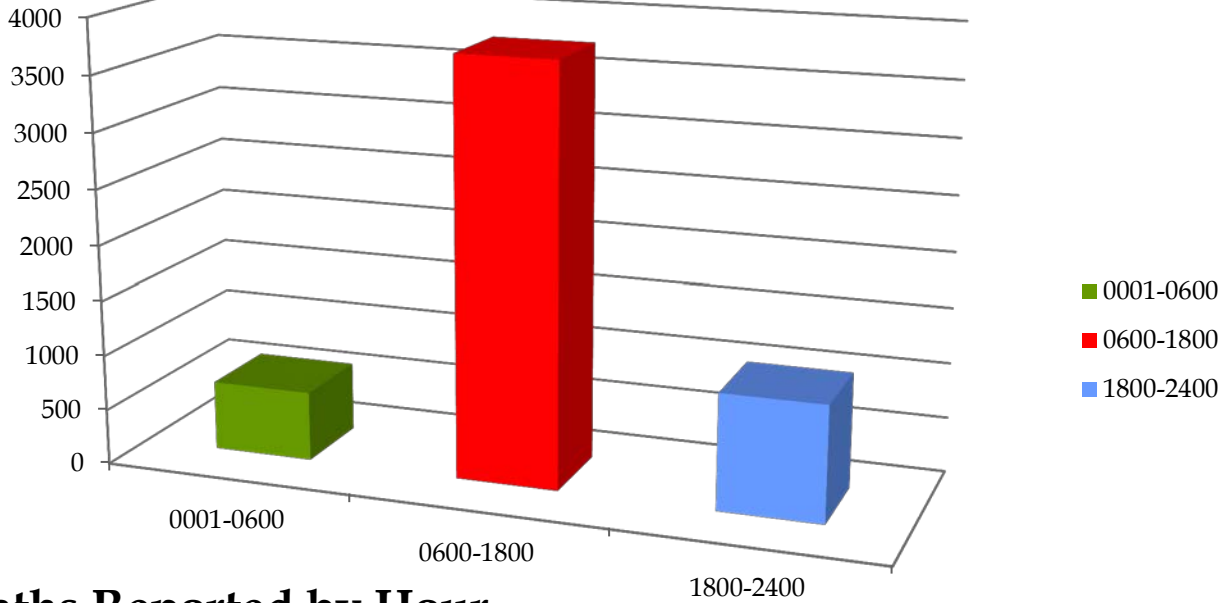
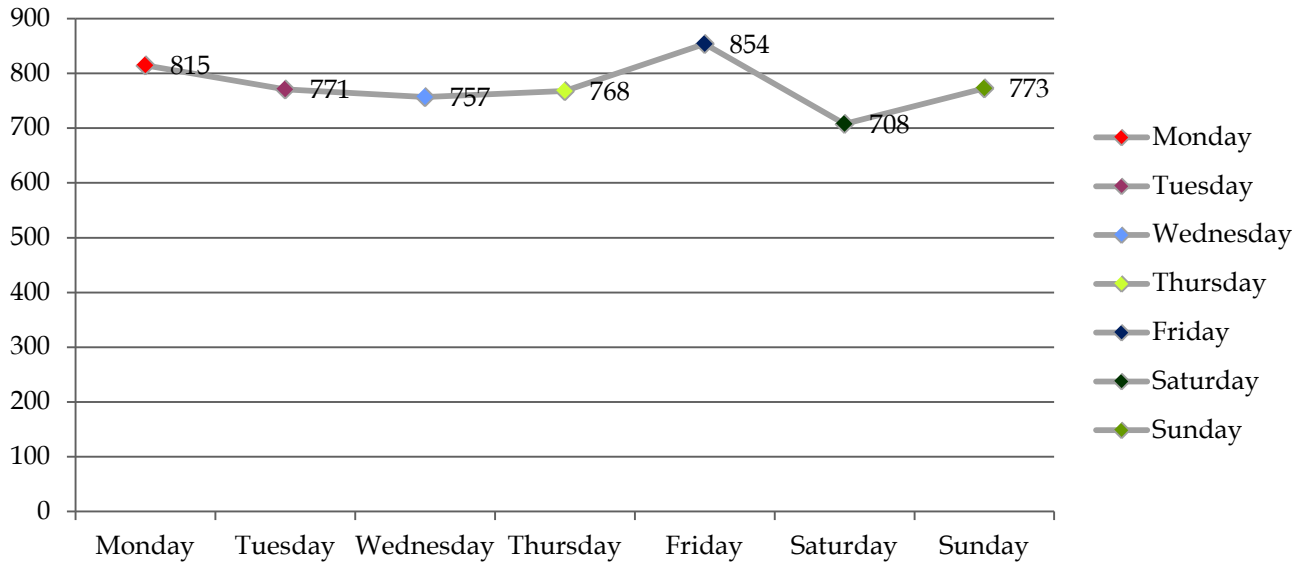


GEOGRAPHIC REGION

As depicted in the Explanation of Data section outlined on page 5, our office is faced with an influx of death investigations based on the location of the Level 1 Trauma Centers in our region. Below are two charts that outline the location of the populous of residency for our investigations. As you can clearly see, we serve more than just the residents of the County of Lehigh on quite a routine basis. The larger population that our office serves is from obviously Lehigh County, however Northampton County, Berks County, and many others require our services.

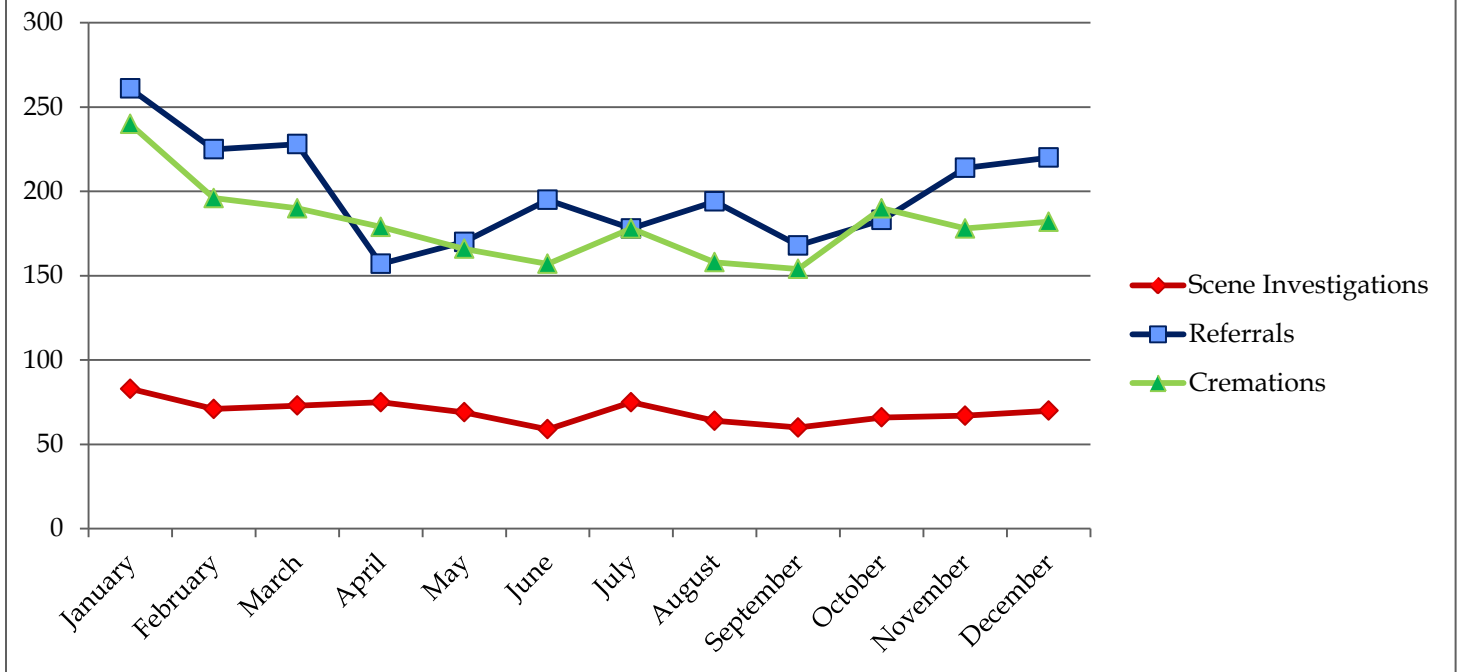


Deaths reported by Day of Week



Deaths Reported by Hour

Investigations by Month



CAUSE AND MANNER OF DEATH INFORMATION

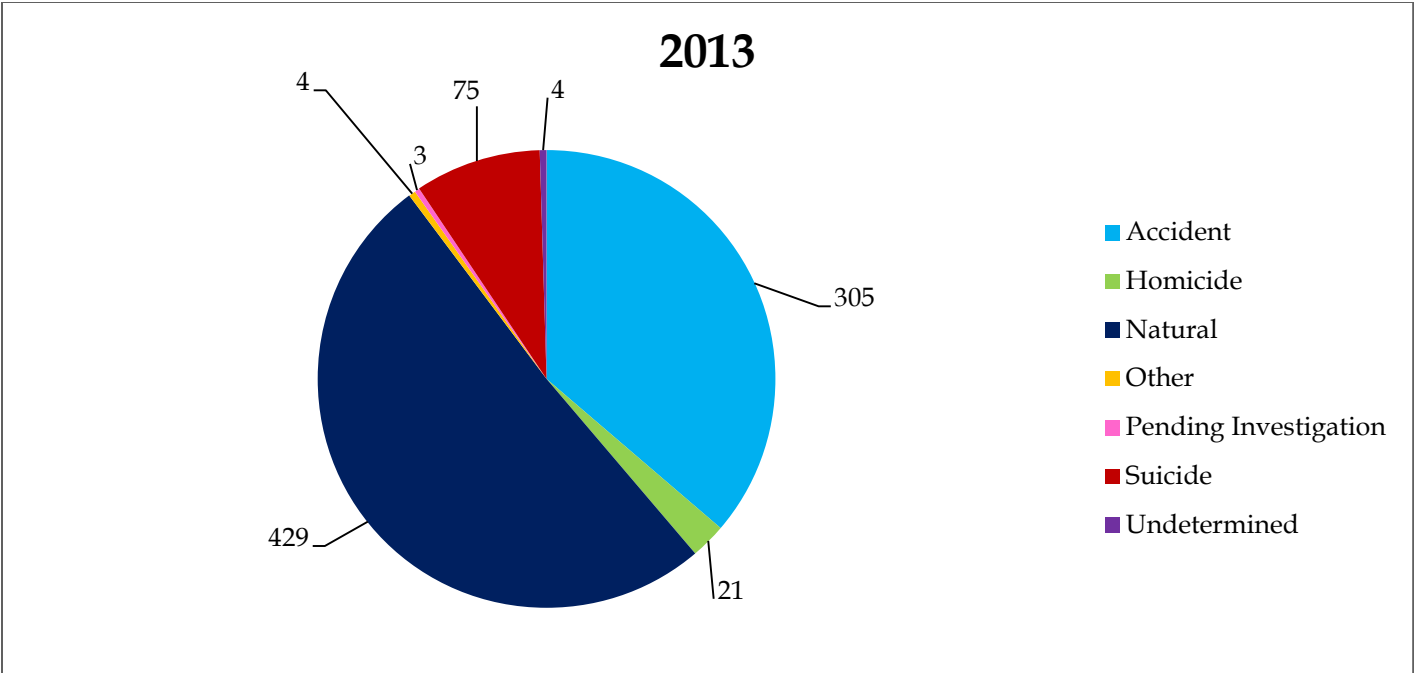
MANNER OF DEATH

Manner of Death was originally not required on the certification of death, however in 1910 the classification of the manner of death was added to the United States Certificate of Death. Currently, Manner of Death is not directly addressed by the World Health Organization. This was added to the death certificate by public health agents in an attempt to classify the circumstances of death.

Currently there are five (5) Manner of Death classifications on final death certificates. They are; Natural, Accident, Suicide, Homicide, and Could Not be Determined. If the investigation is in process, we can and will annotate the Manner of Death as Pending Investigation. This means simply stated, that the investigation is ongoing, however a death certificate is issued to allow for the families of the deceased to proceed with services.

Additionally we do conduct investigations where there is no death certificate issued and we will classify these deaths as Other. These investigations are technically not death investigations, however do fall under our purview. They are investigations such as bones found; typically animal remains, when a crypt of burial site is defaced and bones are unearthed, or simply when remains are found that it is unclear whether they are indeed human.

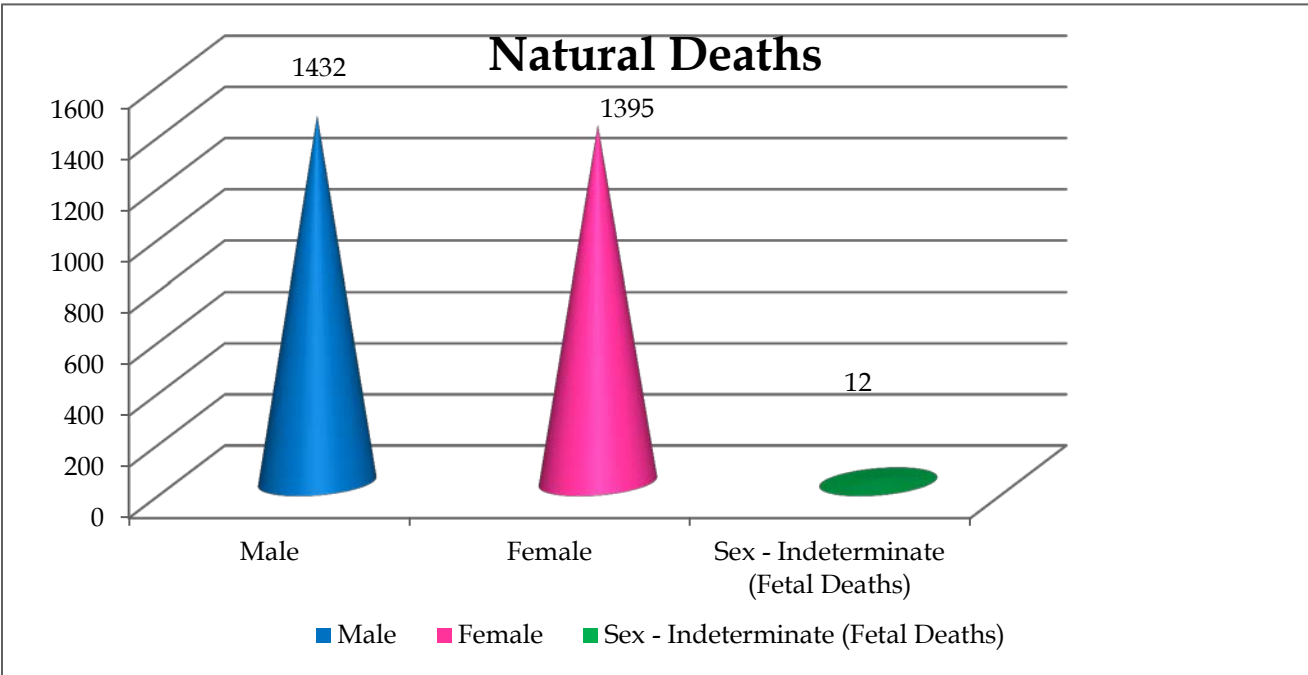
Out of the 841 scene investigations conducted by our office, there were: 429 Natural deaths, 305 Accident deaths, 75 Suicide deaths, 21 Homicide deaths, 4 Undetermined deaths, 4 Other (Bones/Crypt/etc.). As of April 1, 2014 there are still 3 deaths that are Pending further investigation. Below is a chart to show the breakdown.



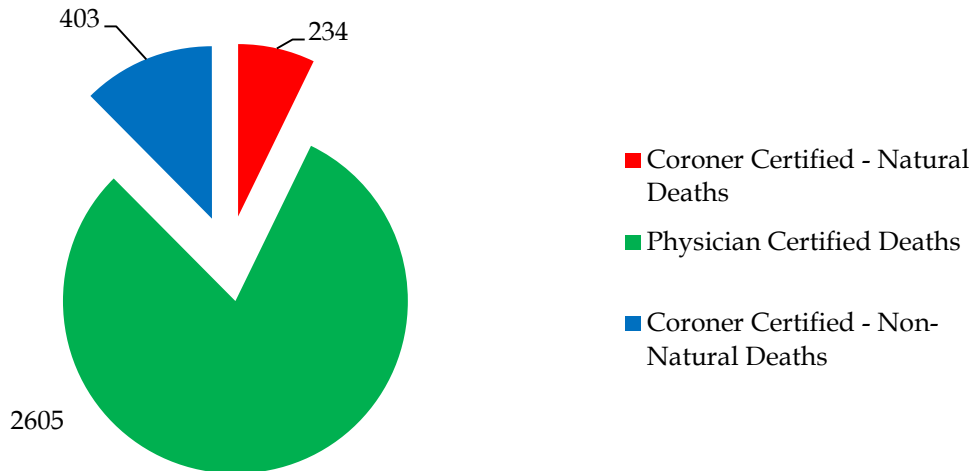
INVESTIGATIONS

NATURAL DEATH INVESTIGATIONS

Our office conducted 2,839 Natural death investigations in calendar year 2013. Of these over 2,800 investigations, only 429 required scene investigation and external examinations of the deceased. Of these investigations, the Office of the Coroner certified 234 of the deaths. The deceased’s attending physician certified the remaining 2,605 deaths. In the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, physicians are only able to certify Natural deaths and our office affords the opportunity to the attending physician to certify the death following our investigation if he/she so chooses. If the attending physician opts not to certify the death, our office certifies and issues the death certificate.



Death Certificate Certification



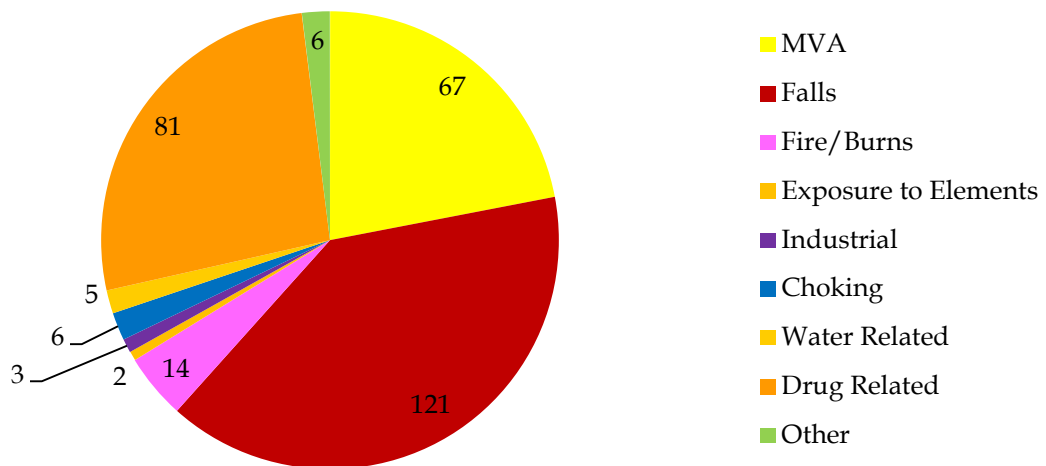
ACCIDENT DEATH INVESTIGATIONS

Our office investigated 305 deaths that were resultant of some type of injury and based on our investigation, the Manner of Death is Accident.

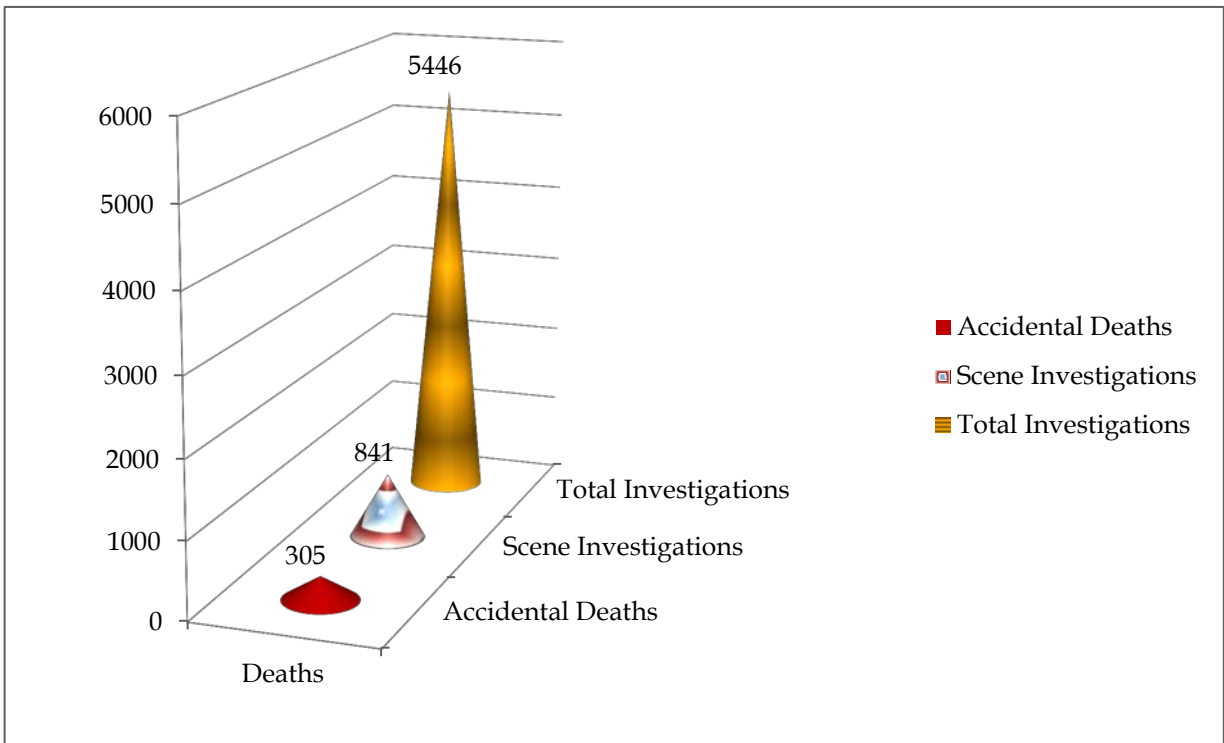
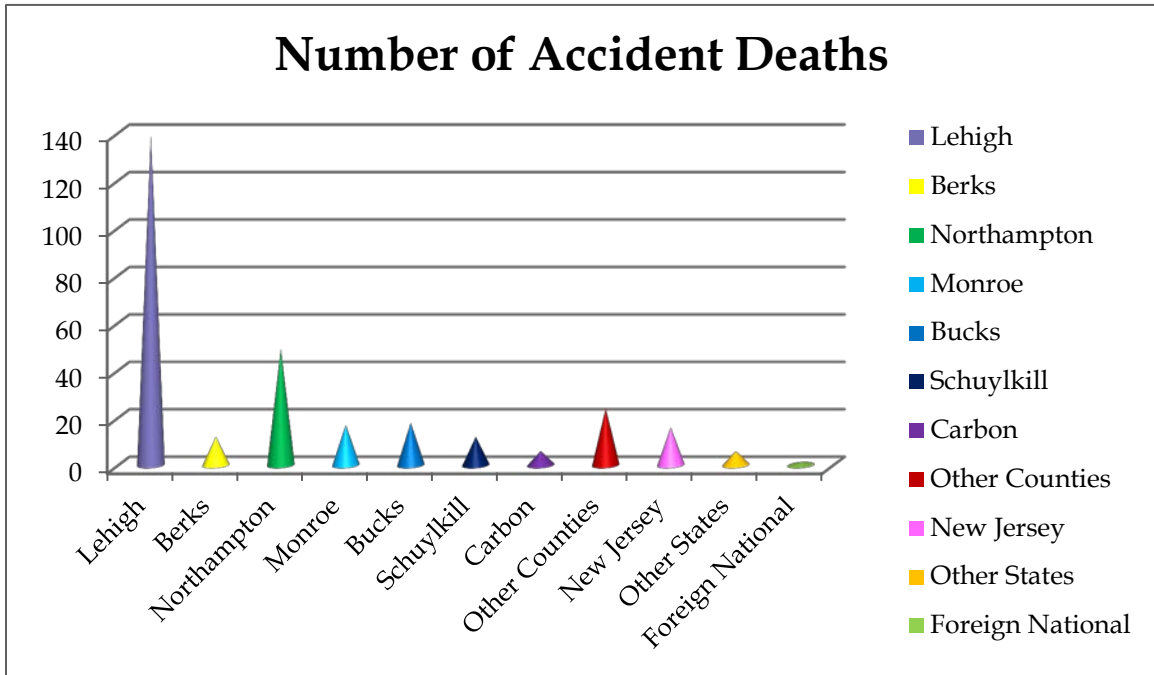
These deaths ranged from Motor Vehicle Accidents to Falls to Choking. On average, accidental deaths make up 36% of our scene investigations. This is caused by not only the vast highway system in Lehigh County, but also the influx of critically injured parties, via the two level one trauma centers within geographical boundaries of Lehigh County.

Please see the charts below that will depict some information regarding the demographics, breakdown of relevant circumstances, and sheer numbers of the accidental deaths our office investigates.

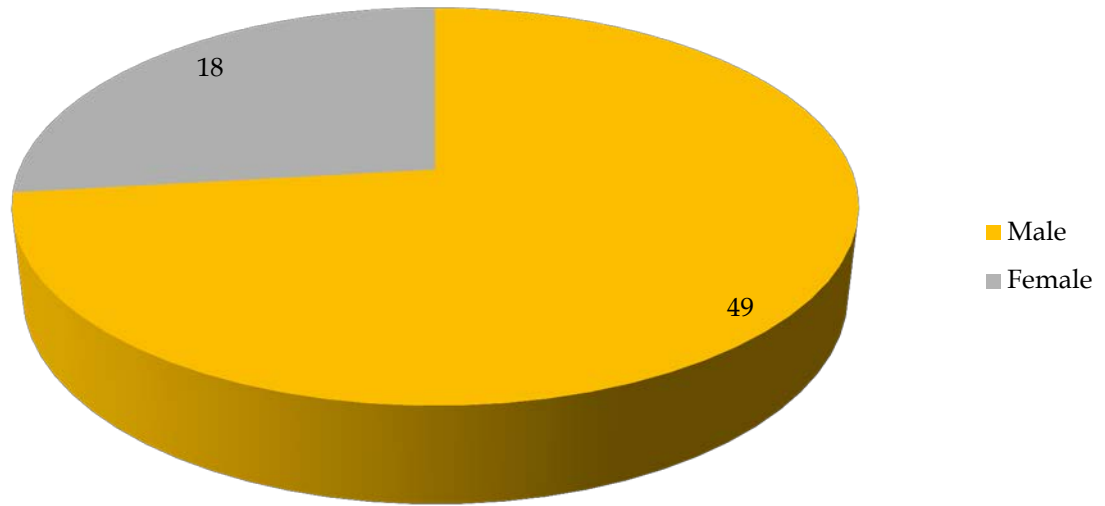
Accidental Deaths



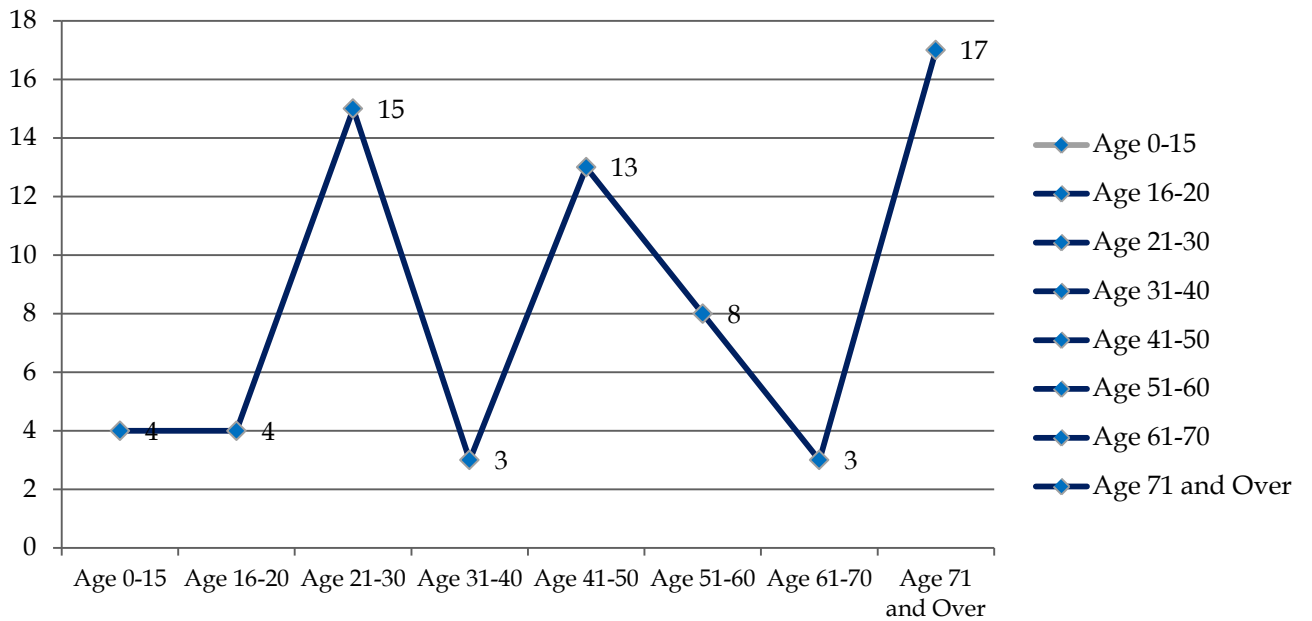
Number of Accident Deaths



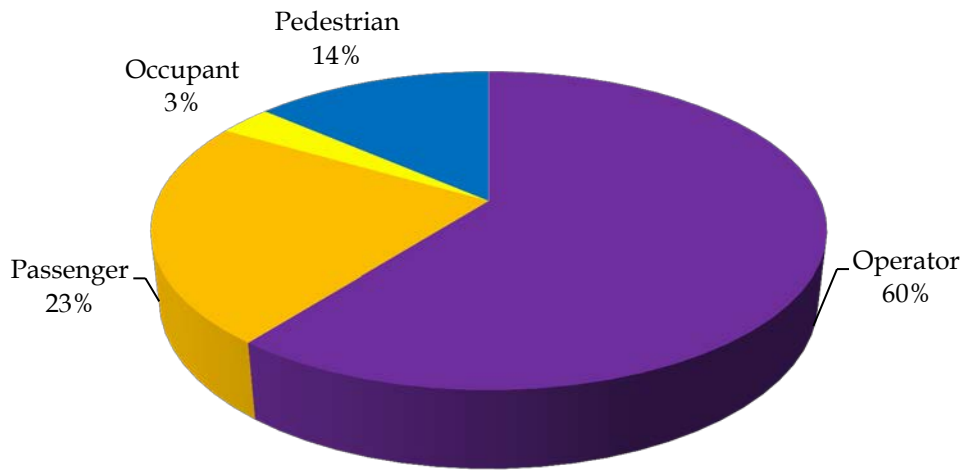
Motor Vehicle Accident Victims - Gender



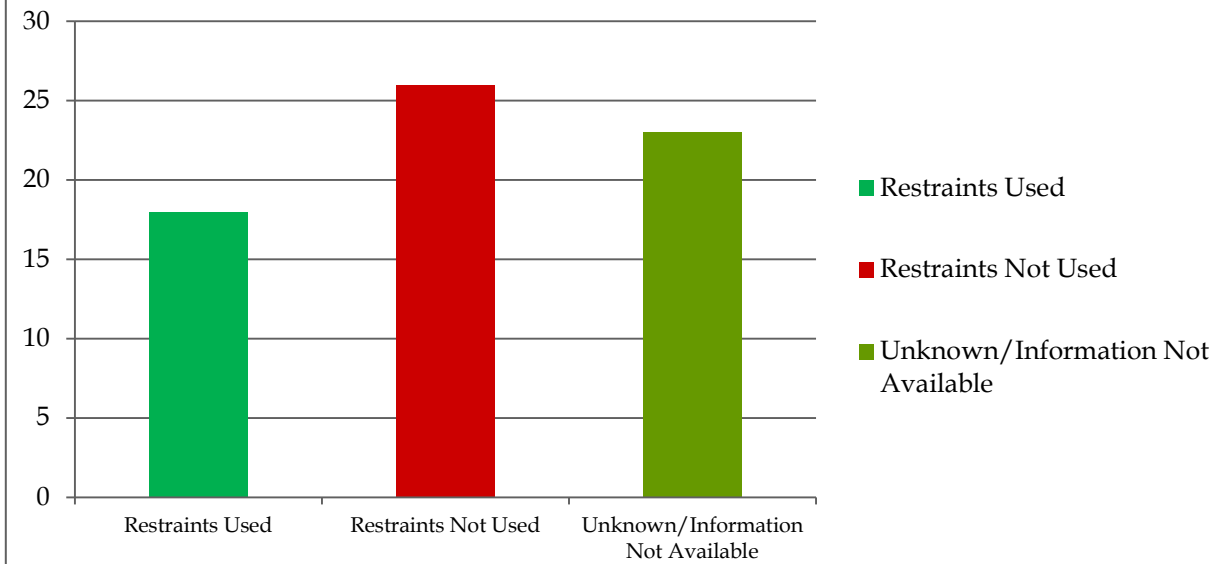
Motor Vehicle Accident - Age Groups



Motor Vehicle Accident - Category of Placement

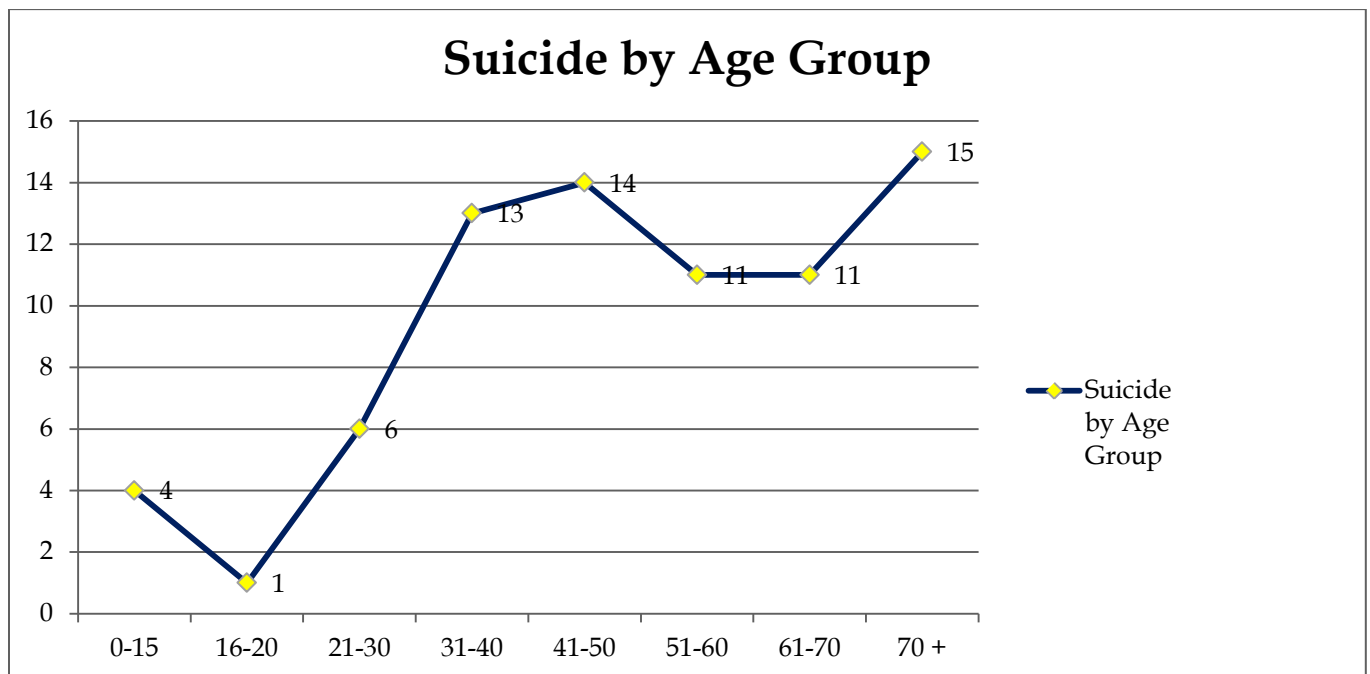
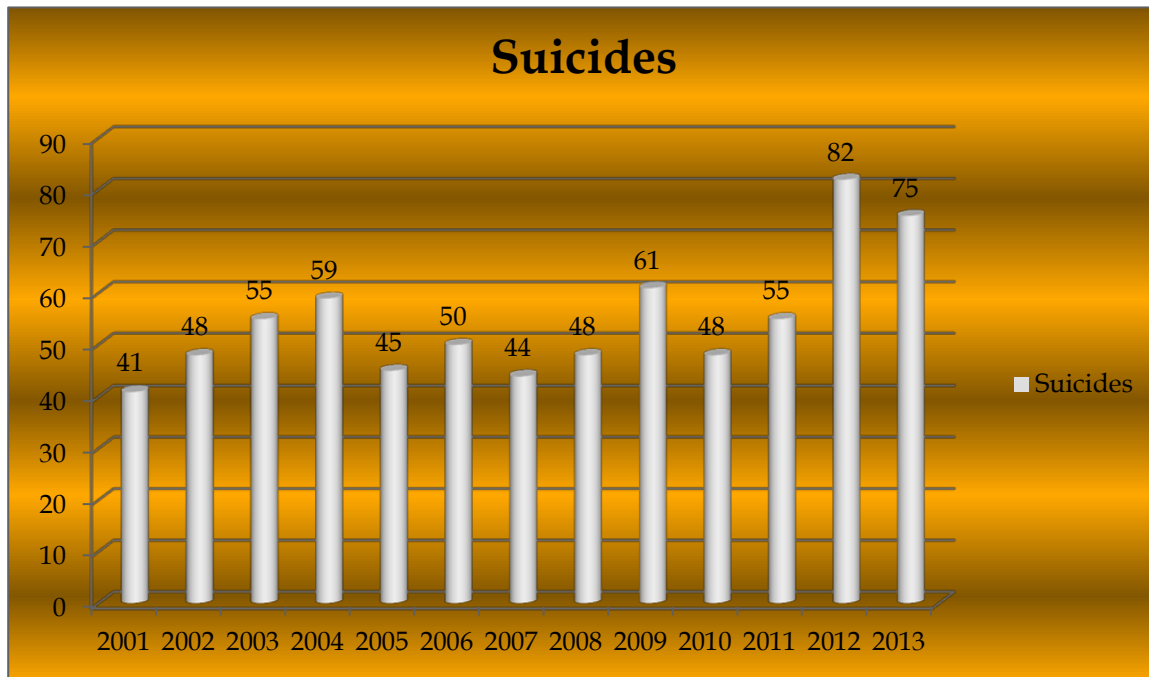


Seat Belt Information



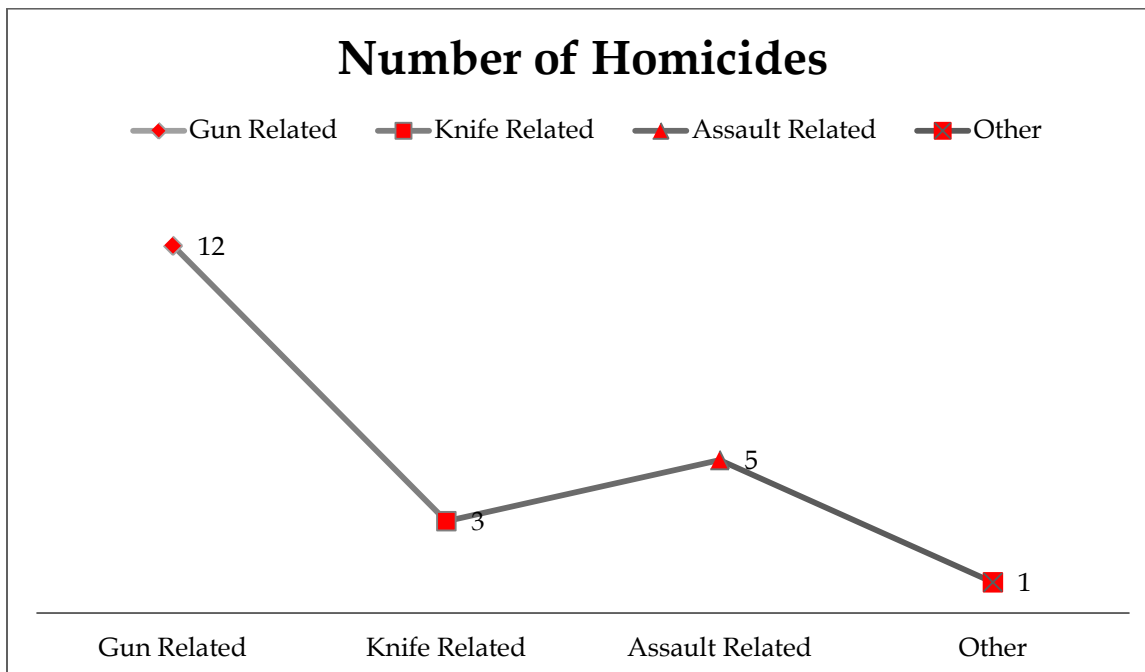
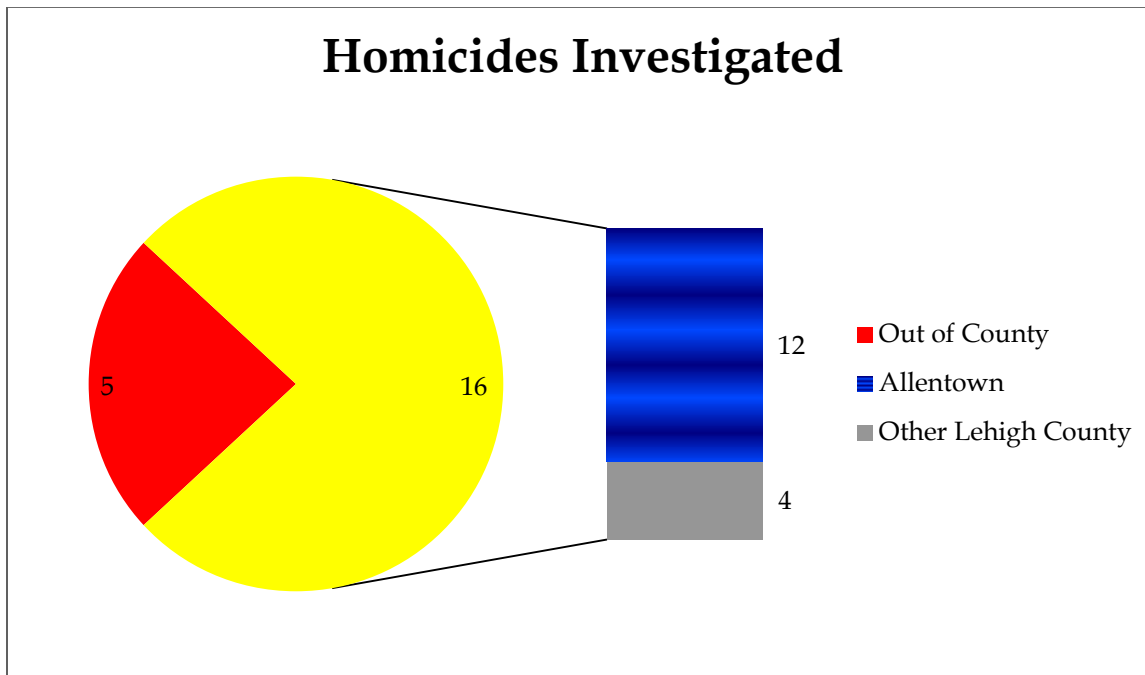
SUICIDE DEATH INVESTIGATIONS

In 2012, we have noticed a surge of suicide cases. As you can see by the chart below, there was a steady increase of suicide cases in the early 2000's, however, since that time we have maintained an average of 50 suicide deaths per year with an extraordinary total of 82 in 2012. Suicide deaths range in modalities from gun related to drug ingestions. There is a real concern coming in the later part of 2012, and continuing into 2013 as it appears that suicide cases are continuing to climb. In 2012, the average age of a suicide death was age 48; however, we had suicide cases as young as age 16 and as old as age 92. The Lehigh County Coroner's Office has been involved with suicide prevention activities, shall remain an advocate for suicide prevention, and is currently in cooperation with the Allentown Health Bureau working towards programs to support and provide awareness of the resources available to people who are contemplating turning to suicide.



HOMICIDE INVESTIGATIONS

Homicide investigations are quite possibly the most sensationalized investigations for any Coroner or Medical Examiner's Office. These investigations garner the most media attention and probably rightfully so. In Lehigh County in the year 2013, our office investigated and ruled 21 deaths Homicide. As you will see in the breakdowns depicted below; they include deaths resultant from firearms, assaults, and knife injuries. While, we again investigate Homicides from other counties based on the local availability of the health care systems, Homicides in Lehigh County outweighed the number of Homicides brought to the local medical facilities from other Counties. In 2013, the Office of the Coroner investigated 16 Homicides from within Lehigh County. Twelve (12) of them were from the City of Allentown. The remaining four (4) homicides were from other municipalities outside of Lehigh County.



UNDETERMINED

All possible efforts are made to determine both a Manner and Cause of Death for all deaths investigated by the Coroner's Office. In a very small percentage of the total cases (.4%, 4/841cases), the Manner of Death was unable to be classified, even with a complete autopsy, scene investigation, and toxicology testing.

CHANGE IS COMING TO THE CORONER'S OFFICE IN 2014

Future Events...

We have applied for and received a grant from the Pennsylvania Commission on Crime and Delinquency (PCCD), which administers the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania's portion of the National Institute of Justice: Paul Coverdell Forensic Science Improvement Grant. We received a total of \$57,023.00 towards this project. This grant has enabled our office to purchase a Computed Radiology System, which will allow our staff to take our own "digital" x-rays.

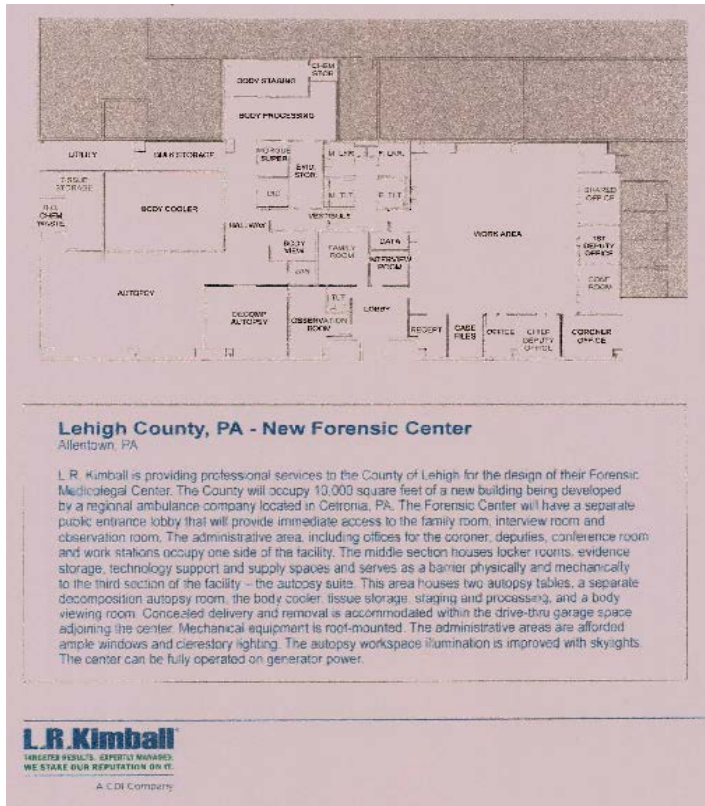
In early 2014 the Lehigh County Coroner's Office has received notice that a grant applied for in late 2013 from the Pennsylvania Commission on Crime and Delinquency (PCCD), which administers the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania's portion of the National Institute of Justice: Paul Coverdell Forensic Science Improvement Grant has been favorably awarded to our office. We will be receiving \$25,077.00 in funding to purchase and equip our full time investigative staff with Digital SLR camera equipment, as opposed to sharing two cameras for the entire office. That is over \$82,000.00 that the Office of the Coroner will be using to make improvements in services and equipment that have not come from the tax dollars of Lehigh County residents.

In 2014 the Office of the Coroner will be experiencing tremendous advancement. With the ever-increasing case load, need for Forensic Autopsies, storage capabilities, and sheer size of our team; Coroner Scott M. Grim has been a proponent of a combined Forensic Center since 1998.

Finally, with the help of the previous and current County Commissioners, County Executive, and Administration we are preparing for the opening of our new Lehigh County Forensics Center in Summer of 2014.

This will combine our operations staff, records section, and morgue services under one roof. This not only allows for increased efficiency, control, security, but productivity as well. We will be able to accommodate up to approximately 30 decedents, perform three simultaneous Forensic Autopsies, perform our own x-rays, detailed examinations in a controlled environment, and have ample space for our Investigations Section.

See below an informational brochure that the architect has provided some months ago.



See below a recent picture of the construction progress.



Picture of the Main Entrance



Picture of the Northwest Corner

Picture of the Southwest Corner



CLOSING REMARKS

The Office of the Coroner again has seen an increase in death investigations. Annually, these numbers continue to climb at an alarming rate with no signs of change in the near future. My office is well-trained, professional, and ready to deal with the needs of the deceased, their families, and the public as we have in the past and will continue to do in the future.

2013 has been an exhilarating year, with the groundbreaking of our very own forensic center that will be located at 4350 Broadway, Allentown PA 18104. This is South Whitehall Township, near the Lehigh County Parks area. This has been a tremendous undertaking. We will be co-occupying this facility with Cetronia Ambulance Corps. We look forward to our opening of this facility in mid-2014.

My office will experience growth in responsibilities, duties, and an increased ability to perform the vital functions of our office with this new Forensic Center. This would not have been possible without support of the Lehigh County Administration and Board of Commissioners. My staff and I are prepared, anxious, and ready to use this new facility to the fullest potential.

Additionally, all of my full time staff has completed the process of being nationally certified by the American Board of Medicolegal Death Investigators in 2013. There are only 2 part time investigators, both with less than 2 years' experience that are preparing for the certification. This again, shows the commitment, dedication, and professional standards that I employ in the Lehigh County Coroner's Office.

Thank you for taking time to read our annual report. This is provided to:

- County of Lehigh - Administration
- County of Lehigh Board of Commissioners
- County of Lehigh - Judiciary
- County of Lehigh - Row Officers
- And various boards and committees.

This is also available for public inspection on the website of the Office of the Coroner by navigating to the link provided.

<http://www.lehighcounty.org/Departments/Coroner/tabid/346/Default.aspx>

If you have any questions regarding this report or any operational issues of the Lehigh County Coroner's Office please feel free to contact the office or me by calling 610/782-3426.

Please note that this report has been furnished in electronic format. If you desire a printed version please contact me at my office number listed above.

Respectfully Submitted,



Scott M. Grim, D-ABMDI
Coroner
County of Lehigh

