



NORTH DAKOTA
DEPARTMENT *of* HEALTH

Office of the State Forensic Examiner

Annual Activity Report January 1, 2011, to December 31, 2011

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, 323 cases were referred to the state forensic examiner. Complete autopsies were done on 320 of these referrals. External examination without an autopsy was done on three individuals. Toxicology studies consisting of blood alcohols and at least a basic drug screen are a routine component of the autopsy. Thirty-one (31) 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 2011 referrals are categorized as follows: **Natural Cause – 71; Accident – 122; Suicide – 96; Homicide – 18; Pending Investigation; - 5; Undetermined – 11.** The forensic examiner office experienced an 8 percent increase in the number of referrals received this reporting period from the previous year.

In addition to the referrals discussed above, the Office of the State Forensic Examiner provided consultations to county coroners on 123 cases. Requests for solid organs, eyes and tissue were made by organ-procurement programs on 31 referrals. 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 autopsy technician. Support personnel for the office include four part-time/temporary autopsy assistants and one part-time/temporary administrative assistant/transcriptionist. After-hours and weekend coverage is provided by board certified medicolegal death investigators 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, 2011, to December 31, 2011

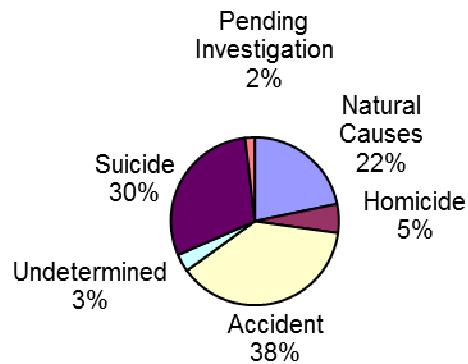
Referrals consist of cases referred to the forensic examiner by county coroners for an examination or autopsy.

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		
Barnes	3	2
Benson	4	2
Billings	1	
Bottineau	2	1
Bowman		
Burke	1	4
Burleigh	55	14
Cass	41	14
Cavalier	2	
Dickey	4	1
Divide	2	2
Dunn	2	4
Eddy	2	
Emmons	1	2
Foster	2	1
Golden Valley	2	1
Grand Forks		
Grant		
Griggs	3	1
Hettinger		
Kidder	1	1
LaMoure		1
Logan	1	
McHenry	3	2
McIntosh	1	
McKenzie	14	5
McLean	5	1
Mercer	11	2
Morton	19	2
Mountrail	7	3

COUNTY	REFERRALS	CONSULTATIONS
Nelson	1	
Oliver	1	
Pembina	4	4
Pierce	2	1
Ramsey	5	2
Ransom		
Renville		1
Richland	5	3
Rolette	13	10
Sargent	1	
Sheridan		1
Sioux	6	1
Slope		1
Stark	17	2
Steele	1	2
Stutsman	15	4
Towner		1
Traill		3
Walsh	3	1
Ward	38	12
Wells	1	
Williams	21	8
Totals	323	123

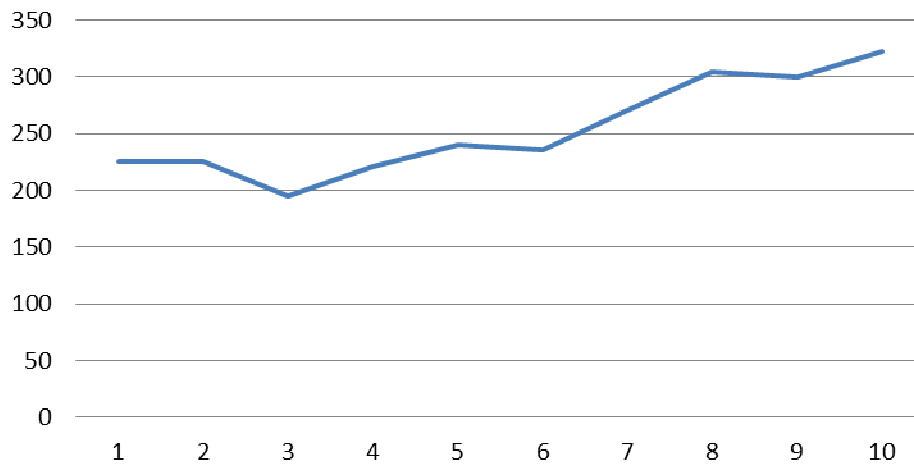
**Coroner Referrals (323)
2011
Manner of Death**



Manner of Death
Totals for 2011

Natural Causes	71
Accident	122
Suicide	96
Pending Inv.	5
Undetermined	11
Homicide	18
Total	323

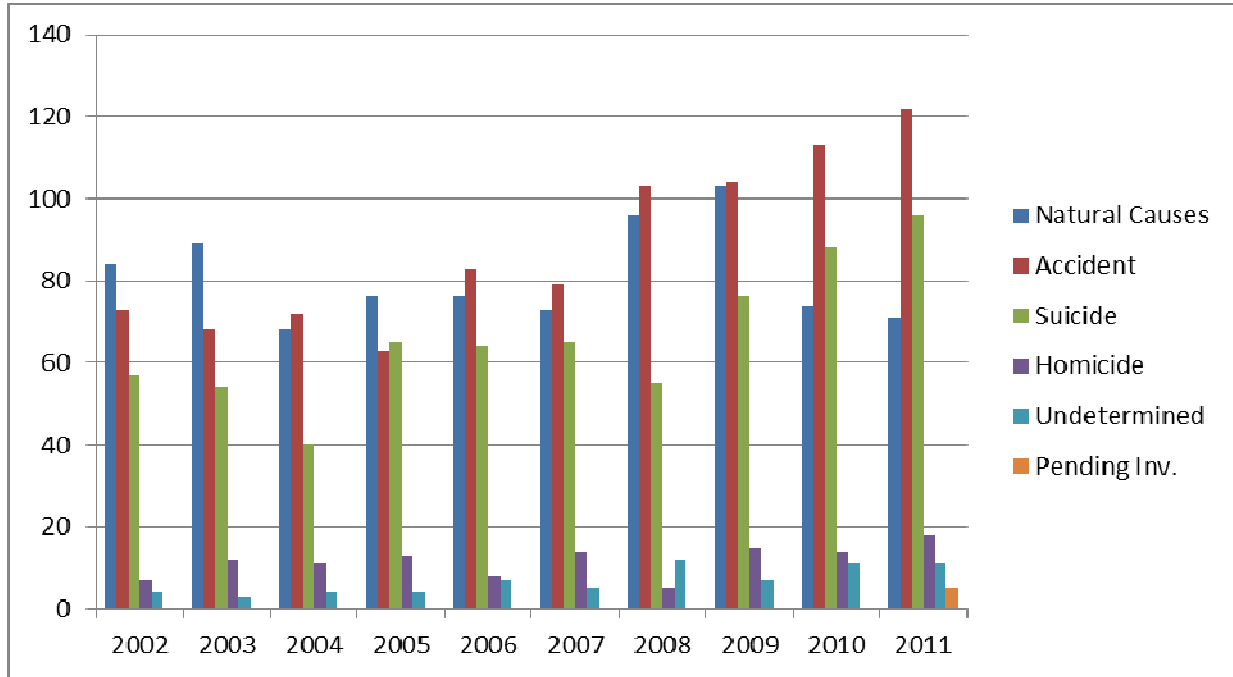
Manner of Death - 10-yr. Summary



Year	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011
	225	226	195	221	240	237	274	305	300	323

(A caseload increase of 36% from 2006 to 2011)

Manner of Death – 10 years



	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011
Natural Causes	84	89	68	76	76	73	96	103	74	71
Accident	73	68	72	63	83	79	103	104	113	122
Suicide	57	54	40	65	64	65	55	76	88	96
Homicide	7	12	11	13	8	14	5	15	14	18
Undetermined	4	3	4	4	7	5	12	7	11	11
Pending Inv.										5
Total	225	226	195	221	240	236	271	305	300	323