



MEDICAL EXAMINER'S OFFICE *Washington County*

2018 Year in Review

Our Mission and Outcome

Wisconsin State Statute 979 requires that a medical examiner or coroner investigate all deaths where there are unexplained circumstances, homicide, suicide, death following abortion, death due to poisoning, death following accident, death where no physician is in attendance within 30 days prior to death, and death where the deceased physician is not able to sign the death certificate. These investigations can be scene investigations or non-scene related inquiries based on the circumstances surrounding the death. State statutes further require a medical examiner to make personal inquiry and examination of the deceased prior to issuing a cremation permit.

In accordance with State Statutes, the Medical Examiner's Office provides independent, scientifically driven, medico-legal death investigations into deaths occurring in Washington County or deaths as a result of events occurring within the County.

In addition to investigative activities, state statutes require medical examiner participation in the surveillance and reporting of diseases of public health concern and in the facilitation and coordination of tissue donation.

In 2018, the Washington County Medical Examiner's Office continued to operate under the Inter-Governmental Agreement with Waukesha County. Management and oversight of all medical aspects of forensic death investigation are performed by a Board Certified Forensic Pathologist. This cooperative agreement gives Washington County unprecedented access to forensic experts, elevating the service the department provides to meet continuously advancing nationally recognized standards.

Submitted February 4, 2019 by
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Lead Investigator

2018 Year in Review

The following table details major activities performed by this department.

	2016 Totals	2017 Totals	2018 Totals
Scene Investigation	188	203	207
Non-Scene Investigation	447	456	409
Cremation Viewing	214	265	274
External Examination	69	80	93
Autopsy	94	97	94
Cremation permits issued	592	632	602
Death certificates signed	164	177	191

Accomplishments

- Continued operating under the Inter-Governmental Agreement with Waukesha County which designates Dr. Lynda Biedrzycki Medical Examiner of Washington County and provides the services of two additional forensic pathologists.
- Reviewed the release of records policy and practices to ensure they appropriately reflect any legislative changes made in the last 24 months.
- Recruited and began training individuals to fill two part-time Deputy Medical Examiner 1 positions.
- Continued to refine statistical reporting tools used to share information with our community partners.
- Continued participation in the Child Death Review Team meetings.
- Began auditing all internal processes and procedures to ensure that they follow published County Policy and guidelines.

2018 Year in Review

2018 Fiscal Condition

In 2017 this year's budget was approved at \$515,884.00. Based on data available at the time this report was written, department expenses were \$1,631.72 under budget. The greatest impact to the 2018 budget was the decrease in the number of cremation permits issued and the unexpected expense of replacing the morgue refrigeration unit. Issuing fewer cremation permits led to an \$11,000.00 decrease in revenue. The work done in the morgue was an unexpected expense of \$10,961.00.

An additional impact to the budget was the amount of overtime necessary to complete cases. With the increase in complex scene cases and the number of cases occurring within a short period of time there was a 72% increase in overtime, \$6,500.00 over the budgeted amount. In an effort to address the increase in overtime, part-time investigators were hired and trained in 2018. Scheduling changes along with the ability to distribute additional workload to the newly hired part-time investigators should result in an overall decrease in salary costs in 2019.

Strategic Planning

In 2015 the Washington County Medical Examiner's Office entered into a five year contract with Waukesha County to provide specific medical examiner services. In the final two years of this contract, 2018 and 2019, Washington County costs are fixed. While no cost increase in 2019 helped stabilize the department budget, planning for known cost increases is underway.

One area of significant cost increase is toxicology testing. In an effort to make toxicology testing more efficient and effective, without jeopardizing the integrity of the clinical findings, pathologists are using a staged approach to testing. First toxicology tests are run on known suspected medications and drugs. Based on the results of the first tests additional tests are then ordered. While this increases the overall time to complete toxicology in complex drug cases it has proven effective in reducing the number of tests ordered thereby controlling costs without sacrificing quality.

Conclusion

In 2018, the Medical Examiner's Office experienced a modest increase in calls for service. However, with the benefits brought to the office by continuing process improvements, staff development and inter-governmental cooperation we successfully completed the increased workload under budget.

In 2019, the Medical Examiner's Office will continue to focus on process improvement, technology advances and staff development to ensure that we continue to provide the citizens of Washington County the most effective form of medico-legal death investigation.