



2024 ANNUAL REPORT

Kittitas County Coroner

This annual report presents 2024
mortality data for Kittitas County, WA.

October 31, 2024

507 N Nanum St #113A, Ellensburg
WA 98926
(509) 933-8200
coroner@co.kittitas.wa.us

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Associations and Certifications

- Member of Washington Association of Coroners and Medical Examiners (WACME)
- Member of International Association of Coroners and Medical Examiners (IACME)
- Certified Diplomats of American Board of Medicolegal Death Investigators (ABMDI)

About Us

We extend our sincere gratitude to the Kittitas County Board of Commissioners for their support of the coroner's office and the services we provide for the citizens of Kittitas County.

The Kittitas County Coroner was first sworn in on January 1st, 2015. At that time the elected coroner was the only employee. In 2022 the office has grown to include two full-time personnel (elected coroner and an office administrator) and four part-time investigators. Investigations may occur at any time so there is an investigator on call 24/7 year-round.

Legislative Authority

Washington uses a mixed system of death investigation with some counties employing coroners and some employing medical examiners. Kittitas County operates under the coroner system. Medical examiners are appointed. Coroners are elected officials. Coroners are not usually required to be physicians, but requirements vary by jurisdiction.

The jurisdiction of the coroner is established by Washington State Law and Kittitas County Code:

RCW Chapter 36.16	County Officers
RCW Chapter 36.24	County Coroner
RCW Chapter 68.50	Human Remains
WAC 246-500-020	Contact with Human Remains
WAC 246-500-040	Transportation of Human Remains
RCW 36.39.030	Disposition of Indigent Remains
RCW 73.08.070	County Burial of Indigent Remains

Jurisdiction:

Kittitas County Coroner's Office investigates deaths occurring within the geographic boundaries of Kittitas County.

We have a responsibility to investigate all deaths:

- Sudden death of persons who are not under care of a physician in the thirty-six hours preceding death
- Where the circumstances of death indicate death was caused by unnatural or unlawful means
- Where death occurs under suspicious circumstances

- Where a coroner's autopsy or postmortem or coroner's inquest is to be held
- Where death results from unknown or obscure causes
- Where death occurs within one year following an accident
- Where the death is caused by any violence whatsoever
- Where death results from a known or suspected abortion
- Where death apparently results from drowning, hanging, burns, electrocution, gunshot wounds, stabs or cuts, lightning, starvation, radiation, exposure, alcoholism, narcotics or other addictions, tetanus, strangulations, suffocation, or smothering
- Where death is due to premature birth or still birth
- Where death is due to a violent contagious disease or suspected contagious disease
- Where death results from alleged rape, carnal knowledge, or sodomy
- Where death occurs in a jail or prison
- Where a body is found dead or is not claimed by relatives or friends

Mission:

Our mission is to serve and protect the interests of the community by determining the cause, manner, and mechanism of sudden or unexplained deaths. To identify deceased persons and notify their next of kin, regardless of where they may live in the world. To ensure the deceased and their property are treated with the utmost respect and dignity.

We accomplish our mission with a team of medicolegal certified investigators and forensically certified pathologists. Through scientific methods of inquiry, we serve as an independent finder of fact, working alongside, but independently from law enforcement investigators. We complete our investigations compassionately and make every effort to provide information to the loved ones of those who have died. Death data collected by our investigation is reported to local, state, and federal health departments to help keep our community safe.

Duty:

- Determine Cause of Death
- Determine Manner of Death
- Certify Death
- Notify Next-of-Kin

Our Database:

June 2018 our office began using MDILog which is a nationwide reporting system. With this software we electronically complete our death investigations from anywhere, at any time. We efficiently manage our casework from the scene through certification.

Year in Review

	Cases	Autopsies	Hospice	Organ Donation	Non-Coroner
Jan	16	2	4	0	1
Feb	21	4	9	0	6
Mar	26	3	13	0	3
Apr	24	0	16	0	6
May	20	1	9	0	9
Jun	23	1	13	0	10
Jul	19	2	7	0	7
Aug	24	1	11	0	10
Sep	26	2	13	0	8
Oct	31	3	11	0	12
Nov	18	0	12	0	3
Dec	22	4	7	0	8
Total	270	23	125	0	83

Our Team

<p>Nicholas C. Henderson D-AMBDI WA State Medicolegal Forensic Investigator Coroner</p>	<p>Cori McKean D-ABMDI WA State Medicolegal Forensic Investigator Chief Deputy Coroner</p>
<p>Lee Ann Konstantinov Administrative Assistant</p>	<p>Jacob Schroeder D-ABMDI WA State Medicolegal Forensic Investigator Deputy Coroner I</p>

<p>Bob Seelye D-ABMDI WA State Medicolegal Forensic Investigator Deputy Coroner I</p>	<p>Cole Gravel WA State Medicolegal Forensic Investigator Deputy Coroner I</p>
<p>David Epperson WA State Medicolegal Forensic Investigator Deputy Coroner I</p>	<p>Hunter Kellogg WA State Medicolegal Forensic Investigator Deputy Coroner I</p>
<p>Charlie Divine WA State Medicolegal Forensic Investigator Deputy Coroner I</p>	<p>Page Gautney WA State Medicolegal Forensic Investigator Deputy Coroner I</p>
<p>Norman Thiersch, MD Board Certified Forensic Pathologist</p>	<p>Kalila Garrison CWU Intern</p>
<p>Elizabeth Rodriguez CWU Intern</p>	<p>Rubi Ceja CWU Intern</p>
<p>Madalyn Hagan CWU Intern</p>	<p>Savannah Griego CWU Intern</p>
<p>Zachary Lynd CWU Intern</p>	<p>Rose Montano CWU Intern</p>
<p>Kimberly Cheeseman Intern</p>	

Office Location

507 N Nanum St, Suite 113A
 Ellensburg, WA 98926
 office (509) 933-8200
 fax (509) 933-8225
 email coroner@co.kittitas.wa.us
<https://www.co.kittitas.wa.us/coroner/>

Coroner Office Activities by Month

	Reported Deaths	Jurisdiction Accepted	Jurisdiction Declined	Cases with Scenes	Coroner Signed Death Certificate	Autopsies
Jan	16	16	0	12	5	2
Feb	21	18	3	12	9	4
Mar	26	21	5	11	7	3
Apr	24	22	2	7	4	0
May	20	17	3	10	5	1
Jun	23	20	3	8	7	1
Jul	19	18	1	11	8	2
Aug	24	23	1	11	10	1
Sep	26	25	1	14	8	2
Oct	31	28	3	20	7	3
Nov	18	15	3	6	1	0
Dec	22	20	2	15	13	4
Total	270	243	27	137	84	23

Total Transports	Total Next-of-Kin Notifications
243	243

Jurisdiction, or the official power to make legal decisions and judgments, is accepted for those deaths suspected to be homicides, suicides, accidents, or sudden unexpected natural deaths and they are

investigated. Jurisdiction may be declined when a death is due to natural causes such as illness, old age, or a known medical condition. In such cases the attending physician can issue a natural death certificate without further investigation.

The Washington Health Department of Health has not issued statistics indicating the total number of deaths reported within Kittitas County in 2024. Not all deaths that occur in the county require the coroner’s office to be notified.

In 2024 there were no law enforcement related deaths.

The office approved disposition as follows:

Burial	Cremation	Storage	Unclaimed	Removed from State
31	222	0	0	1

Total Forensic Examinations:

Our medicolegal investigators conduct physical examinations of decedent’s during their investigations. A forensic examination or autopsy is completed by a board-certified forensic pathologist.

Exam Type	Total
Full Autopsy	21
Limited Autopsy	2
Toxicology Only	1
No Forensic Examination	246

Definitions:

- Full Autopsy (or complete autopsy) is an examination of the entire external body and an internal examination of all the major organs of the body, like heart, lungs, liver, brain, and kidneys.
- Limited Autopsy (or partial autopsy) is an examination of the entire external body and an internal examination of a specific part of the body, such as “head” or “chest”.
- Toxicology is the analysis of biological samples for the presence of toxins, including drugs. In some instances only toxicology specimens are submitted for testing.
- Forensic Examination is not completed on every case. Death investigation include an external body examination completed by a medicolegal death investigator and with enough medical information the coroner can certify a death without a forensic examination. Medical history, risk factors, and the *totality of the circumstances* surrounding the death all play factors in

determining to whether to complete a forensic examination.

Manner of Death by Month

All	Homicide	Suicide	Accident	Natural	Undetermined	Pending	NA
Jan	0	1	1	13	1	0	0
Feb	0	2	2	17	0	0	0
Mar	1	0	1	23	1	0	0
Apr	0	1	1	20	0	0	2
May	0	0	1	16	0	0	3
Jun	0	2	1	20	0	0	0
Jul	0	0	5	14	0	0	0
Aug	0	1	1	18	1	0	3
Sep	0	0	2	22	1	0	1
Oct	0	0	2	29	0	0	0
Nov	0	0	0	17	0	0	1
Dec	0	0	3	19	0	0	0
Total	1	7	20	228	4	0	10

Manner of death indicates the circumstances surrounding the death, how the fatal event came about and is based on investigation. This is determined through scene investigation, medical records review, examination of the body, autopsy, and ancillary studies.

None of the deaths occurring in 2024 were “in custody” or law enforcement involved.

Definitions

- **Homicide:** due to a volitional act by another with intent to cause fear, harm, or death and in some negligent acts, even when a person did not intend to cause harm.
- **Suicide:** injury that occurred with the intent to induce self-harm or cause one’s own death.
- **Accident:** injury when there is no evidence of intent to harm.
- **Natural:** due to natural disease processes.
- **Undetermined:** there is inadequate information regarding the circumstances of death to determine a manner. An example is a person found unconscious with a subdural hemorrhage; in the absence of information on the events leading up to death, it may not be possible to determine if the hemorrhage is due to accidental fall, homicidal violence, etc.
- **Pending:** for the benefit of the decedent’s family, to provide a timely legal document indicating death has occurred, while an investigation is ongoing into a more specific cause and manner of death.
- **Not Applicable:** those cases where investigation resulted in identifying remains as “non-

human” or “human - anthropological remains” and no death certification was necessary.

Total Cases with Scene Investigations

All	# Cases	Cases with Scenes	Scenes Attended
Jan	16	12	11
Feb	21	12	12
Mar	26	11	11
Apr	24	7	7
May	20	10	9
Jun	23	8	7
Jul	19	11	11
Aug	24	11	11
Sep	26	14	15
Oct	31	20	19
Nov	18	6	5
Dec	22	15	14
Total	270	137	132

Why not go to the scene to investigate every time? At times there is no reason to go to a scene. Examples of when a scene visit is not necessarily done include bones photographed and determined to be non-human, deaths at a medical facility where we are completing a medical records review but do not assume jurisdiction, or those deaths which occur when the scene is either not accessible to us (alpine wilderness) or not safe (avalanche areas).

Natural Deaths Involving

	Neurologic	Genitourinary	Cardiac	Kidney	Pulmonary	Liver	GI	Cancer	Other
Jan	2	0	5	1	2	0	0	2	1
Feb	4	0	6	1	1	0	0	1	4
Mar	5	0	8	0	5	1	1	2	1
Apr	3	0	5	0	4	0	0	8	0
May	1	0	5	0	2	0	0	7	1
Jun	4	0	7	0	2	0	0	7	0
Jul	6	0	5	0	2	0	0	0	1
Aug	3	0	4	1	5	0	0	4	1
Sep	5	0	8	0	3	1	0	4	1
Oct	4	0	12	0	6	0	0	5	2
Nov	3	0	4	0	2	0	1	6	1

Dec	0	0	10	0	1	1	0	7	0
Total	40	0	79	3	35	3	2	53	13

Definitions:

Simply put, a “natural” death is one that occurs due to an internal factor that causes the body to shut down. It means there was no external reason for the death.

- Neurological: death may occur from injury, disease, or disorder of the nervous system.
- Genitourinary: deaths are those occurring from disorders.
- Cardiac: death pertains to the heart.
- Kidney: deaths include infection, transport disorders, or tumors.
- Pulmonary: death pertains to the lungs.
- Liver: death is caused by diseases.
- Cancer: can develop in any tissue of any organ at any age.
- Other: deaths are investigated and after a post-mortem examination no obvious cause may be found that fits in any of the above categories.

Unnatural Causes of Death Involving:

All	Trauma	Burns	Drowning	Fall	Firearm	Hanging	Vehicle	Drugs	Stab	Other	Total
Jan	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	1	3
Feb	0	0	0	0	2	0	0	3	0	0	4
Mar	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	1	0	1	3
Apr	0	0	0	0	1	0	1	0	0	0	2
May	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	1
Jun	0	0	1	0	2	0	0	0	0	0	3
Jul	0	0	1	0	0	0	3	0	0	1	5
Aug	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	0	0	1	3
Sept	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	0	0	1	3
Oct	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	0	0	2
Nov	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Dec	0	0	0	1	0	0	1	1	0	0	3
Total	0	0	2	1	6	1	9	8	1	5	32

Unnatural death is defined as death resulting from an external cause. These are deaths from homicide, suicide, or by accident.

Factors Contributing to Unnatural Death

Unnatural death can include injury, inhalation, ingestion, or submersion or any combination of these mechanisms.

Accident

Types of Vehicles

	Auto	Motorcycle	Garden Tractor	Total
Apr	1	0	0	0
May	0	0	0	1
Jul	3	0	0	0
Aug	0	0	0	1
Sep	2	0	0	0
Dec	0	0	1	0
Total	6	0	1	2

Suicide

	Firearm	Hanging	Drugs	Stab	Total
Jan	0	0	0	1	1
Feb	2	0	1	0	2
Mar	0	0	0	0	0
Apr	1	0	0	0	1
May	0	0	0	0	0
Jun	2	0	0	0	2
Jul	0	0	0	0	0
Aug	0	1	0	0	1
Sep	0	0	0	0	0
Oct	0	0	0	0	0
Nov	0	0	0	0	0
Dec	0	0	0	0	0
Total	0	1	1	1	7

Homicide

	Firearm
Mar	1
Total	1

It is important to understand that Homicide and Murder do not have the same meaning. Murder is used in criminal law matters but cannot be used as a manner of death. While all murders are homicides, not all homicides are murders.

Kittitas County had a total of one homicide in 2024.

Demographics

Disposition of Body

	Burial	Cremation	Unclaimed	Removal from State	Exhumation
2024	31	222	4	1	0

Ethnicity of Deceased

	White	Black	Asian	Indian
2022	251	1	3	2

Sex of Deceased

	Male	Female
2022	156	102

Age of Deceased

	<1	1 to 5	6 to 10	11 to 17	18 to 25	26 to 44	45 to 64	65+
202	0	1	1	0	2	15	38	201

Both fatality in age group <1 to 18 were occupants of motor vehicles.

Tissue and Organ Donation

The Kittitas County Coroner's Office recognizes donated tissue such as skin, bone, and heart valves can dramatically improve the quality of life for recipients. Donation can help save lives and end needless suffering¹. Deaths we investigate are automatically and purposefully referred to organ procurement organizations through the MDILog.com database. Once an investigator enters their report a conversation between the investigator and an organ procurement organization starts.

Donations can be used in many applications including serious life-threatening medical situations. Signing up for organ donation means someday you may be able to help another in need. Today the number of people in need of the donation vastly outnumbers that of registered organ donors.

Under the authority of RCW Chapter 68.64, the coroner's office works in cooperation with organ and tissues procurement agencies, in 2024 123 cases were referred and organ donation occurred 8 times.

Help Us Identify

Kittitas County Coroner's office has one unidentified person. John Doe was found in a remote area of Kittitas County in 1987 and remains to this day unidentified.

November 2022, using imaging obtained with assistance from the Washington State Forensic Anthropologist and the King County Medical Examiner's Office the National Missing and Exploited Children organization provided a facial reconstruction poster.

Please take a moment to look at the following picture. If you recognize this young man or know someone who might, contact our office (509) 933-8200.



¹ Donate Life America Stories of Hope: <https://donatelife.net/stories-of-hope/chris-and-caitlyn-tissue-donor-and-recipient/>



