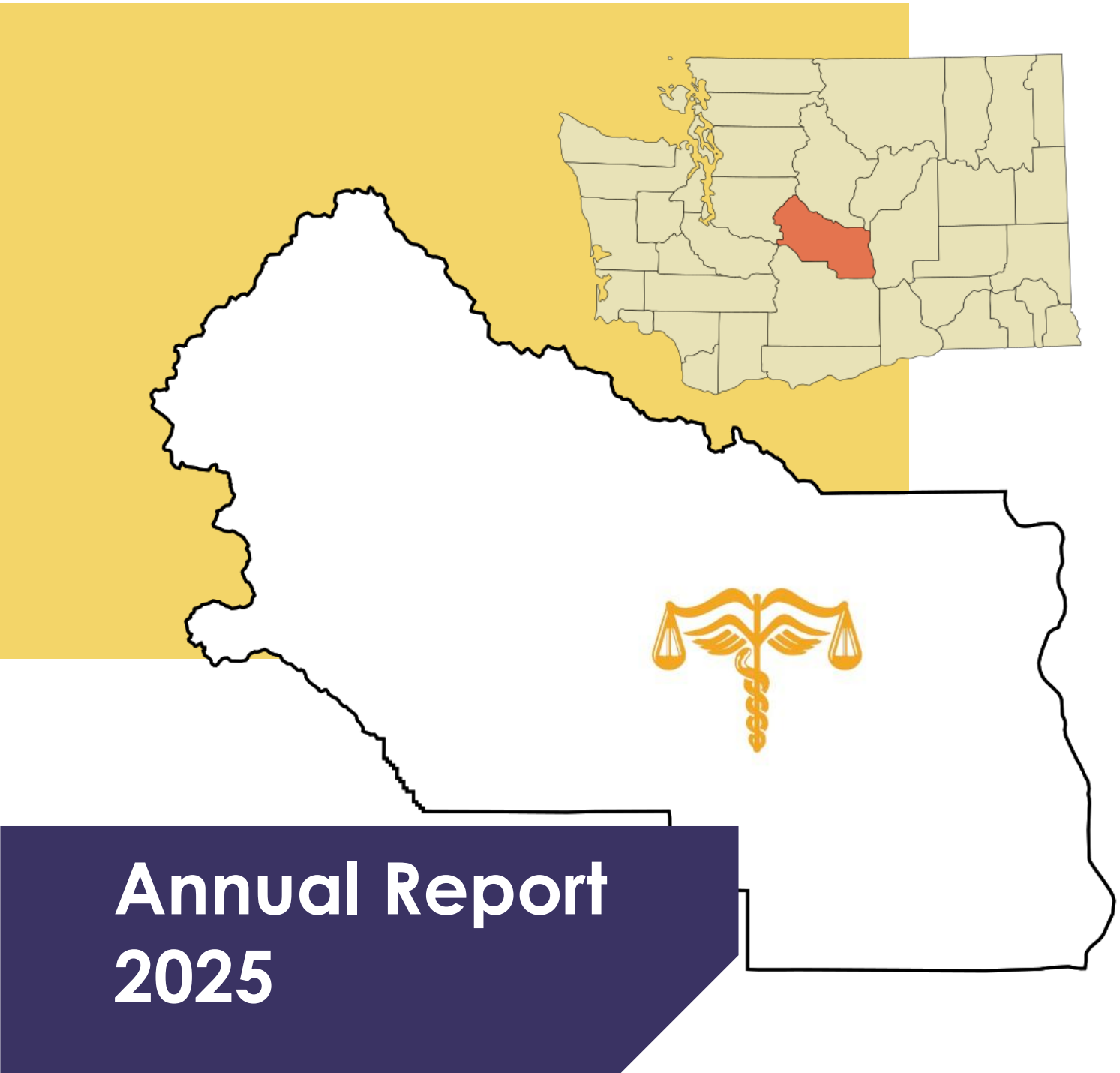




Annual Report 2025

Kittitas County Coroner

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KITTITAS COUNTY CORONER

About Us

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

Since the election of Kittitas County's first coroner in 2014, the Coroner's Office has grown alongside the community it serves. Today, the office includes three full-time employees, six state-certified on-call deputies, and robust partnerships across Kittitas County. Spanning from the Cascades to the Columbia, the office serves all **48,803 residents** and **2,333 square miles** of the county.

Associations & Certifications

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

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 a 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.

Legislative Authority

Washington uses a mixed death investigation system, with some counties operating under a coroner model and others under a medical examiner model. Kittitas County operates under the coroner system. Under Washington law, coroners are elected county officials, while medical examiners are appointed. Coroner qualifications can vary by jurisdiction. The authority of the Kittitas County Coroner is established primarily by Washington law, together with applicable county code provisions.

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

The jurisdiction of a county coroner under the first clause of RCW 68.08.010 extends to the body of a deceased person in the following circumstances:

- 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

Our Team

Nicholas C. Henderson, D-ABMDI
Coroner

Cori McKean, D-ABMDI
Chief Deputy Coroner | Coroner

Lee Ann Konstantinov
Administrative Assistant

Kelly Held
Chaplain

Charlie Divine
Deputy Coroner

David Epperson
Deputy Coroner

Cole Gravel
Deputy Coroner

Hunter Kellogg
Deputy Coroner

Jacob Schroeder, D-ABMDI
Deputy Coroner

Bob Seelye, D-ABMDI
Deputy Coroner

Norman Thiersch, MD
Forensic Pathologist

In Memoriam

Nick was the first elected Coroner in Kittitas County, a role previously filled by the county prosecutor until the population crossed over 40,000 residents. He took office on January 1, 2015, with nothing more than a “desk in the corner of the jail and some pencils-but not a pencil sharper!” Nick was serving as the elected Coroner at the time of his death and was looking forward to his retirement at the end of his term in 2026. Nick’s vision for the Kittitas County Coroner’s office came to fruition when the office was accredited by the International Association of Coroners & Medical Examiners in October of 2024. Nick was a lifetime resident of the Upper County. He was a consummate storyteller with an encyclopedic knowledge of Upper Kittitas County history. He had a wicked sense of humor. Nick was always up for telling stories or a joke. He cared deeply about the citizens of Kittitas County. He was loved by many and an icon to all who knew him. He will be sorely missed.

Nicholas “Nick” C. Henderson



January 8, 1957 – October 22, 2025

ANNUAL STATISTICS

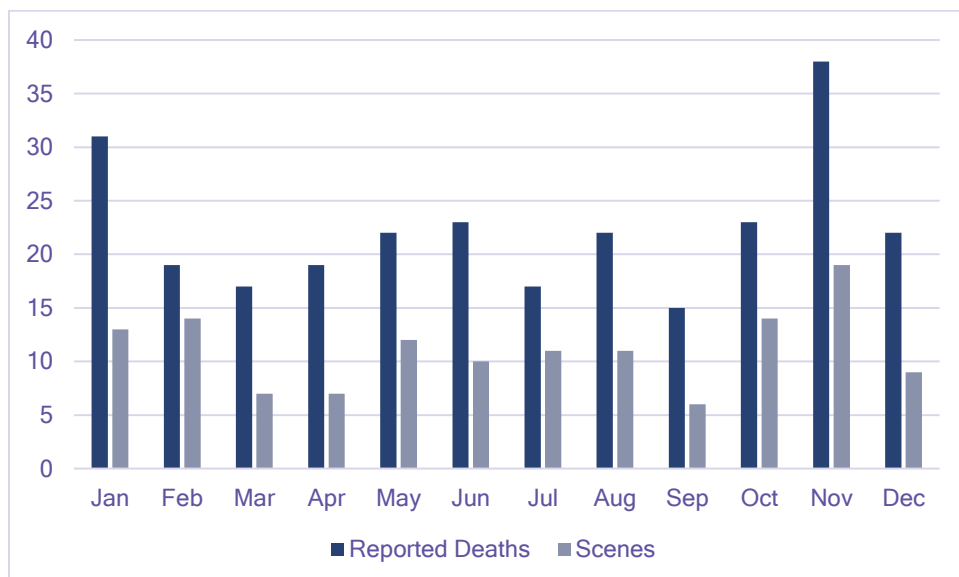
Year in Review

Jurisdiction, or the official power to make legal decisions and judgments, is accepted for 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 State Department of Health has not issued statistics indicating the total number of deaths reported within Kittitas County in 2025. Not all deaths that occur in the county require the coroner's office to be notified.

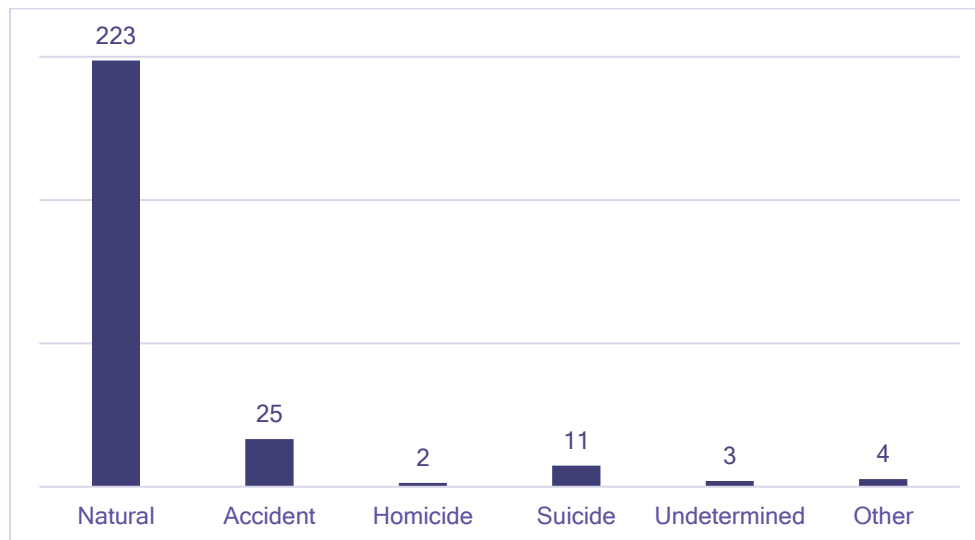
In 2025 there were:

- No in-custody or law enforcement-involved deaths
- No exhumations ordered
- 6 decedents approved for cremation
- **268 deaths reported** to our office
 - 133 of which included a scene investigation, transportation to a secure storage facility, and next of kin notification



Manners of Death

Manner of death is a legal determination made by the coroner that classifies a death as **natural**, **accident**, **suicide**, **homicide**, or **undetermined**. It describes the circumstances surrounding the death and how the fatal event came about, based on a thorough investigation that may include scene investigation, review of medical records, examination of the body, autopsy, toxicology and other ancillary studies. The “Other” category represents non-human remains and cases in which no jurisdiction was assumed.



Deaths by Demographics

Included below are unknown/indeterminate counts. These counts reflect non-jurisdictional and/or found non-human remains cases in which demographics could not be determined from the available information.

Sex of Deceased

Male	Female	Indeterminate
147	116	5

Ethnicity of Deceased

White	Black	Asian	American Indian/Alaskan	Unknown
256	3	1	4	4

Age of Deceased

<1*	1-5**	6-10	11-17	18-25	26-44	45-64	65+	Unknown
3	2	0	0	4	18	48	187	6

*All infant deaths were classified as natural.

**Of the two child deaths, one was classified as natural and one as accident.

Deaths by Cause

Natural (223)

- Cancer: 56
- Cardiac: 66
- Gastrointestinal: 4
- Genitourinary: 2
- Kidney: 7
- Liver: 5
- Pulmonary: 26
- Neurologic: 36
- Other: 21

Accident (25)

- Asphyxia: 2
- Drowning: 2
- Drugs: 9
- Fall: 2
- Motor Vehicle: 10

Homicide (2)

- Firearm: 1
- Motor Vehicle: 1

Suicide (11)

- Firearm: 6
- Hanging: 5

Undetermined (3)

Other (4)

Other represents non-jurisdictional cases where no cause of death was determined or reported.

Autopsies

An autopsy is a postmortem medical examination used to help determine the cause, mechanism, and manner of death. In a forensic setting, it may include external and internal examination, documentation of injuries or disease, photographs, and collection of specimens for toxicology or other testing. Autopsies are not performed in every death investigation; many deaths can be certified through scene information, medical history, records review, and an external body examination completed by a medicolegal death investigator. The Coroner determines whether an autopsy is needed based on the totality of the circumstances, including medical history, risk factors, evidence of injury, investigative needs, and whether additional information is necessary to accurately certify the death. **In 2025, 38 autopsies were completed.** Of those, **32 were full autopsies**, involving external and internal examination of the entire body, **1 was a limited autopsy**, involving external examination of the entire body and internal examination only of a specific area of the body, and **5 were an external exam only.**

Toxicology

Toxicology testing is the analysis of biological specimens for the presence and amount of substances that may have contributed to a person's death, including alcohol, prescription medications, illicit drugs, and other potential toxins. In death investigations, toxicology results are considered along with the scene investigation, medical history, autopsy or external examination findings, and other available information. Toxicology testing is not performed in every case and may be ordered either as part of a forensic autopsy or independently when an autopsy is not performed, if additional information is needed to help determine or confirm the cause and manner of death. **In 2025, toxicology testing was performed for 47 cases.**

TISSUE AND ORGAN DONATION

About

The Kittitas County Coroner's Office recognizes that tissue donation can dramatically improve the quality of life for recipients. Donation can help save lives and end needless suffering.

Under the authority of RCW Chapter 68.64, the coroner's office works in cooperation with organ and tissues procurement agencies. Deaths we investigate are automatically and purposefully referred to organ procurement organizations through the MDILog.com database.

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.

Statistics

In 2025, **54 cases were referred** for organ procurement and **organ donation occurred 5 times**, twice by an organ procurement organization, and by an eye bank three times.

INDIGENT AND UNCLAIMED

About

The Kittitas County Coroner's Office makes every effort to locate and notify next of kin after a death. Some decedents are considered **indigent** when family is known but cannot afford disposition; these cases are handled respectfully and in accordance with RCW 68.50.230, with family informed of the final resting place. Others are considered **unclaimed** when no family can be located after an exhaustive search, or when family declines involvement. Unclaimed individuals are entered into the National Missing and Unidentified Persons System, or NAMUS, which checks for possible matches with missing and unidentified people. No NAMUS matches have been made to date. **In 2025, our indigent program included 6 cases.**

Any eligible veteran or veteran's spouse left unclaimed is moved to Tahoma National Cemetery, where they will be cared for and honored for their service.

HELP US IDENTIFY

Kittitas County John Doe

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. He is estimated to have been between 16 and 23 years old at the time of his death, and between 5'1" and 5'7" tall.

In November of 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 the following facial reconstruction poster.

Please take a moment to look at the following picture. If you recognize this young man, or know someone who might, please contact our office.

