



# **GARFIELD COUNTY CORONER'S OFFICE**

**2024 Annual Report**

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# Contents

Garfield County Coroner's Office.....	3
Other Services:.....	4
Accessibility Statement: .....	4
Staff .....	4
Contact .....	4
General Statistics .....	5
Coroner's office Investigated Deaths Data .....	6
Decedent age at time of death:.....	6
Manner of Death .....	6
Unintentional drug/alcohol overdose deaths .....	8
Fentanyl Related Deaths.....	9
Suicide Deaths .....	10
Natural Deaths.....	11
Homicide Deaths .....	11
Undetermined Deaths .....	11
Deaths involving Children:.....	12
In-Custody/Law Enforcement Involved Deaths:.....	12
Area of Response .....	13
Response Times .....	14
Death Notifications:.....	15
Additional Statistics and Graphs.....	15
Organ/Eye/Tissue Procurement Referrals and procurements. ....	16
Unclaimed decedents, unidentified decedents, and exhumations. ....	17
Death Certification and Timelines: .....	18
Closing .....	19

## Garfield County Coroner's Office

This report provides a summary and statistical analysis of deaths that were investigated by the Garfield County Coroner's Office in 2024.

Garfield County consists of about 3,000 square miles of rugged alpine vistas, high desert mountains, and major river ways. Outdoor recreation opportunities include skiing, hunting, fishing, hiking, rafting, and many more. Garfield County is home to the second largest designated wilderness area in Colorado – the Flattops Wilderness. The estimated 2023 population in Garfield County was 63,158, making it the 13<sup>th</sup> most populated county in Colorado. Municipalities in Garfield County include Carbondale, Glenwood Springs, New Castle, Silt, Rifle, Parachute, and the unincorporated community of Battlement Mesa.

The coroner and his staff must be available 24 hours a day, 365 days a year. The primary task of the coroner's office is to establish cause and manner of death of those who die in Garfield County or where the event that led to their death occurred in Garfield County.

Colorado Revised Statute 30-10-606 states that the coroner, in cooperation with law enforcement, shall make all proper inquiry to determine the cause and manner of death of any person in his or her jurisdiction who has died under any of the following circumstances:

- If the death is or may be unnatural as a result of external influences, violence, or injury;
- Due to the influence of or the result of intoxication by alcohol, drugs, or poison;
- As a result of an accident, including at the workplace;
- When the death of an infant or child is unexpected or unexplained;
- When no physician is in attendance or when, though in attendance, the physician is unable to certify the cause of death;
- From a death that occurs within twenty-four hours of admission to a hospital;
- From a disease which may be hazardous or contagious or which may constitute a threat to the health of the general public;
- If the death occurs from the action of a peace officer or while in the custody of law enforcement officials or while incarcerated in a public institution;
- When the death was sudden and happened to a person who was in apparent good health; When a body is unidentifiable, decomposed, charred, or skeletonized; or
- Circumstances that the coroner otherwise determines may warrant further inquiry to determine cause and manner of death or further law enforcement investigation.

## Other Services:

The Garfield County Coroner's Office provides additional services as needed that include:

- Assistance to neighboring counties.
- Community Service roles such as speaking to community groups, students, and participating in mock DUI incidents.
- Participation in the Garfield County Sheriff's Office Trauma Team.
- Participation in the Garfield County Child Fatality & Prevention Team.
- Participation in the Suicide Prevention Coalition of Garfield County.

## Accessibility Statement:

This PDF Document, in its original digital form on the Garfield County Coroner's Office website, was developed with accessibility and compliance with Colorado's HB 21-2110. If you find that this PDF document does not meet your accessibility needs, I welcome your request for accommodation and feedback. You may contact the coroner's office at (970) 665-6335 or via the contact form at the website, [www.garfield-county.com/coroner](http://www.garfield-county.com/coroner).

## Staff

Robert M. Glassmire	Coroner
Danica Pruitt	Senior Medicolegal Death Investigator
Cassidy Blackard Weeks	Medicolegal Death Investigator
Claudia R. Beattie	Medicolegal Death Investigator
Julia Stern	Medicolegal Death Investigator (part-time as needed)
Lanny Grant	Medicolegal Death Investigator (part-time as needed)
Sage Castine	Medicolegal Death Investigator (part-time as needed)

## Contact

Garfield County Coroner's Office  
1806 Medicine Bow Court  
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## General Statistics

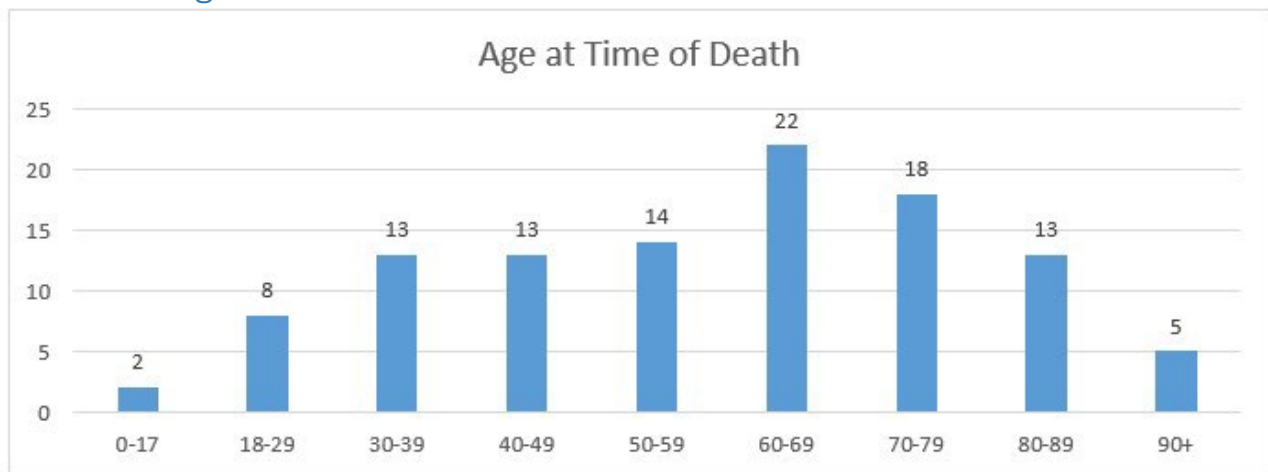
The following information pertains only to deaths that were investigated or reported to the Garfield County Coroner's Office.

<b>2024 estimated Garfield County Population</b>	63,158
<b>2024 total estimated Garfield County Deaths and non-Garfield County deaths transferred to the jurisdiction of the Garfield County Coroner's Office.</b>	379
<b>Coroner's office Death Investigations &amp; Death Notifications *</b>	382
Investigated by coroner's office "Cases":	108
○ Scene Investigations	92
○ Body Transports to Coroner's Office	92
In Custody Deaths/Law Enforcement Involved:	2
Deaths reported to the coroner's office with no investigation.	
– limited inquiry (Hospice/Hospital/Transfer out/or inquires)	274
*The coroner's office will occasionally take reports on deaths that occur in other counties where the incident that led to the death occurred in Garfield County.	
<b>Percentage of Garfield County deaths investigated by coroner:</b>	28%
<b>Number of postmortem examinations (autopsies with toxicology):</b>	58
<b>Percentage of all Garfield County deaths having an autopsy.</b>	15%
<b>Percentage of coroner's office investigations having an autopsy:</b>	54%
<b>Gender of deaths investigated by the coroner:</b>	
Males	73
Females	35
<b>Race/Ethnicity of deaths investigated:</b>	
White	95
Hispanic origin	13
Asian	0
African American	0
Other/Mixed Race	0

## Coroner's office Investigated Deaths Data

The data contained in this report from this point forward represents the deaths that were investigated by the Garfield County Coroner's Office. The data does not include information regarding the natural deaths that were not investigated. This data may differ from public health data as public health agencies may report on the residence of the decedent. The coroner's office will investigate a death regardless of the decedent's residence if the death (or the incident that caused death) occurred in Garfield County.

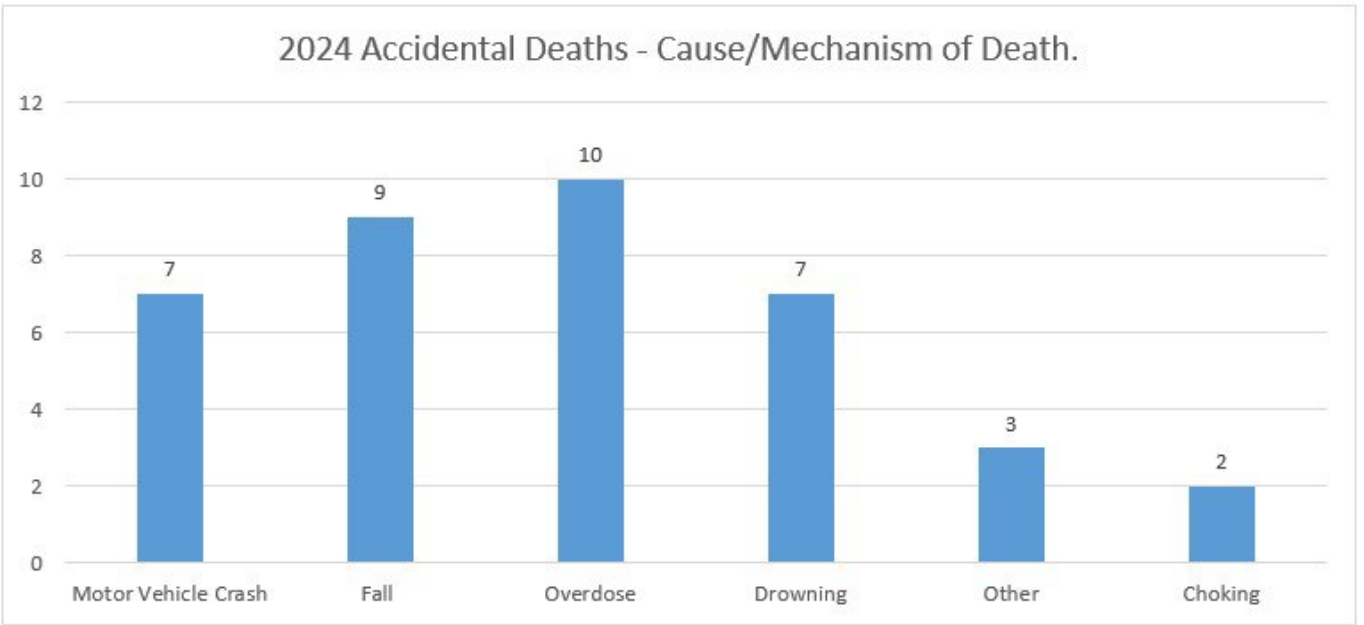
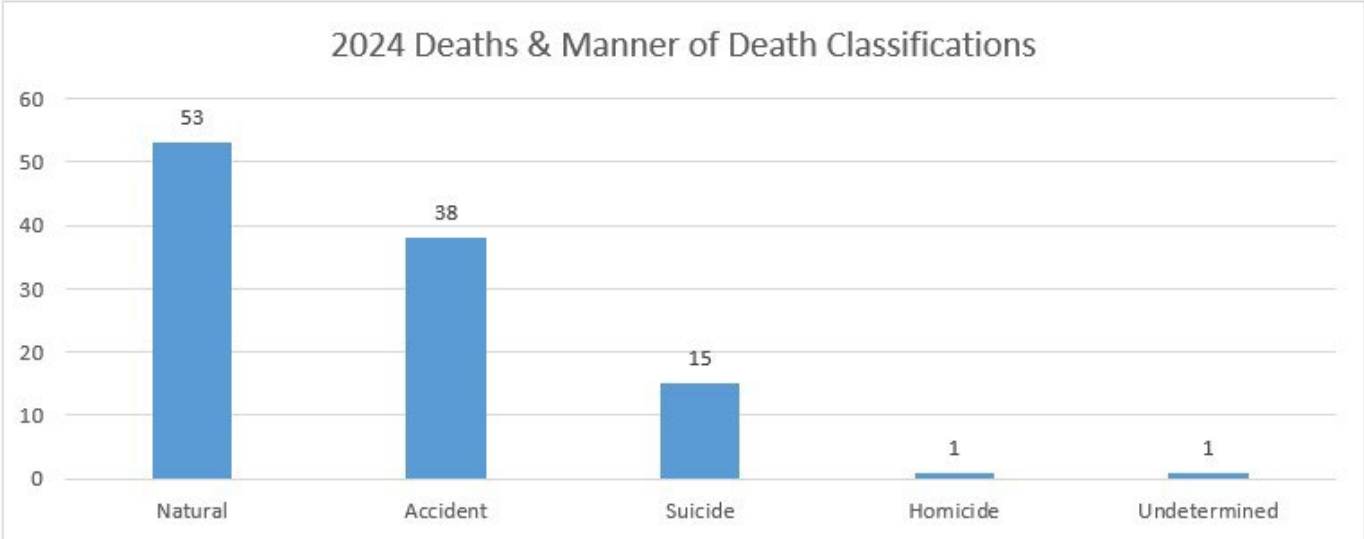
### Decedent age at time of death:



## Manner of Death

The National Association of Medical Examiners general "rules" for classifying manner of death:

- Natural Deaths are due solely or nearly totally to disease and/or aging process.
- Accident applies when an injury or poisoning causes death and there is little or no evidence that the injury or poisoning occurred with intent to harm or cause death. In essence, the fatal outcome was unintentional.
- Suicide results from an injury or poisoning as a result of an intentional, self-inflicted act committed to do self-harm or cause the death of oneself.
- Homicide occurs when death results from a volitional act committed by another person to cause fear, harm, or death. Intent to cause death is a common element but is not required for classification as homicide. It is to be emphasized that the classification of Homicide for the purposes of death certification is a "neutral" term and neither indicates nor implies criminal intent, which remains a determination within the province of legal processes.
- Undetermined or "could not be determined" is a classification used when the information pointing to one manner of death is no more compelling than one or more other competing manners of death in thorough consideration of all available information.
- In general, when death involves a combination of natural processes and external factors such as injury or poisoning, preference is given to the non-natural manner of death.

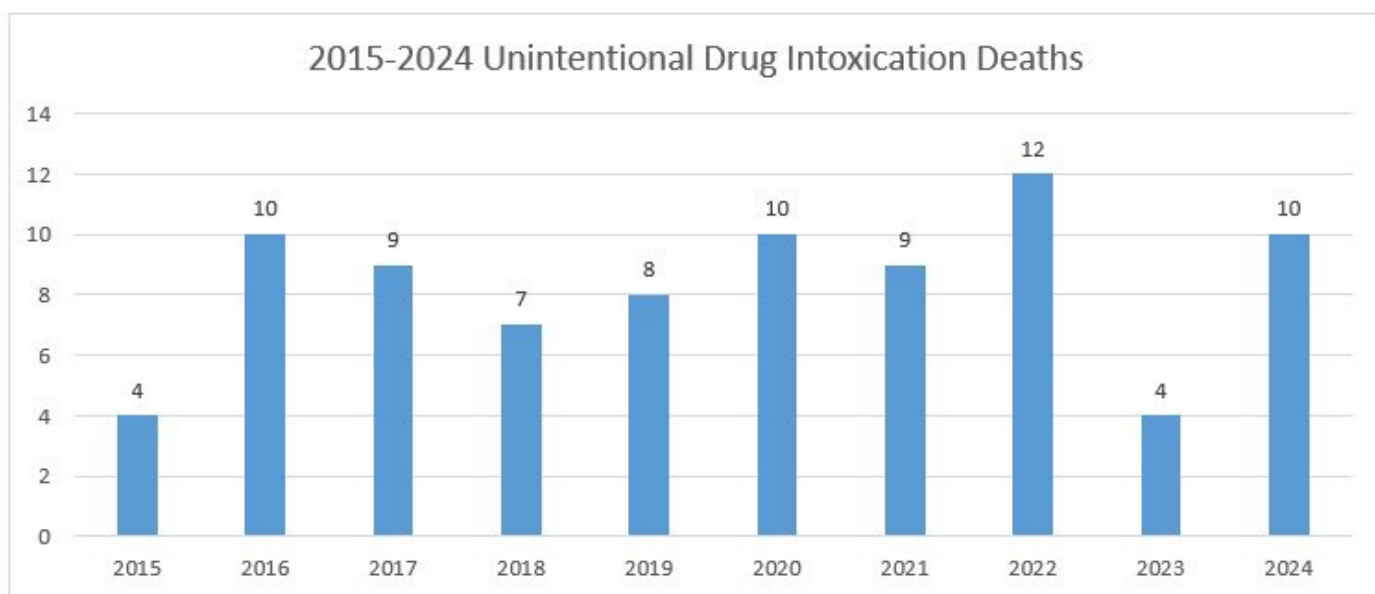


## Unintentional drug/alcohol overdose deaths

In 2024, the Garfield County Coroner's Office investigated ten deaths where the "immediate cause of death" was determined to be due to the intoxication of drugs or alcohol. Many times, when there is more than one drug or alcohol combination, the cause of death is classified as a mixed drug intoxication. These ten deaths represent deaths where the primary cause of death is due to drugs or alcohol. There are several other deaths that involve drugs/alcohol, and the primary cause of death is due to other causes such as blunt force injury. See page seven, accidental deaths, for more information. Characteristics of the ten deaths reported in the accidental drug/alcohol overdose deaths include:

- There were three deaths that were due to the intoxication of one drug.
  - Two fentanyl drug deaths.
  - One cocaine drug death.
- There were seven deaths that were due to mixed drug intoxication.
  - One fentanyl, methamphetamine, and methadone death.
  - One Acetylfentanyl, fluorfentanyl, and fentanyl death.
  - One cocaine, oxycodone, and hydrocodone death.
  - One fentanyl, acetylfentanyl, flourfentanyl, and methamphetamine death.
  - One methamphetamine and cocaine death.
  - One methamphetamine and methadone death.
  - One methamphetamine and oxycodone death.

The below chart details recent years where drugs or alcohol was certified as the immediate cause of death.



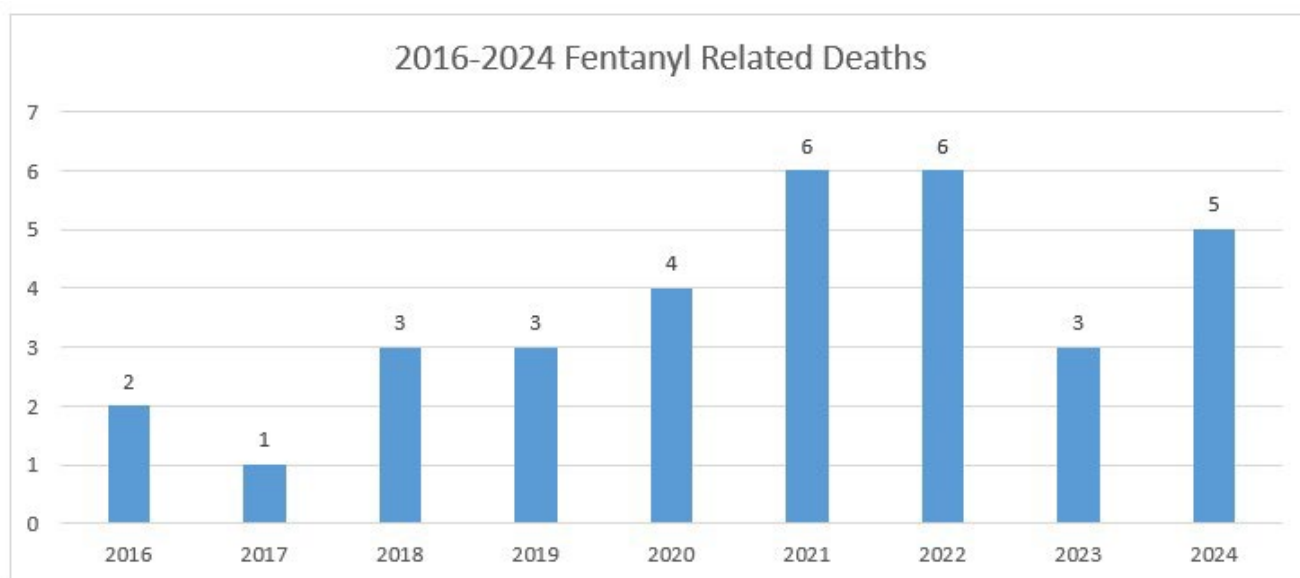


## Fentanyl Related Deaths

Often, the Garfield County Coroner's Office is asked about the increase in fentanyl related deaths in Garfield County and its impact to our community. While deaths remain at a lower level, on average, there was an increase of fentanyl related deaths from 2017-2022 with a slight decrease in 2023. Additionally, coroner's office staff anecdotally hear of fentanyl related incidents where a person is suspected to be under the influence of fentanyl or other opioids and the person experiences an overdose related medical event only to be saved by first responders and with the aid of naloxone (Narcan).

Fentanyl is in Garfield County. In one death in 2022, the Garfield County Coroner's Office located over 75 illicit fentanyl pills in the decedent's possession.

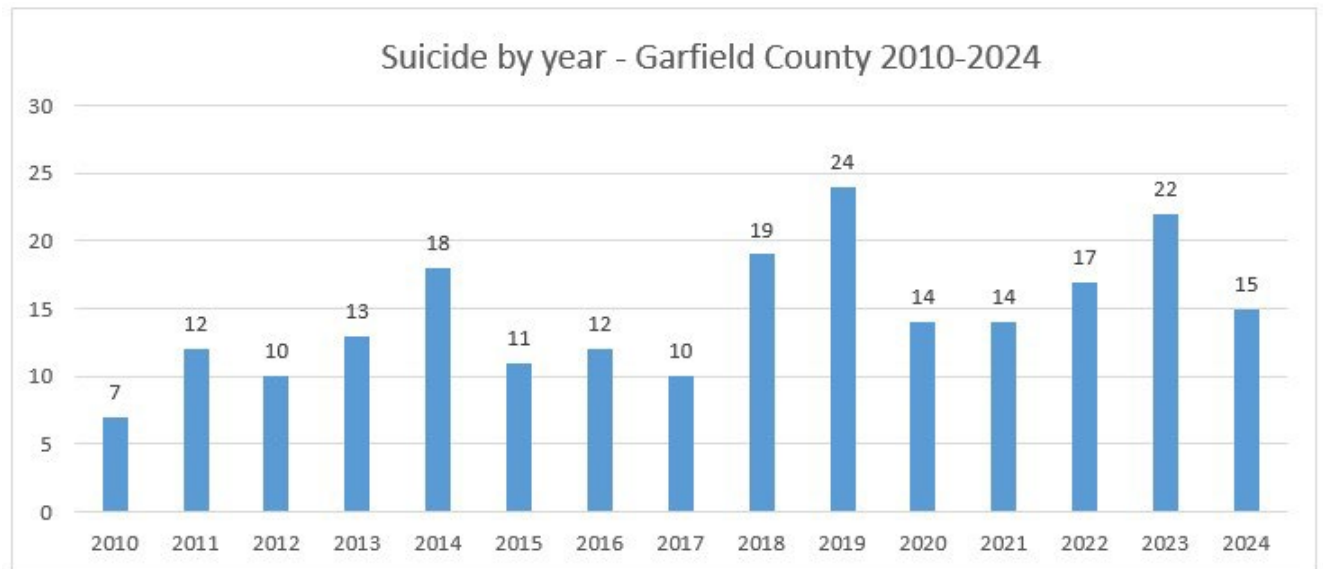
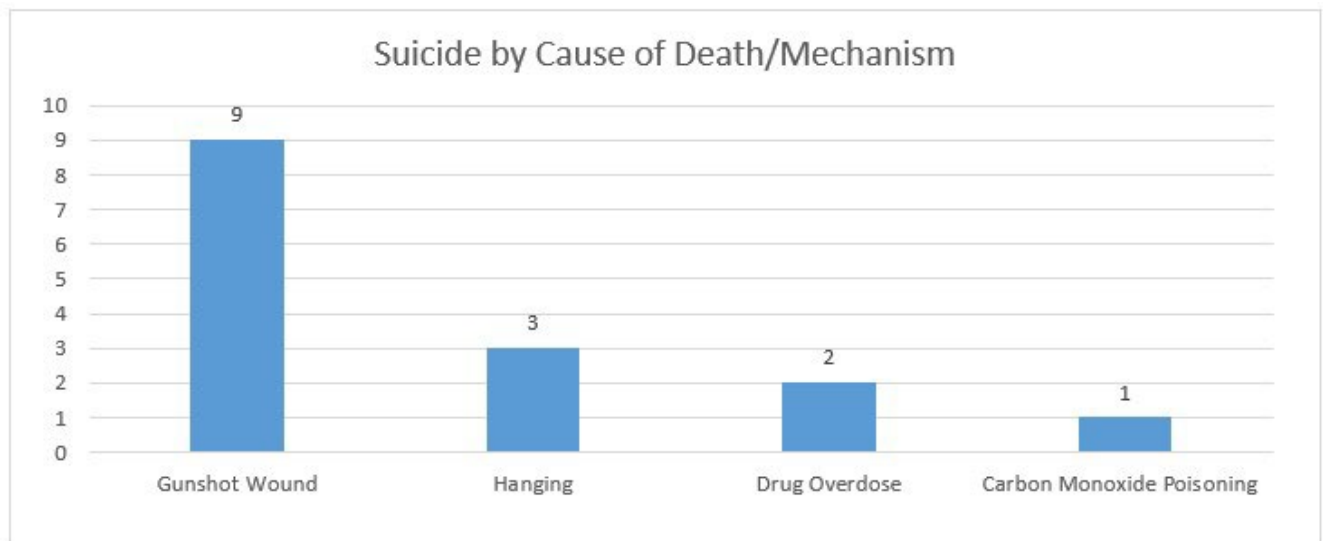
The below chart details recent years where fentanyl was either listed in the cause of death or as a "other significant condition" (Also known as Part B of a death certificate).



## Suicide Deaths

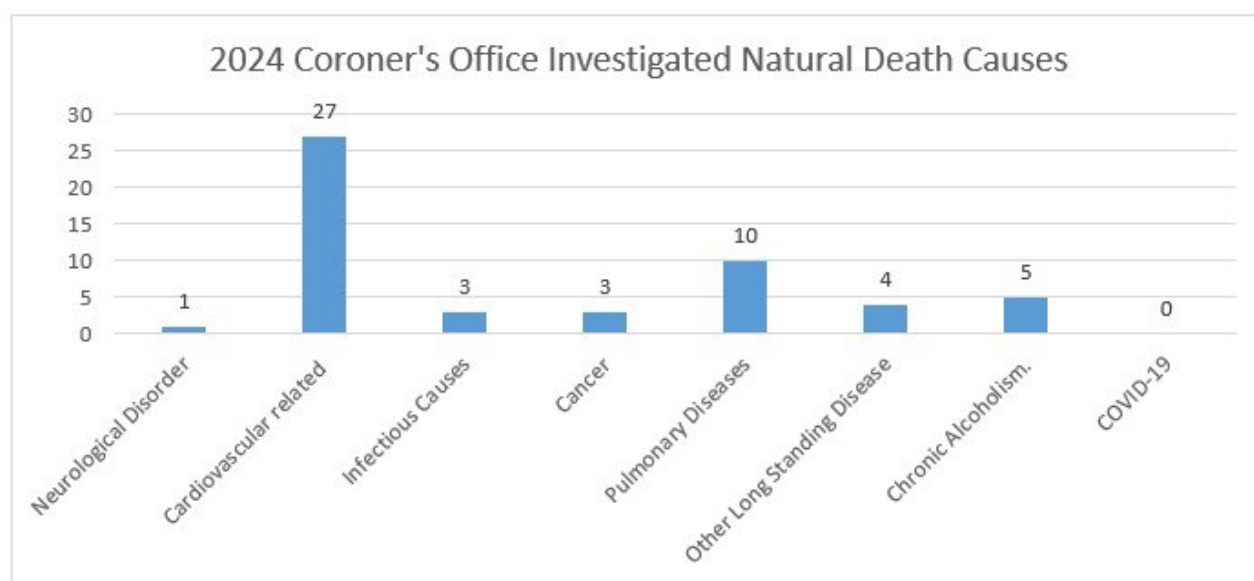
In 2024 there were fifteen deaths that were certified with manner of death as suicide. Below are the characteristics of those fifteen deaths.

- Males = 10 and Females = 5.
- Males ranged in age from 31-66 years old.
- Females ranged in age from 19-66 years old.



## Natural Deaths

The Garfield County Coroner's Office investigated 53 deaths that were determined to be natural. Of the 53 natural deaths, 27 were cardiovascular related. Cardiovascular related deaths included myocardial infarcts (heart attacks), heart arrhythmia, strokes, and aneurysms. There were ten deaths related to chronic pulmonary disease. One death was related to complications of a neurological disorder such as dementia. There were five deaths due to chronic alcoholism. There were three deaths where the cause of death was due to cancer. The remaining four deaths were primarily from complications of other long-standing diseases.



\*Only natural deaths investigated by the Garfield County Coroner's Office are represented. Most natural deaths occur at a skilled nursing facility to include nursing homes and hospitals and do not require a coroner's office inquiry.

## Homicide Deaths

There was one homicide death in Garfield County in 2024. A male suspect who was being contacted by law enforcement for an outstanding arrest warrant in a public parking area. Upon contact, the male individual pulled out a firearm and began to point it at the officers. The officers shot at the suspect, striking him. The male later died on scene. It should also be noted that the term homicide for the purpose of death certification is a "neutral" term and neither indicates nor implies criminal intent, which remains a determination within the province of the legal processes. (NAME, 2002)

## Undetermined Deaths

Undetermined or "could not be determined" is a classification used when the information pointing to one manner of death is no more compelling than one or more other competing manners of death in thorough consideration of all available information. In 2024 there was one "undetermined" manner of death classification. A male in his forties was found deceased at the

bottom of a cliff. The thorough investigation was unable to determine if the man had intentionally jumped or accidentally fallen off the cliff.

### Deaths involving Children:

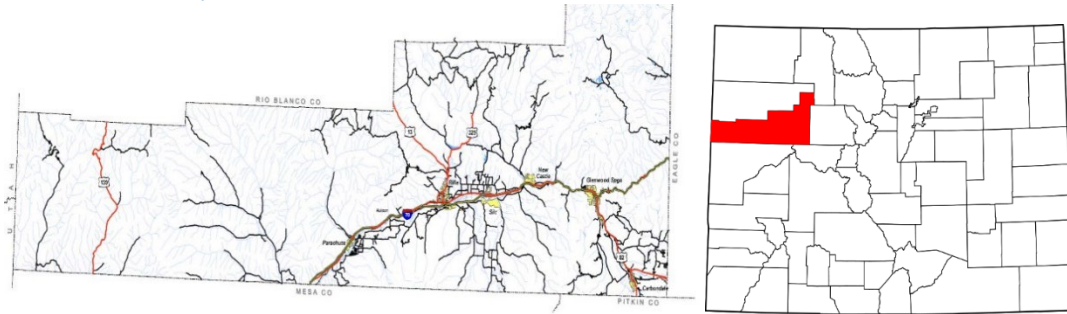
The Garfield County Coroner's Office investigated two deaths involving children aged 0-17 years old. Both deaths were determined to be natural. One death involved a toddler who had been treated by a physician and was found to be not breathing in the middle of the night. Autopsy results revealed the child had died of Group A Streptococcus sepsis. The second child an infant, died in the early morning hours. The autopsy results revealed acute bronchopneumonia.

### In-Custody/Law Enforcement Involved Deaths:

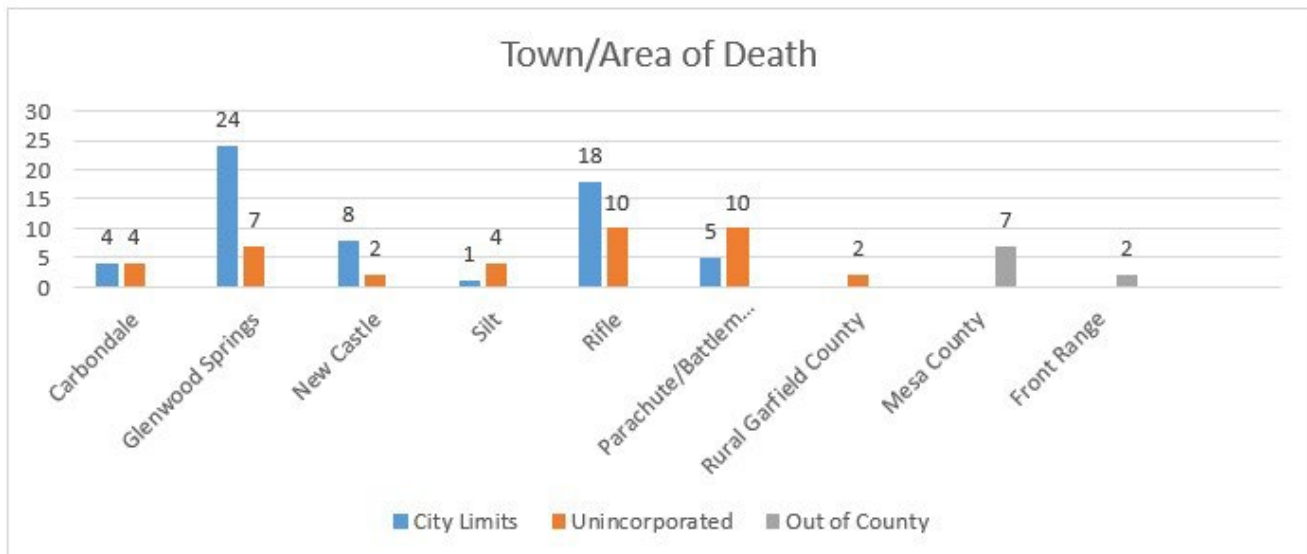
There were two law enforcement involved/in custody deaths in Garfield County in 2024. There was one law enforcement involved death of a male suspect who was being contacted by law enforcement for an outstanding warrant in a public parking area. Upon contact, the male individual pulled out a firearm and began to point it at the officers. The officers shot at the suspect, striking him. The male later died on scene. The coroner's office certified the death as homicide.

There was one death of a Colorado Department of Corrections inmate at the Rifle Correctional Facility. The death was determined to be natural.

## Area of Response



The Garfield County Coroner's Office responds to death investigations throughout Garfield County. Garfield County serves the communities of Carbondale, Glenwood Springs, New Castle, Silt, Rifle, Parachute, and the unincorporated community of Battlement Mesa. In addition, there are several rural areas of Garfield County. In one instance investigators travelled two and a half hours to the Stillwater Reservoir area of Northeast Garfield County and was assisted by the Routt County Search and Rescue to recover a man who had a boating accident in the Bear River.



- Of the 18 deaths investigated in the city limits of Rifle by the coroner's office, six were at Grand River Hospital.
- Of the 24 deaths investigated in the city limits of Glenwood Springs by the coroner's office, nine were at Valley View Hospital.
- There were seven deaths at St. Mary's Hospital or other care facilities in Mesa County, CO. The incident causing these deaths occurred in Garfield County. Therefore, jurisdiction was transferred to the Garfield County Coroner's Office. None of the seven deaths required a response and the decedents were released directly to a funeral home.
- There were two deaths that occurred at Metro Denver area hospital. The incident causing the death occurred in Garfield County. Therefore, the jurisdiction was transferred to the Garfield County Coroner's Office. The deaths did not require a response, and the decedent was released directly to a funeral home.

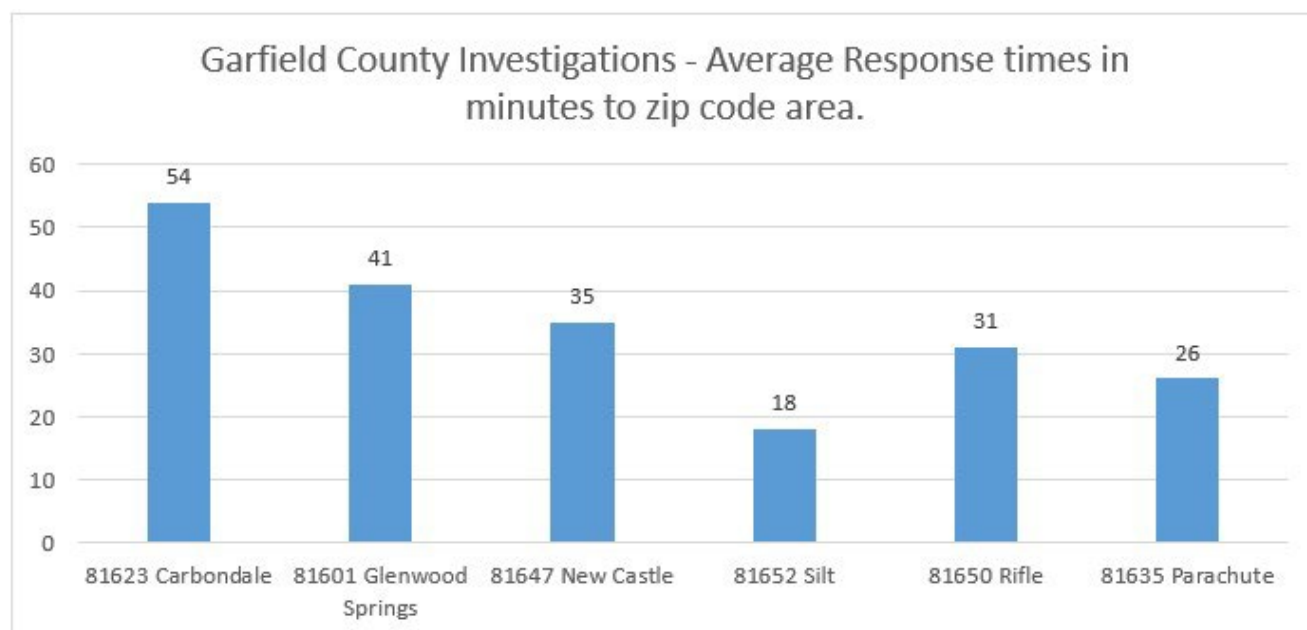
## Response Times

The coroner's office is required to respond to death investigations in a timely manner. The body of a deceased person cannot be removed until the coroner completes their investigation. The family of the decedent depends on the coroner's office timely response to complete the investigation and to care for their loved one.

Moreover, important resources depend on the timely response of the coroner's office. Law enforcement, emergency department staff, fire fighters, and EMS staff may be required to remain on scene until the coroner's office responds. In addition, trauma rooms, equipment, and roads are another consideration of the coroner's office timely response.

The coroner and medicolegal death investigators are on call 24 hours a day. Depending on the time of the call, the location of their response may vary. Coroner's office staff may respond from their home, the coroner's office, while on a hike, or while attending a child's school event.

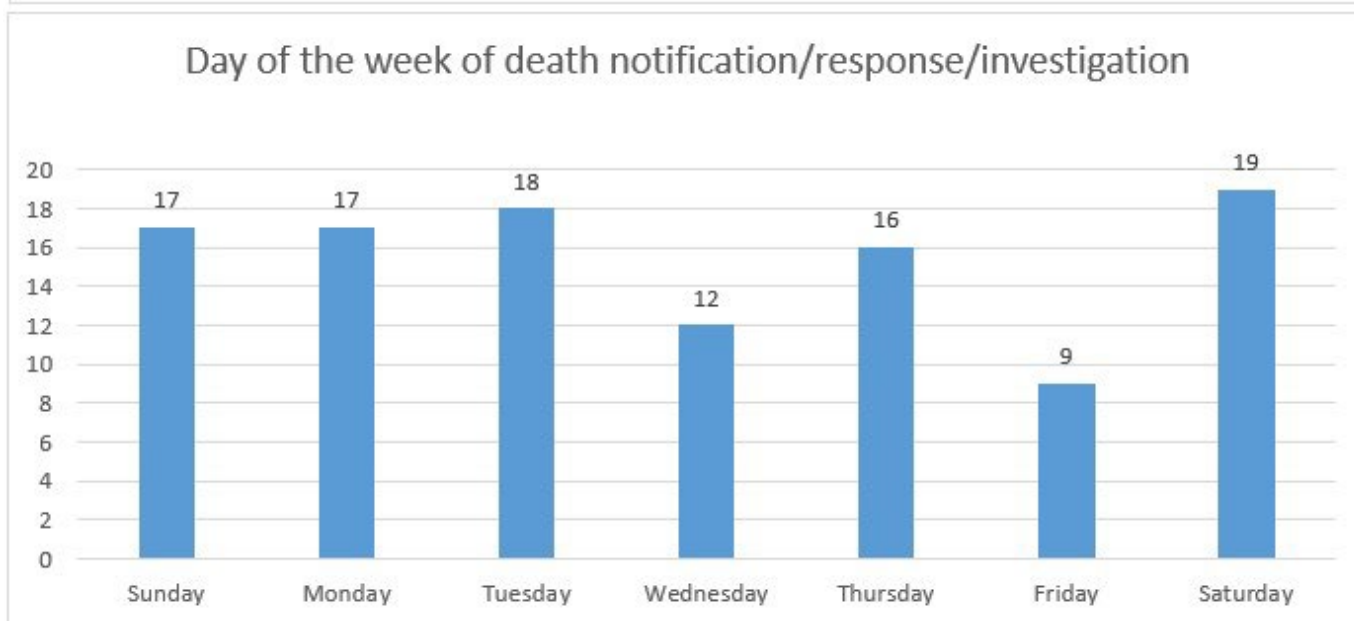
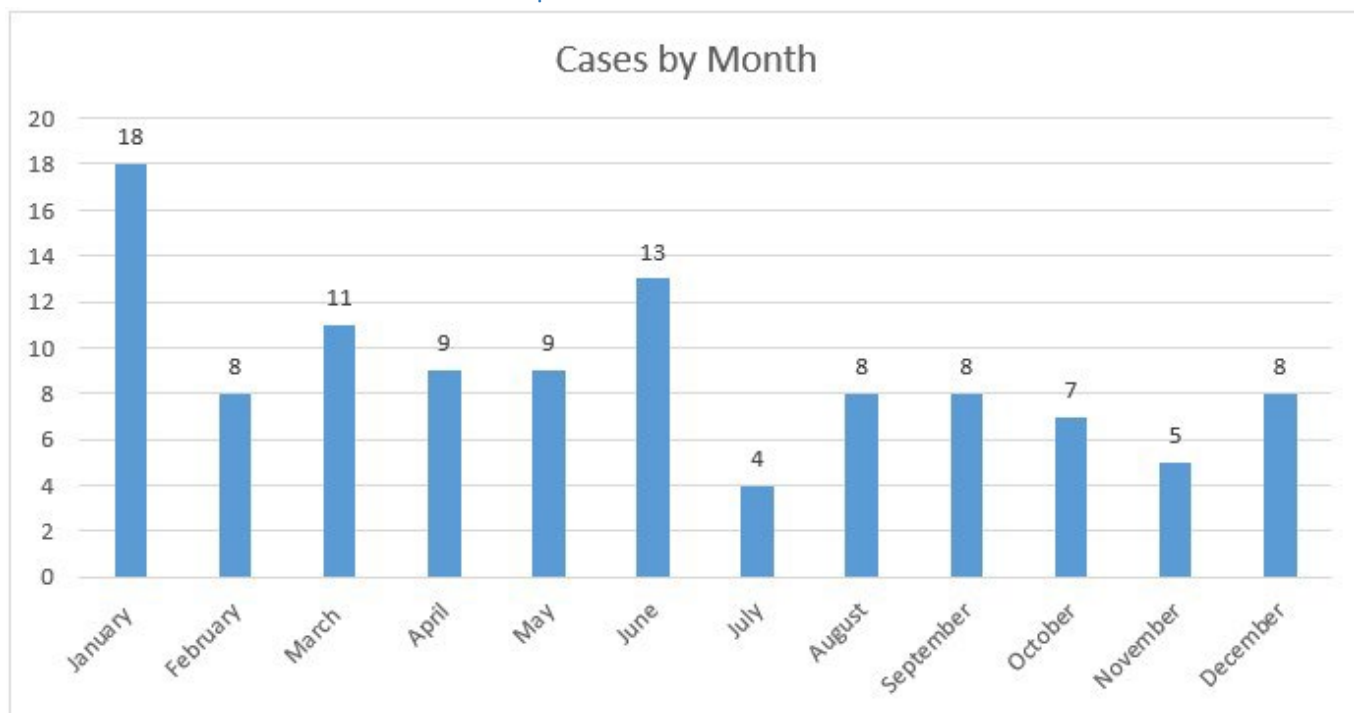
The following graph represents average response times to the Garfield County's communities by zip code. The coroner's office is in Silt, CO and most the coroner's office staff live west of New Castle, CO. Therefore, when an investigator is responding from their home their response time will be longer to Carbondale than if they respond from the coroner's office.

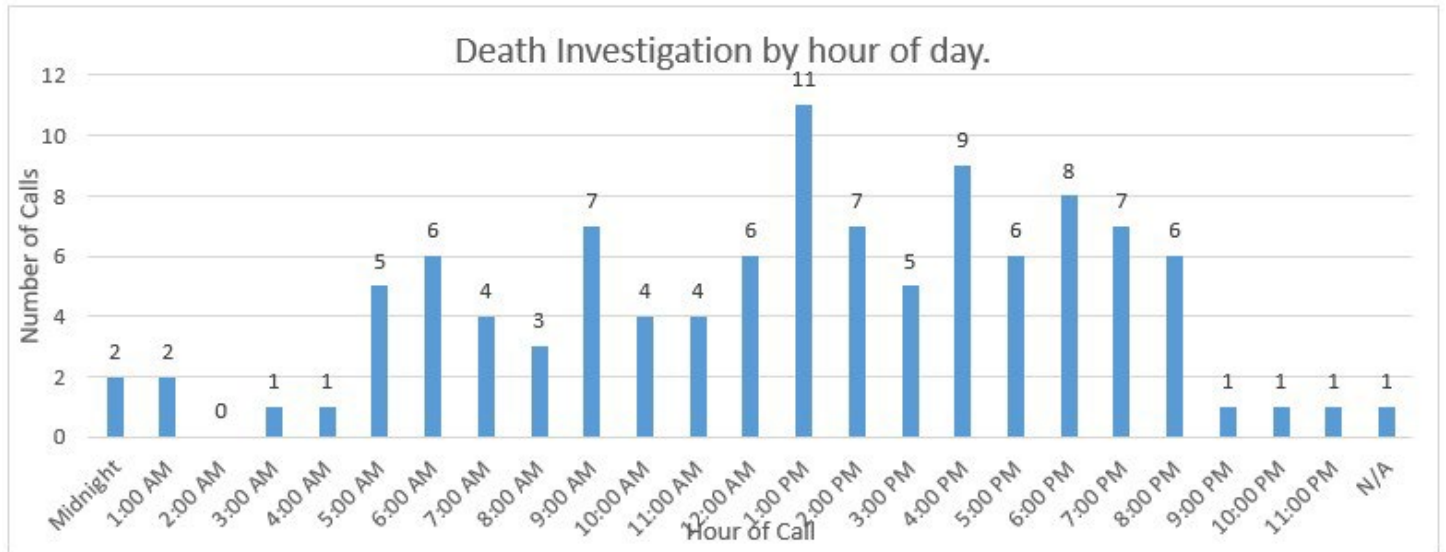


## Death Notifications:

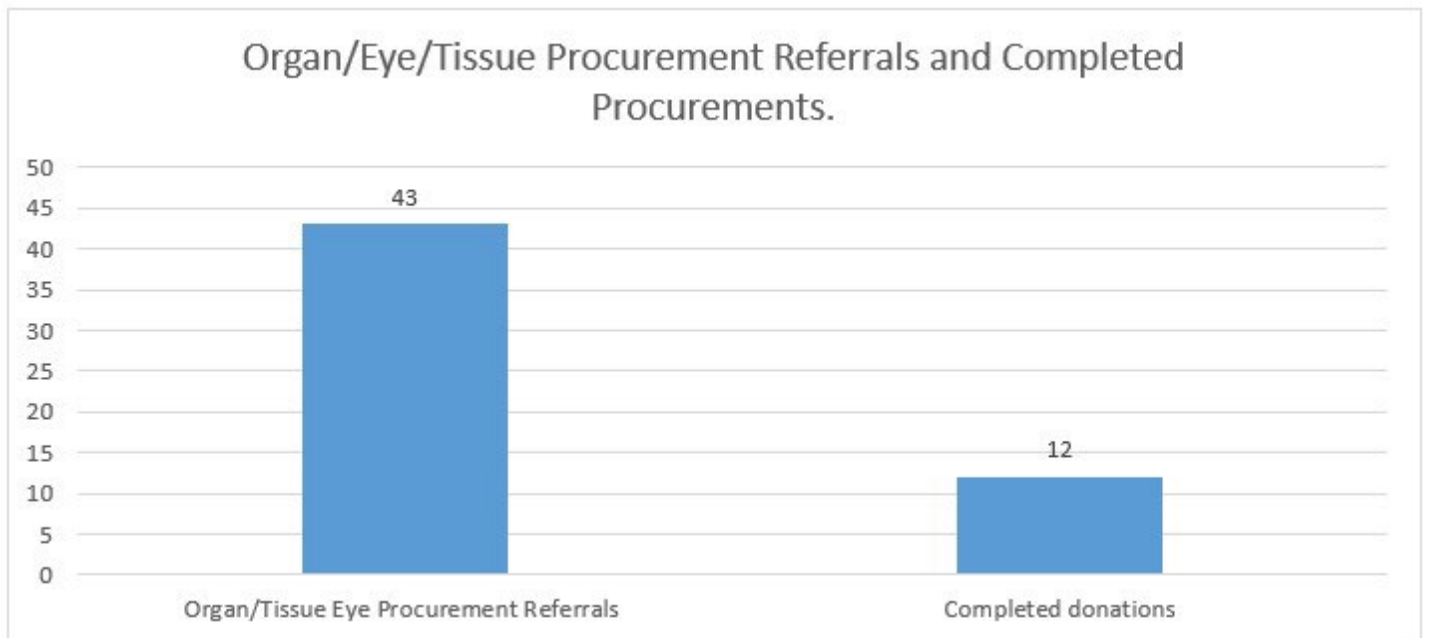
Death notifications are routine function of the coroner's office. In addition to the death notifications our office makes to families and friends of deaths we investigate; our agency will also assist law enforcement and out of county jurisdictions in making notifications to residents and visitors of Garfield County that their loved one died elsewhere. These notifications are infrequent. In 2024, the coroner's office assisted in less than five death notifications for other jurisdictions.

## Additional Statistics and Graphs





Organ/Eye/Tissue Procurement Referrals and procurements.





## Unclaimed decedents, unidentified decedents, and exhumations.

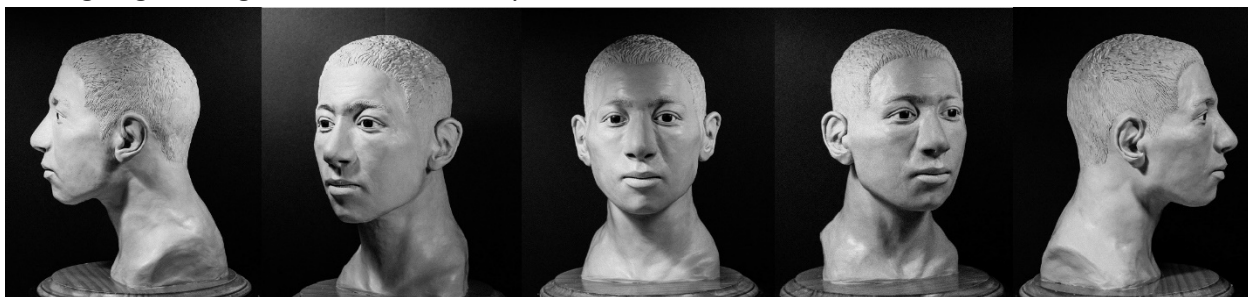
In 2024, the Garfield County Coroner's Office investigated several deaths and of all the deaths the decedent's body was identified and claimed by next of kin. In 2024 there were zero exhumations of decedent's performed by the coroner's office.

The coroner's office continues to investigate two unidentified remains from previous years. Both unidentified remains cases are reviewed at minimum on an annual basis.

### **Case 2003-07-07**, Namus UP#15492 – Adult male, of African ancestry or Latino/Hispanic ancestry

On July 7, 2003, a person fishing on the banks of the Colorado River near Silt, CO found a human skull. Over the course of several years the sheriff's office and the coroner's office after 2015, obtained DNA, X-rays, and dental charting. The information has been entered and maintained into the appropriate databases including CODIS, UNT Center for Human Identification, NCIC, and Namus.

A facial reconstruction of the skull was completed, and images were rendered and provided for ongoing investigation into the identity of the decedent.



### **Case 2004-09-09** – Namus UP#15487 – Adult male, 27-65 years old, 5'10" (approximately) tall, of Caucasian race.

On September 9, 2004, hikers located the skeletal remains in a campsite in the upper No Name Creek area near Glenwood Springs, CO. The remains as well as campsite artifacts are located. Over the course of several years the sheriff's office and the coroner's office after 2015, obtained DNA, X-rays, and dental charting. The information has been entered and maintained into the appropriate databases including CODIS, UNT Center for Human Identification, NCIC, and Namus.

A facial reconstruction of the skull was completed, and images were rendered and provided for ongoing investigation into the identity of the decedent.



## Death Certification and Timelines:

Death certification is one of the final acts the coroner's office takes when completing a death investigation. Death certificates are an important process to documenting the death, the cause, the manner, as well as the demographics of someone who has died. Death certificates are a legal document issued by the Colorado Vital Records Office. There are multiple satellite offices in county governments in Colorado. The local vital records office is located within the Garfield County Clerk & Recorder's Office.

The coroner does not issue death certificates but must certify the death using the Colorado Vital Events System (COVES). A funeral home usually initiates the death certificate process and then once ready, the coroner's office will certify the cause and manner of death along with any injuries (if applicable). If a death is still under investigation, the coroner's office has the option to mark the death as "pending death investigation" which allows the funeral home to move forward with final disposition. Once the coroner's office death investigation is complete, the coroner's office will certify the cause and manner of death. Then the funeral home can assist the family in getting certified copies. The coroner's office adheres to the International Association of Coroners & Medical Examiners (IACME) accreditation guidelines that require that of all final death certificates, 90% shall be completed within 120 days.

In 2024, the coroner's office certified 108 deaths. On average, the final death certificate was signed in 15.29 days. The shortest period for a death certificate to be certified was one day and the longest time for a death certificate to be certified was 38 days. Typically, in cases involving an autopsy, the death certificate will be signed once the autopsy report is complete. In 2024, the coroner's office met the IACME requirement.

## Closing

This concludes the 2024 Garfield County Coroner's Office Annual Report. Compiling the data, seeing the decedent's names again, and remembering that while our investigators and I will be moving on to another year with new families and new names, we will not forget that the names, people, and families represented in the 2024 annual report are more than just "numbers," they are the loved ones of families who are learning to navigate their lives without their loved one. To those families and friends who lost their loved ones in 2024, the Garfield County Coroner's Office extends our deepest condolences to you and your families. Whether you worked with Cassie, Dani, Rose, or me, we are all honored and humbled to be chosen to perform this difficult job in serving you and the Garfield County community.

Please do not hesitate to contact me with questions regarding this report or anything pertaining to the coroner's office.

Respectfully,



Rob Glassmire  
Garfield County Coroner