

Beaufort County Coroner's Office

2021

Annual Report



Beaufort County
South Carolina

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OFFICE OF THE CORONER

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David W. Ott
Coroner

To the Residents and Visitors of Beaufort County:

On behalf of the Beaufort County Coroner's Office, we welcome you to review the 2021 Annual Coroner's Report. Completing my first year in office as your Coroner has been a privilege and an honor. This report reflects the kind of accountability and transparency that the public should expect from their elected officials.

I would like to express my sincere condolences to everyone who lost a loved one in 2021. The members of my staff and I have been impacted by each decedent and the families we have served. Regardless of the cause and manner of death, these were people who left behind families and friends. Entirely too many lives prematurely ended. Our goal remains to gain and share any information that might lead to the prevention of such tragedies.

My staff and I are in the process of several improvements to better serve the public. The awarding of a forensic grant will allow the office to advance in several areas:

- A new computer system for reporting incidents that meets the industry standard.
- National Accreditation through the International Association of Coroners and Medical Examiners.
- Final equipment purchases to provide local autopsies.
- The addition of a Forensic Pathologist, a Morgue Attendant, and an Accreditation Manager.

If you need any additional information feel free to contact me at 843-255-5150.

David Ott
Beaufort County Coroner

Beaufort County Coroner's Office

Mission Statement:

The mission of the Beaufort County Coroner's Office is to conduct medicolegal death investigations in a thorough, independent, professional, and compassionate manner. We strive to be ambassadors of all decedents and an advocate to the survivors. We are committed to rising above normal expectations and strive to provide the best services possible for the citizens and visitors of Beaufort County.

MEET THE CORONER



David Ott was sworn into the office of Coroner in 2021 after serving as the Chief Deputy Coroner. His many years of experience with the Coroner's Office is one of the many experiences that makes David uniquely qualified for this position.

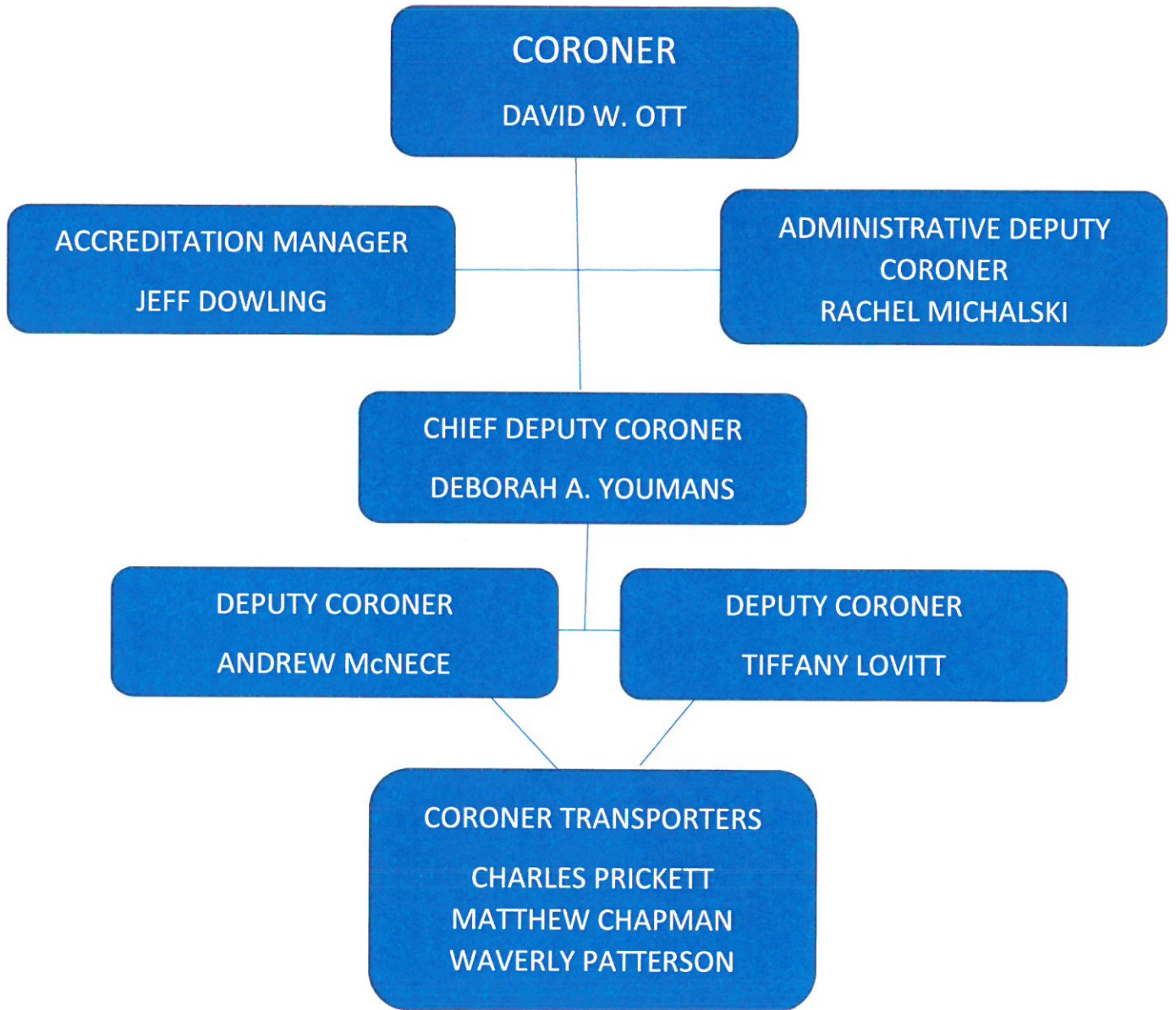
David's father, a United States Marine, received orders in late 1957 to Beaufort. Since then, David has been a proud Beaufortonian. He graduated Battery Creek High School in 1977. In 1982, he married his wife, Kitty, and together, they moved to Georgia so that David could pursue a new career opportunity in law enforcement. David graduated from the Georgia Police Academy on May 24, 1985, though he never actually made it to the graduation ceremony itself, as he and Kitty welcomed their first daughter, Melanie, on the same day. They later welcomed their second daughter, Stephanie, at Beaufort Memorial Hospital in 1989.

In 1986, David was offered an opportunity to return to Beaufort as a Sheriff's Deputy with Beaufort County Sheriff's Office, where he became a detective after only nine months. He proudly served the citizens of Beaufort County and the Sheriff's Office, until 1995, when he accepted a position with Beaufort City Police Department. During David's tenure at both Beaufort County Sheriff's Office and Beaufort City Police Department, he was instrumental in solving multiple high-profile crimes throughout Beaufort County. David served the Beaufort Police Department as an Investigator until his retirement in 2009.

After his retirement from law enforcement, David started a new chapter as the Deputy Coroner under Coroner J. Edward Allen, where he served since 2009. His years as a civil servant have enhanced David's keen eye for detail, empathetic character, and investigative skills.

Throughout David's entire career, he has participated in numerous training opportunities, ranging from enhancing investigation and interrogation techniques to advanced crime scene analysis. His experience with cold case investigations, bloodstain pattern analysis, and vulnerable children and adults uniquely qualify David to be Beaufort County Coroner.

BEAUFORT COUNTY CORONER'S OFFICE ORGANIZATIONAL CHART



APRIL 18, 2022

BEAUFORT COUNTY

DESCRIPTION OF JURISDICTION

Historic Beaufort, the second oldest city in South Carolina, is located between Savannah and Charleston on South Carolina's Atlantic Coast.

From the natural beauty of the islands to the history dating back to Native Americans and Spanish explorers, our region is filled with wonder and enchantment at every turn. Proud to be a bit off the beaten path, Beaufort has the charm and Southern hospitality, but our own unique community and Lowcountry style of life.

Beaufort County celebrates a long and positive relationship with the military through Marine Corps Recruit Depot Parris Island; a Marine Corps military base first built in 1861 and used from 1915 to present day, Naval Hospital Beaufort, and Marine Corps Air Station Beaufort.

The county comprises lowland plains and some 65 islands (part of the Sea Islands chain) separated from each other and from the mainland by bays, the St. Helena and Port Royal sounds, the Coosaw, Broad, and other rivers, and the Intracoastal Waterway. Some of the islands, including the sites of Hunting Island State Park and Pinckney Island National Wildlife Refuge, persist in a relatively unspoiled state. Others, especially Hilton Head Island, are known for sandy beaches and mild temperatures and attract tourists throughout the year. A bridge connecting Hilton Head to the mainland was built in 1956.

At the end of the 20th century, Beaufort County boasted one of the few unpolluted marine estuaries on the U.S. Atlantic coast, an important shellfishery. Hilton Head Island is the largest city, and Beaufort is the county seat. Area 587 square miles. Population 192,122 (2019).

Beaufort County is also known for its ongoing revival and celebration of the Gullah culture, as is reflected in much of the artwork, cooking and culture. The County has also been recognized as a Reconstruction Era National Park for its influential role in this critical time in American history. Many of the county's longtime African American residents speak the Sea Islands' unique Gullah dialect, compounded of African and English linguistic elements. The Beaufort Water Festival is also held every summer.

Beaufort City, seat of Beaufort County, southern South Carolina is situated on Port Royal, one of the Sea Islands, and on the Intracoastal Waterway. Its harbor was first visited by Spaniards in 1521. Early settlement attempts in the area were made by French Huguenots (1562), the English (1670), and Scottish Covenanters (1684). A fort was built by the British in 1711, and the town, also founded that year, was named for Henry Somerset, 2nd duke of Beaufort (1684–1714).

Beaufort was occupied by invading forces during the Revolutionary and American Civil wars. Between wars it thrived on a plantation economy, exporting indigo, rice, and cotton. An antebellum atmosphere with numerous colonial buildings and historic landmarks has been preserved; these include the Episcopal church (built in 1724 and later remodeled) and the arsenal (built c. 1798; now housing the Beaufort Museum).

Shrimping, truck farming, cattle raising, light manufacturing, lumber milling, tourism, and the U.S. Marine Corps Recruit Depot keeps Beaufort prospering. In 1959 the building that had housed Beaufort College (1795–1861) became the administrative center of the newly organized Beaufort campus of the University of South Carolina. The city is also the site of the Technical College of the Lowcountry, which traces its origin to the Mather School, founded in 1868.

“CAUSE” and “MANNER” OF DEATH

The Cause of Death is the official determination of the specific disease or injury and the sequence of events that leads to an individual’s death.

The Manner of Death is determined largely by means of the investigation and relates to circumstances at the time of or surrounding the death. In South Carolina, as is common in the United States, there are five manners of death as listed below.

NATURAL: Death caused by disease.

SUICIDE: Death because of a purposeful action to end one’s own life.

ACCIDENT: Death, other than natural, where there is no evidence of intent.

HOMICIDE: Death resulting from injuries inflicted by another person.

UNDETERMINED: Manner assigned when after a thorough investigation there is insufficient evidence, or conflicting/equivocal information (especially about intent), to assign a specific manner.

2021 STATISTICS

A total of 1845 calls for service were handled by the Coroner's Office in 2021.

Reported deaths	1820
Cases Accepted	1845
Scene Investigation	738
Transported by the office	258
Transported to the office	252
External examinations performed	5
Partial autopsies	0
Full autopsies	182
Hospital autopsies	182
Toxicology requests	187
Unidentified bodies	0
Organ/tissue referrals/donations	Handled by hospitals
Unclaimed bodies	2
Exhumations	0
Notifications for other jurisdictions	25
Cremation Permits Issued	302
Reported by Hospice	850

Deaths – 2017

(Non-Natural)

Homicide	8
Suicide	21
Accidental	31
Drug Overdose	26
MVA	30
TOTAL	116

Deaths – 2018

(Non-Natural)

Homicide	13
Suicide	28
Accidental	32
Drug Overdose	14
MVA	20
TOTAL	107

Deaths – 2019

(Non-Natural)

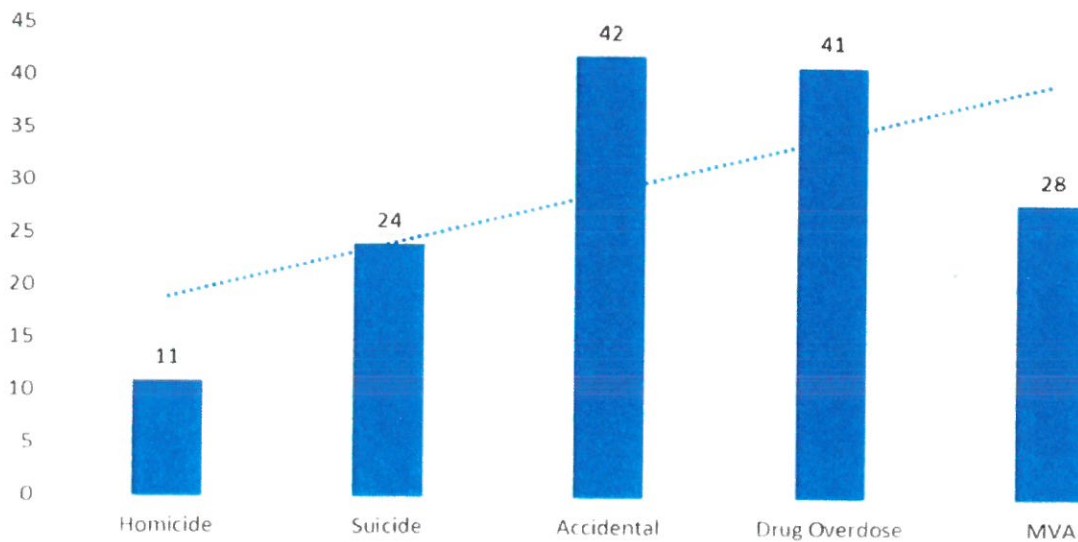
Homicide	17
Suicide	32
Accidental	30
Drug Overdose	17
MVA	19
TOTAL	115

Deaths – 2020

(Non-Natural)

Homicide	14
Suicide	32
Accidental	41
Drug Overdose	31
MVA	22
TOTAL	140

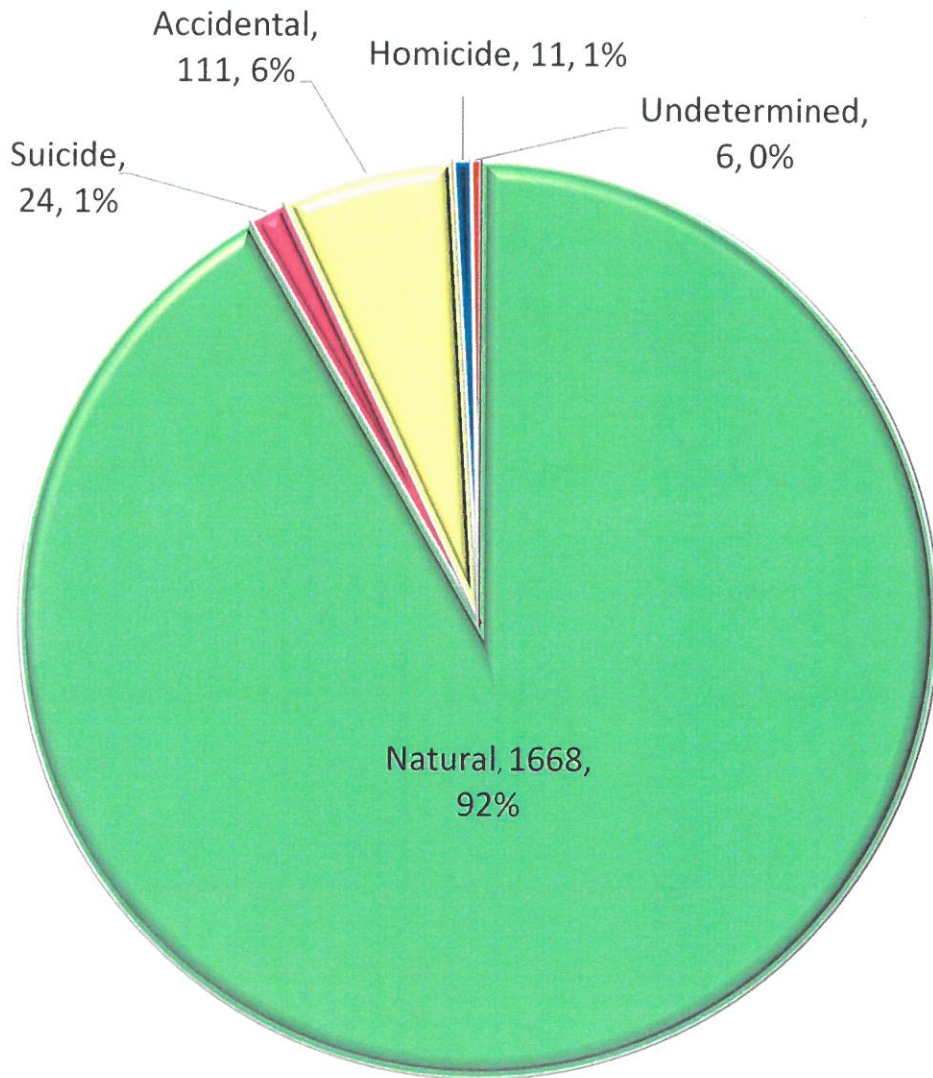
Deaths - 2021



2021 TOTAL 146

DEATHS for YEAR 2021

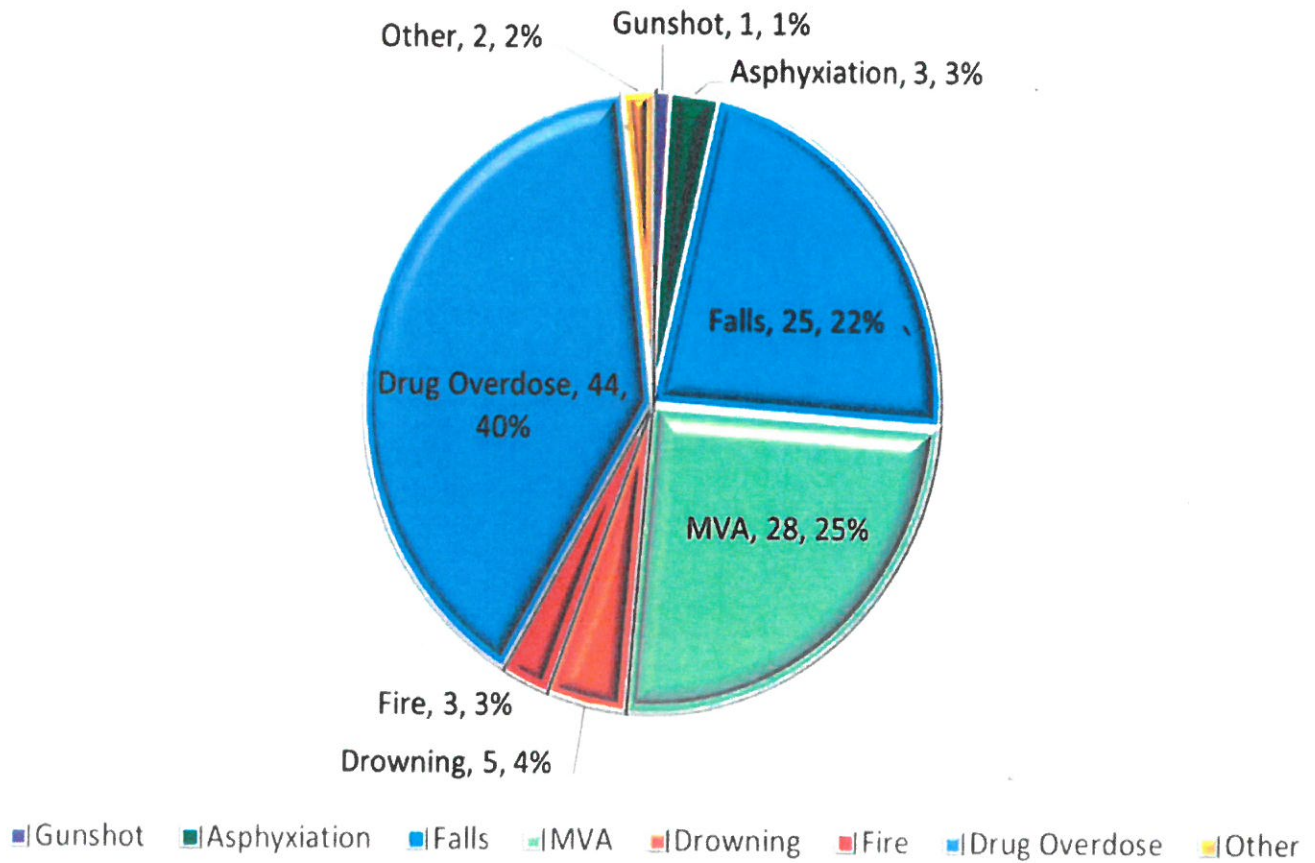
(By Manner of Death)



■ Natural ■ Suicide ■ Accidental ■ Homicide ■ Undetermined

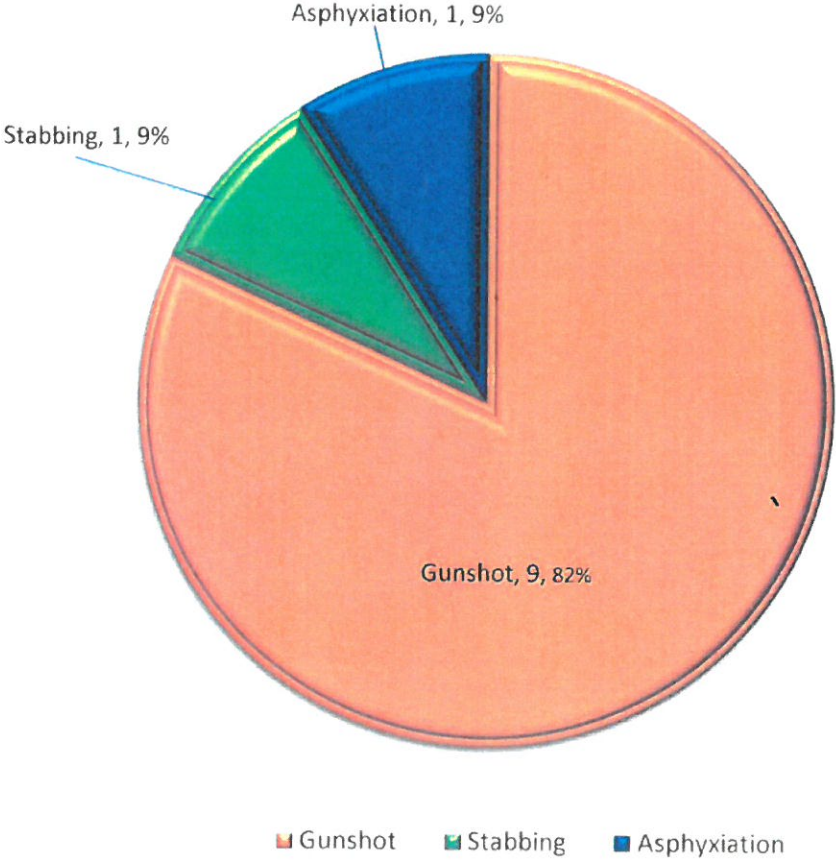
ACCIDENTAL DEATHS - 2021

MANNER of DEATH



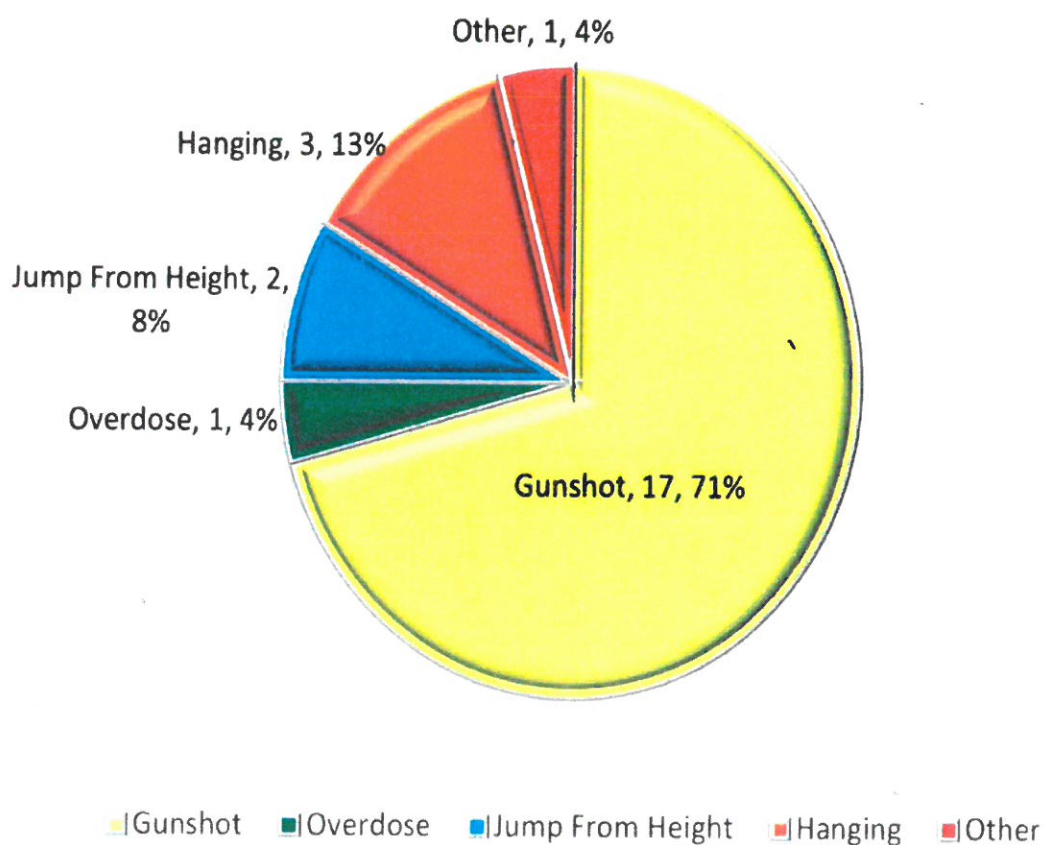
HOMICIDES for YEAR 2021

(Manner of Death)



SUICIDE – 2021

Manner of Death



THE BEAUFORT COUNTY CORONER'S OFFICE

FUTURE GOALS

- Apply for Department of Justice grant for forensic improvements. The application was successful, and the grant was awarded October 2021 for \$99,999.56.
- Complete the outfitting of the autopsy room. Funds were provided for additional improvements to include an X-Ray system.
- Hire a Forensic Pathologist and morgue assistant to begin in-house autopsies. Both positions were approved and applicants were interviewed and will begin August 2022.
- Achieve national accreditation through the International Association of Coroners and Medical Examiners (IACME). A part-time accreditation manager was hired and the process began in March 2022. Expected completion date October 2022.
- Register the Coroner and Deputy Coroner's by the American Board of Medicolegal Death Investigators (ABMDI). All four are currently in the process.
- Enhance the training program for new employees. A new training system is currently being designed.
- Reduce gasoline and costs per mile on vehicle fleet. This is being accomplished by eliminating transportation to Charleston for autopsies. In addition, funeral homes are now responsible for transportation from the morgue.

View the 2020 South Carolina Code of Laws | View Previous Versions of the South Carolina Code of Laws

2016 South Carolina Code of Laws

Title 17 - Criminal Procedures

CHAPTER 5 - CORONERS AND MEDICAL EXAMINERS

ARTICLE 1 Definitions

- Section 17-5-5. Definitions.

ARTICLE 3 Coroners

- Section 17-5-10. Election of coroner.
- Section 17-5-20. Bond.
- Section 17-5-30. Official oaths; commission.
- Section 17-5-40. Term.
- Section 17-5-50. Vacancy.
- Section 17-5-60. Office; book of inquisitions.
- Section 17-5-70. Coroner's deputies, appointment and duties.
- Section 17-5-90. Coroner may not act under appointment of sheriff.
- Section 17-5-100. Coroners must carry out orders of county governing body; fees and costs.
- Section 17-5-110. Coroner or deputy coroner may carry pistol or other handgun.
- Section 17-5-115. Deputy coroners; training and law enforcement status.
- Section 17-5-120. Availability of medical records to coroner of another state.
- Section 17-5-130. Coroner qualifications; affidavits of candidates; training; exemptions; Coroners Training Advisory Committee; Expenses.

ARTICLE 5 Medical Examiners

- Section 17-5-220. Establishment and functions of medical examiner commissions in certain counties.
- Section 17-5-230. Medical examiner commission shall employ medical examiner; duties; assistants; facilities.
- Section 17-5-240. Employment and duties of deputy medical examiners.
- Section 17-5-280. Records to be kept in office of medical examiner; index; copies; admissibility in evidence.
- Section 17-5-330. Salaries and fees; annual budget.

ARTICLE 7 Duties of Coroners and Medical Examiners

- Section 17-5-510. Duties of coroner and medical examiner.
- Section 17-5-520. Authority to order autopsy; request in event of child's death.
- Section 17-5-530. Duty to notify coroner's or medical examiner's office of certain deaths and stillbirths; inquiry; findings; notification of next-of-kin; consent for certain actions.
- Section 17-5-535. Persons authorized to view photographs or videos of autopsy; training use exception; penalty.
- Section 17-5-540. Coroner or medical examiner to notify Department of Child Fatalities of certain child deaths.
- Section 17-5-550. Coroner or medical examiner may petition for warrant to inspect home of child whose death occurred elsewhere.
- Section 17-5-555. Reporting certain deaths of vulnerable adults.
- Section 17-5-560. Certification of cause of death on death certificate.
- Section 17-5-570. Release and burial of dead bodies; preservation and disposition of unidentified dead bodies.
- Section 17-5-580. Authorization for removal of dead body; penalties; coroner's jury.
- Section 17-5-590. Disposition of remains of unidentified dead bodies.
- Section 17-5-600. Permit required for cremation.
- Section 17-5-610. Duty to notify coroner or medical examiner in certain cases when body is buried without investigation.

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2016 South Carolina Code of Laws

Title 17 - Criminal Procedures

CHAPTER 7 - AUTOPSIES AND INQUEST ON THE DEAD

ARTICLE 1 Autopsies, Preliminary Examinations, and Inquests

- Section 17-7-10. Coroners or solicitors shall order autopsies; autopsy to be ordered upon death of persons in penal institutions.
- Section 17-7-15. Return of body after autopsy or medical examination.
- Section 17-7-20. Requirement of preliminary examination before formal inquest; issuance of burial permit, conclusion of inquiry or formal inquest.
- Section 17-7-25. Autopsy on unidentified body; preservation of DNA samples.
- Section 17-7-30. Findings on preliminary examination and filing of evidence.
- Section 17-7-40. Fees for preliminary examination.
- Section 17-7-70. Jurisdiction of coroners to take inquests.
- Section 17-7-80. Duties of coroner concerning motor vehicle, swimming, or boating accident deaths.
- Section 17-7-90. Persons subject to jury duty are liable to serve on an inquest.
- Section 17-7-100. Mode of summoning a jury.
- Section 17-7-110. Procedures to be followed by person directed to summon jury; compensation.
- Section 17-7-120. Form of warrant to summon jury.
- Section 17-7-130. Execution and return of warrant; officer or juror subject to penalty for failure to perform.
- Section 17-7-140. Number of jurors and oath.
- Section 17-7-150. Coroner shall charge jury.

- Section 17-7-160. Inquiry in case of suicide.
- Section 17-7-170. Coroner's power to issue warrants and to summon and examine witnesses.
- Section 17-7-175. Coroner's power to issue subpoena duces tecum.
- Section 17-7-180. Disregard of summons or refusal to testify.
- Section 17-7-190. Coroner may punish for contempt.
- Section 17-7-200. Coroner's power to adjourn the jury and bind jurors.
- Section 17-7-210. Supplying places of absent jurors.
- Section 17-7-220. Oath of witnesses.
- Section 17-7-230. Coroner shall take testimony in writing and bind over or commit witnesses.
- Section 17-7-240. Duty to render verdict; form.
- Section 17-7-250. Form of conclusion of inquisition where deceased was wilfully killed.
- Section 17-7-260. Form of conclusion of inquisition where death was not wilful but by the hands of another.
- Section 17-7-270. Form of conclusion of inquisition in case of death by self-murder.
- Section 17-7-280. Form of conclusion of inquisition in case of death by means unknown.
- Section 17-7-290. Form of conclusion of inquisition in case of death by mischance.
- Section 17-7-300. Form of attestation clause; signature to inquisition.
- Section 17-7-310. Return of inquisition and evidence to clerk.
- Section 17-7-320. Endorsement on return of inquisition and evidence.
- Section 17-7-330. Coroner's Book of Inquisitions.
- Section 17-7-340. Compensation and mileage allowed coroner's jurors.

ARTICLE 3 Bodies Buried Without Inquiry

- Section 17-7-510. Penalty for burying body without notice or inquiry.
- Section 17-7-520. Order to take up buried body on suspicion of violent death; examination.
- Section 17-7-530. Record of body long dead and buried or improperly kept.

ARTICLE 5 Commitments and Reports

- Section 17-7-610. Warrant in case of wilful killing.
- Section 17-7-620. Form of warrant in case of wilful killing.
- Section 17-7-630. Commitment of person named in warrant in case of wilful killing.

- Section 17-7-640. Sheriff and jailers are required to keep persons committed.
- Section 17-7-650. Binding over person who killed another by mischance and witnesses.
- Section 17-7-660. Report by county coroner to Governor in certain homicide cases.
- Section 17-7-670. Report by coroners and magistrates to Public Service Commission in case of railroad accident.

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