

# **Richland County Coroner's Office 2019 Annual Report**



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May 15, 2020

The Richland County Coroner's Office is pleased to release this 2019 Annual Report. The purpose of this report is to enable the County Commissioners, Law Enforcement, the Richland County Health Department, and the general public to better acquaint themselves with the activities of our office, as well as to provide an ongoing statistical analysis of past and current deaths in the county and to serve as a tool for future planning.

It has been another busy and eventful year in our office. We have continued to build relationships with our County Commissioners, County Prosecutor's Office, Law Enforcement, emergency medical resources, Health Department, and local funeral homes. Our office wants to extend our gratitude to all of the departments that we continue to work with. These departments help our office in tremendous ways, and we are so thankful to work with these men and women.

In recent years in the state of Ohio the workload of county Coroners has continued to increase dramatically. This is partly due to changes in the Ohio Revised Code mandating new investigative and reporting responsibilities, as well as changes in society that have made the Coroner's investigative function increasingly important to help resolve conflicts in criminal and civil legal cases, insurance investigations, Worker's Compensation and OSHA cases, Consumer Product and Safety issues. Coroners and their staff are now urged to undergo education and certification, much of which is mandatory. Proposed legislation pending in Congress will require coroner's investigators to undergo formal certification in order to perform their duties and there is discussion on a national level of certifying all coroner and medical examiner offices.

In addition, our office has involved itself in community education by speaking to service clubs, high school and college classes, teenage driving schools, drug rehabilitation forums, victim awareness classes, and by participating in the annual 4H Mock Crash event. We are also involved in the county Suicide Coalition, Safe Communities Coalition, Opiate Board, and Emergency Planning Committee. We have had multiple interns from criminal justice programs, forensic science, and forensic nursing programs spend time with us. Our investigators are also involved with Ohio Mortuary Operational Response Team, involved with the Richland County Mass Fatality Board. There is a movement by the Ohio County Commissioners Association and the Ohio Legislature to reformat the structure of county government, starting with ideas for the changes in the functioning of the coroner's office. While not opposed to change per se, we want to ensure that changes are indeed improvements and are done solely to improve our ability to provide proper and efficient death investigation services to the citizens of Ohio.

We have investigated over 3600 deaths during the twelve-year period of 2005-19. Our goal is to maintain a high level of quality, professionalism, and integrity in the field

of death investigation. We hope that the reader finds the report useful and informative. If you have any questions regarding this report feel free to contact us, (419)-774-5868. I would like to thank my investigators and administrative assistant for the time and effort that they have put in at all hours. They work 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, including holidays. Without their dedication to the community and their compassion to help families of the deceased, this office could not function efficiently.

Sincerely,

Daniel D. Burwell, DO.

Richland County Coroner

## **Duties of the Coroner's Office**

Many people do not understand the difference between a coroner and a medical examiner. Both essentially perform the same functions, but there are a couple of differences. Medical examiners are appointed officials and are always licensed physicians. Coroners are elected officials, and this theoretically offers them autonomy and freedom from being controlled by an "appointing" agency, however in most states coroners are not required to be licensed physicians. Ohio is one of two states that utilize the coroner system but also require their elected coroners to be licensed physicians.

Duties of the Richland County Coroner's Office include:

- To respond to death scenes when needed, 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.
- To thoroughly investigate death scenes.
- To determine the date and time of death, as nearly as possible.
- To determine the manner and cause of death.
- To take all necessary steps to properly and positively identify the decedent.
- To collect, preserve, and process pertinent evidence at the scene (often working along with the local or state crime lab).
- To photograph, sketch, or otherwise document the scene.
- To interview witnesses, family members, physicians, employers, friends, neighbors, etc.
- To remove the body from the scene in a dignified manner.
- To make sure that next-of-kin are notified in a proper fashion.
- To take responsibility for all personal effects on the person of the deceased, and to document the release of these items to the family, law enforcement, or crime lab.
- To determine in which cases an autopsy should be performed.
- To arrange for an autopsy by a forensic pathologist when required.
- To be present at autopsy if necessary, and to otherwise consult with the forensic pathologist in determining cause of death.
- To provide families with information and assistance in helping them through the ongoing process of the death investigation.
- To compile and document all information in an unbiased, accurate, and thorough report.
- To interact with other law enforcement, government, and health agencies, including police/sheriff, fire, EMA, prosecutors, private attorneys, OSHA, Consumer Product Safety Commission, FAA, NTSB, hospitals, funeral homes, organ donation teams, etc.
- To release information to the public and media through interviews and press releases.
- To provide testimony at depositions and in court.
- To provide training and education in the field of death investigation and the role of the Coroner's office to other law enforcement, health, and community service agencies.

- To otherwise be of community service in any way possible, including community and school education activities and participation in community health forums and safety programs.
- To work with the county Emergency Planning Agency(s) to develop mass fatality plans.
- To ensure that the Coroner, Deputy Coroner, and Coroner's Investigators receive ongoing continuing education by attending death investigation, medical, and forensic seminars, and encouraging certification by the American Board of Medicolegal Death Investigators.

### **Community Service Activities**

The philosophy of the Richland County Coroner's Office is that it is our responsibility to participate in community safety and education forums whenever possible. To that end we have been a part of the following;

- Presentations to Teen Driver's Education programs.
- Presentations to high school science classes.
- Presentations to North Central State College classes.
- Presentations to community service clubs.
- Participation in Safe Community Coalition Meetings.
- Participation in Child Fatality Reviews at the health department.
- Participation in Suicide Prevention meetings at the health department.
- Participation in Pandemic Flu Seminars for the community.
- Helped develop a county wide Pandemic Flu Plan.
- Developed a county Mass Fatality Plan
- Presentation at MADD dinner.
- Member of Local Emergency Planning Committee.
- Participation in Mock Disaster Drills.
- Participation in annual 4-H-sponsored Teen Mock Crash events at fairgrounds.
- Participation in high school job shadowing programs.
- Member of Board of Directors of Richland Alternative Program.
- Meet with various local township fire/EMS units.
- Hosted a conference for Emergency Responders.
- Served as preceptors for forensic nursing and criminal justice majors.

### **Reportable Deaths**

By law, the County Coroner is directed to administer and conduct investigation into all deaths which occur under questionable circumstances. By law, all deaths must be reported to the Coroner in the following circumstances:

**Accidental Deaths;** if the death occurs when in apparent good health or in any unusual or suspicious manner including:

- Asphyxiation by gagging on foreign substance, including food in airway; compression of the airway or chest by hand, material, or ligature; drowning; handling cyanide; exclusion of oxygen; carbon monoxide; and/or other gasses causing suffocation.
- Blows or other form of mechanical violence.
- Burns from fire, liquid, chemical, radiation or electricity.
- Cutting, stabbing, or gunshot wounds.
- Electrocution.
- Drug overdose from medication, chemical, or poison ingestion (actual or suspected).
- Explosion.
- Falls, including hip fractures or other injury.
- Stillborn or newborn infant death where there is recent or past traumatic event to the mother such as vehicular accident, drug ingestion, homicide attempt, or suicide attempt that may have precipitated delivery or had a detrimental effect to the newborn.
- Vehicular accidents, including auto, bus, train, motorcycle, bicycle, aircraft, watercraft, or snowmobile, including driver, passenger, or non-passenger deaths related to the accident.
- Weather related deaths, including lightning, heat exhaustion, hypothermia, or death due to high winds.

### **Homicidal Deaths;**

- By any means, suspected or known.

### **Suicidal Deaths;**

- By any means, suspected or known.

### **Occupational Deaths;**

Instances in which the environment of present or past employment may have caused or contributed to death either by trauma or disease. This includes not only injuries received during employment or past employment such as fractures or burns, but also industrial infections, pneumoconiosis, present or past exposure to toxic waste or product (including nuclear products, asbestos, or coal dust), and caisson disease (bends).

### **Sudden Deaths;**

If the death occurs when in apparent good health or in any suspicious or unusual manner including;

- DOA; any person pronounced dead on arrival at any hospital, emergency room, or doctors office shall be reported.

- Any infant or young child found dead, unless under medical care and clearly a natural death from a pre-existing condition. This includes all cases of Crib Death (Sudden Infant Death Syndrome).
- All stillborn infants when there is actual or suspected trauma to the mother.
- Deaths under unknown circumstances.
- Any deaths where the identity of the deceased is unknown.
- Any sudden unexpected death on the street, at home, in a public place, or a place of employment.
- Any death related to drug abuse, habitual use of drugs, or drug addiction.

#### **Custodial Deaths;**

- Deaths occurring while in jail, confinement, or any kind of judicial custody.
- Any Death while being pursued, apprehended, or taken into custody.

#### **Special Circumstances;**

- Death of any Mentally/Developmentally Disabled (MDD) client.
- Any maternal or infant death where there is suspicious of illegal interference by unethical or unqualified personnel, or self-induction.
- “Delayed Death” where the immediate cause of death is from natural disease, but an accident or injury may have occurred weeks, months, or even years before that initiated the sequence of events or medical conditions leading to the death.

#### **Therapeutic Deaths;**

- Any death while under anesthesia, during the anesthetic induction, or during the post-anesthetic recovery period.
- Any death while undergoing any type of surgical procedure.
- Any death thought to be related to any surgical procedure.
- Death during or following any diagnostic procedure if thought to be related to the procedure or complications of the procedure.
- Death due to the administration of any drug, serum, vaccine, or any other substance given for diagnostic, therapeutic, or immunologic purpose.

The Richland County Coroner’s Office encourages the reporting of any death where there is a doubt about whether or not the case should be reported. Many times after investigation the Coroner will release the case back to the jurisdiction or institution where the death certificate will be signed by the attending physician as a natural death.

By state law, only the Coroner can sign the death certificate if the manner of death is anything other than a natural death.

# Richland County Demographics

Richland County is located in North Central Ohio and as of the 2010 census had a population of 124,475. It is the 23<sup>rd</sup> most populated county out of Ohio's 88 counties.



The county has a total area of 500 square miles. The county seat is Mansfield with a population of 49,346. Other cities within the county include Shelby, Ontario, and parts of Crestline and Galion. The county also includes the villages of Bellville, Butler, Lexington, Lucas, Shiloh, and part of Plymouth. It borders five counties; Ashland, Crawford, Huron, Knox, and Morrow counties.

Interstate 71 runs from SW to NE through southern Richland County. US 30 is a major east-west hub and US 42 runs through the county as well. There are fourteen state highways running through Richland County. Overall there are 595.27 lane miles of state, US, and Interstate highways.

The county has two major river basins. The Clear Fork of the Mohican River runs through the southern part of the county, and the Black Fork of the Mohican River runs through northern Richland County.

The county contains parts of three major reservoirs within its boundaries; The Clear Fork Reservoir lies within Richland and Morrow Counties while both Pleasant Hill Reservoir and Charles Mill Reservoir lie within Richland and Ashland Counties.

## 2019 Budget - Richland County Coroner's Office

The total spending of the Richland County Coroner's Office for 2019 was \$424,485.30.

In 2018, our actual budget that we spent from was \$373,332.23. Between these years there was a \$51,152.79 increase in the amount of spending our office has. Primarily of these costs went towards our autopsy costs. This was primarily due to an increase in cases and autopsies required. Below is the break-down of our spending:

Salaries	\$203,929.52
Contract-services	\$8,437.01
Non-Contact Services	\$204,978.85
Training	\$0
Travel	\$0
Dues	\$3,290.00
Supplies	\$480.90
Equipment/Repair	\$2,688.54
Subscriptions/Printing	\$63.54
BWC Chargeback	\$0
<b>Total</b>	<b>\$424,485.30</b>

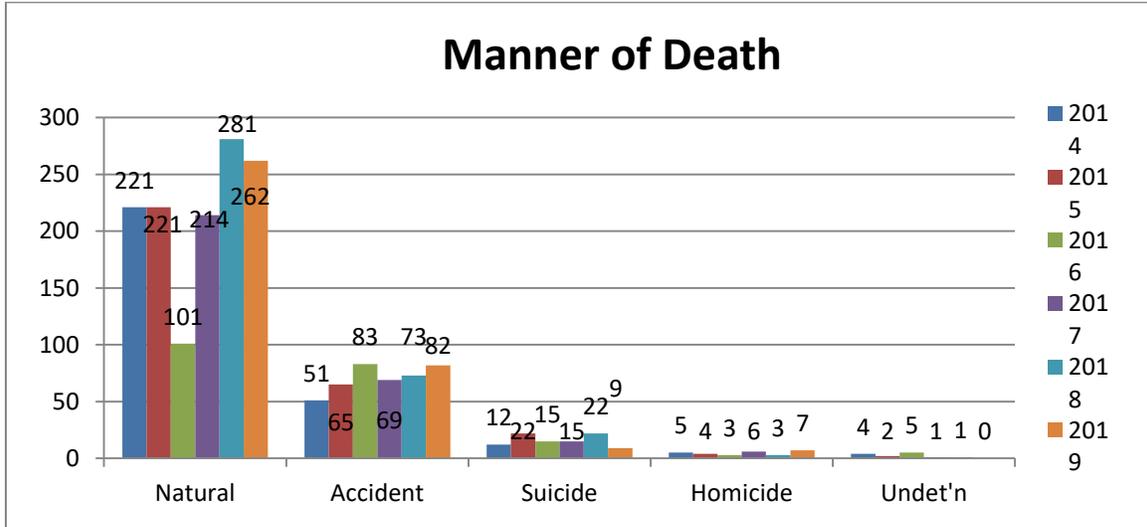
“Services/Non Contract” represents primarily autopsies. Because Richland County has no forensic morgue and has no forensic pathologists, coroner's cases that require autopsy are usually sent out of county to coroner's offices such as Montgomery County where the autopsy is performed. Currently an out-of-county autopsy and transport costs about \$1,850.00, which is a \$100 increase from 2016. According to Ohio law, the cost of having an autopsy done in a referral county shall be “no greater than the actual value of the services of technicians and the materials used in performing such examination.”

### Total Deaths

There were 1,213 total deaths in Richland County in 2019. 74 of those cases were autopsied and 26 of those cases were drawn toxicology. Below in Total of Deaths, the manner of death is broken down.

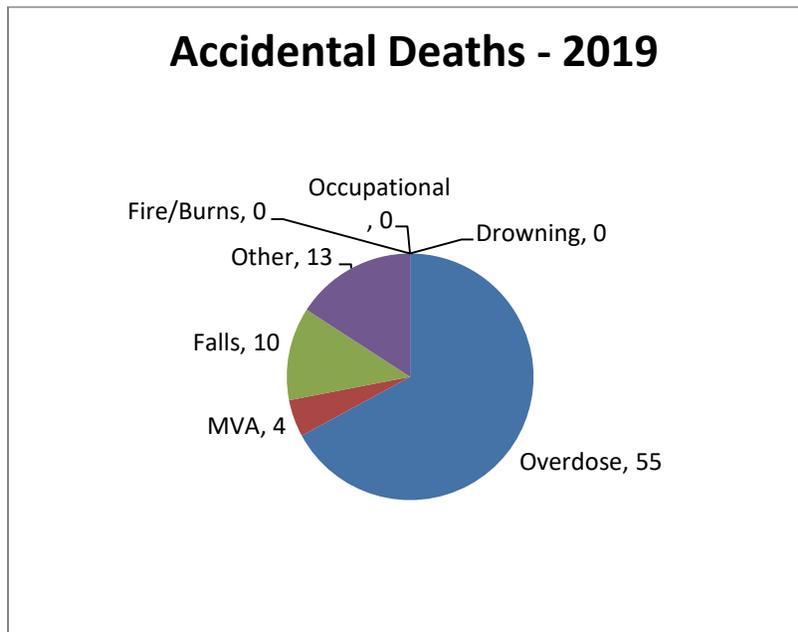
## Manner of Death

Of the deaths reported to the Richland County Coroner's office in 2019, there were 82 accidental deaths, 9 suicides, 7 homicides, and the rest of our cases were natural causes.



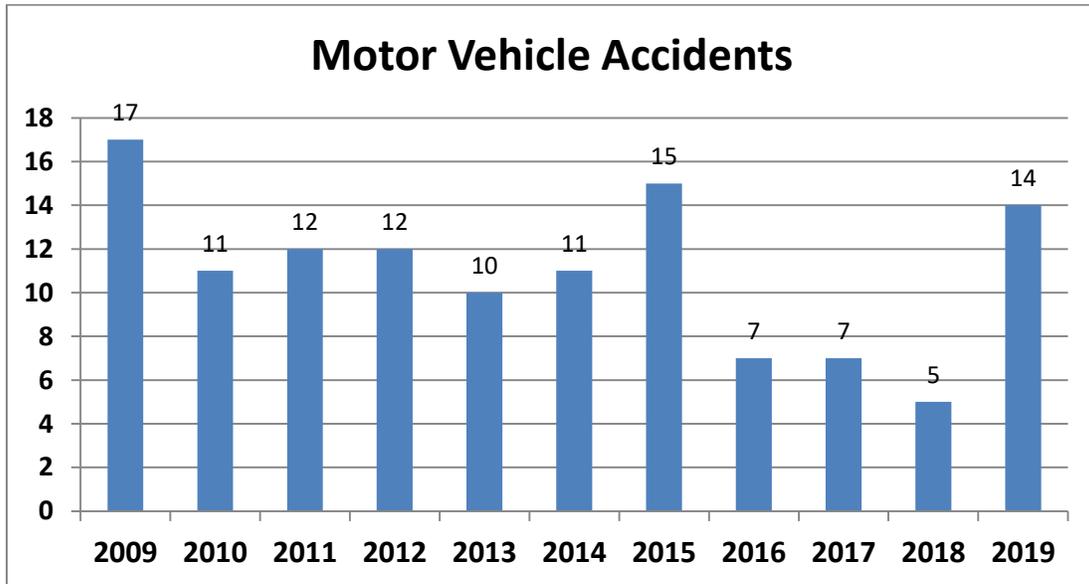
## Accidental Deaths

There were 82 accidental deaths. 55 of those deaths were drug overdoses, 10 were caused from falls, 1 was from hypothermia, 7 from blunt force trauma, 1 head injury, 1 co-poisoning, 4 involved in fatal crashes, 1 asphyxia, 1 electrocution, and 1 co-sleeping.



### Motor Vehicle Accidents

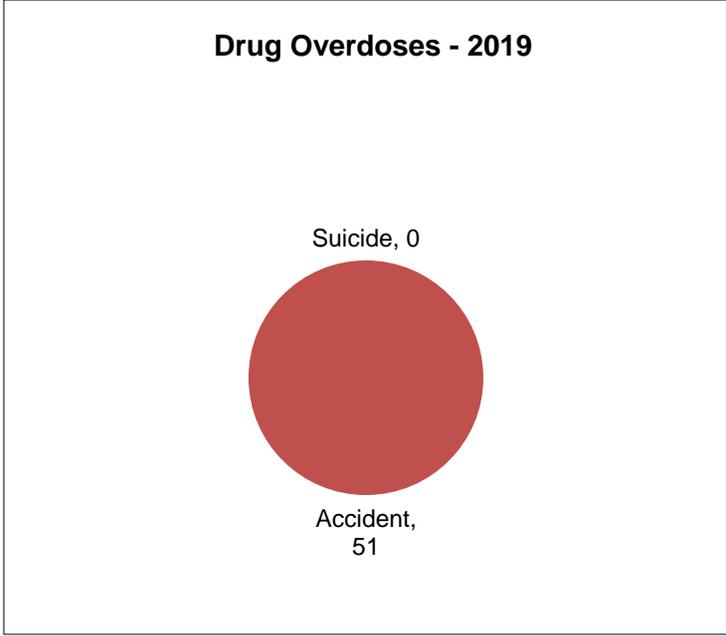
There were 14 motor vehicle deaths in 2019. Two of the decedents were under the age of 18. None of these motor vehicle accidents were drug and/or alcohol related in regards to factors causing the crash. Most of them were motor vehicle accidents, three were motor cycles, one of them was struck on a bicycle by a motor vehicle, and one was an Amish buggy struck by a motor vehicle.



### Drug Overdoses

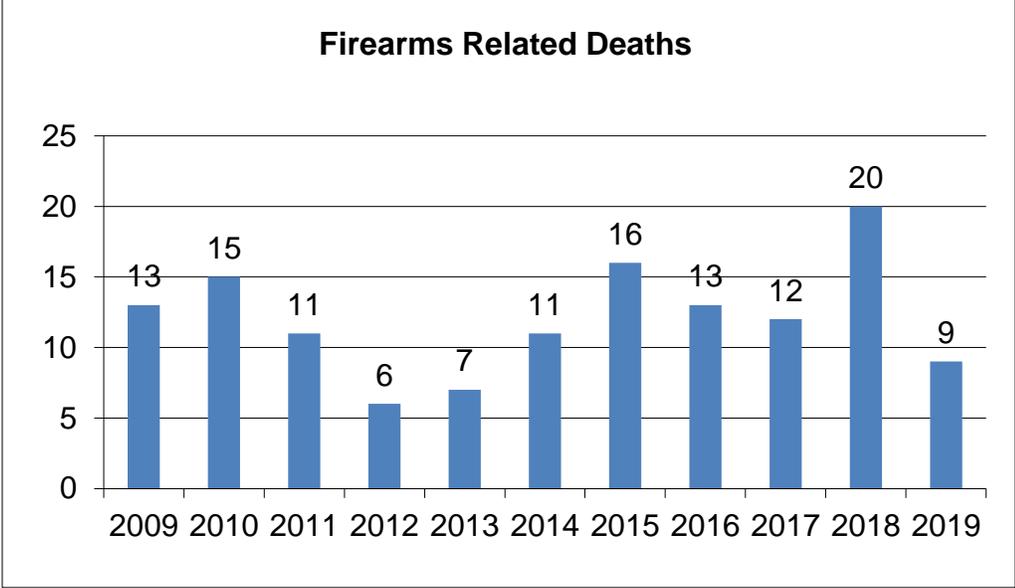
There were 51 deaths due to drug overdoses in 2018. There were 39 of those cases that were males, and 12 of those that were females. One thing we are noticing with our drug overdose cases is that decedents do not just have one drug. They are mixing drugs. With that also being said, fentanyl is continuing to increase in Richland County. Other drugs in our county include;

- Heroin
- Meth
- Opiate
- Cocaine
- Fentanyl
- Benzos
- Norfentanyl



### Firearm Related Deaths

When it comes to firearm related deaths, most of them are related to both homicides and suicides. In 2019, we had 9 firearm related deaths. Of the firearm related deaths were homicide related. We had 5 suicides related to firearms and 4 firearm related homicides.



## Homicides

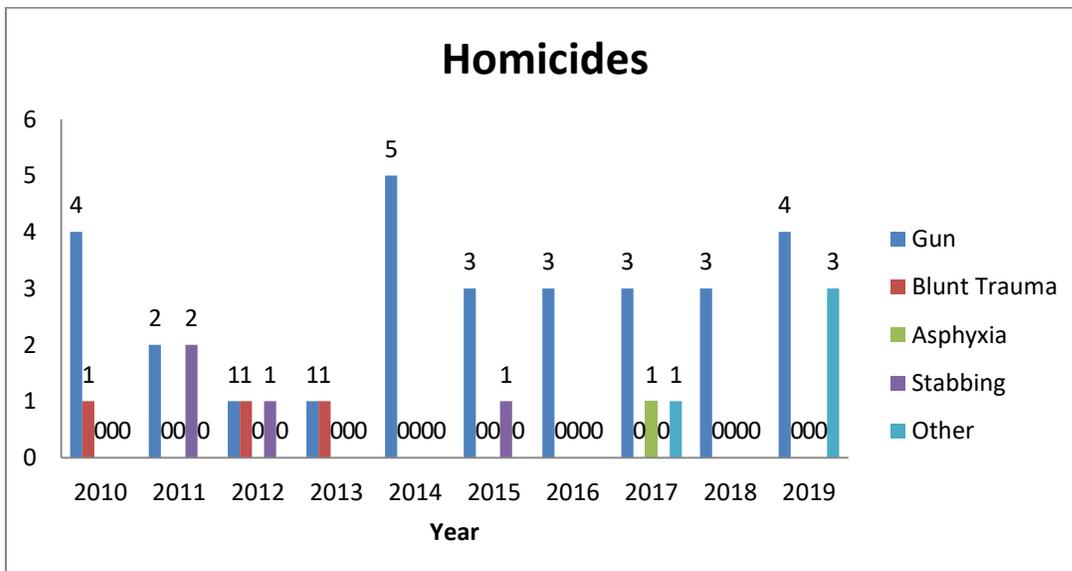
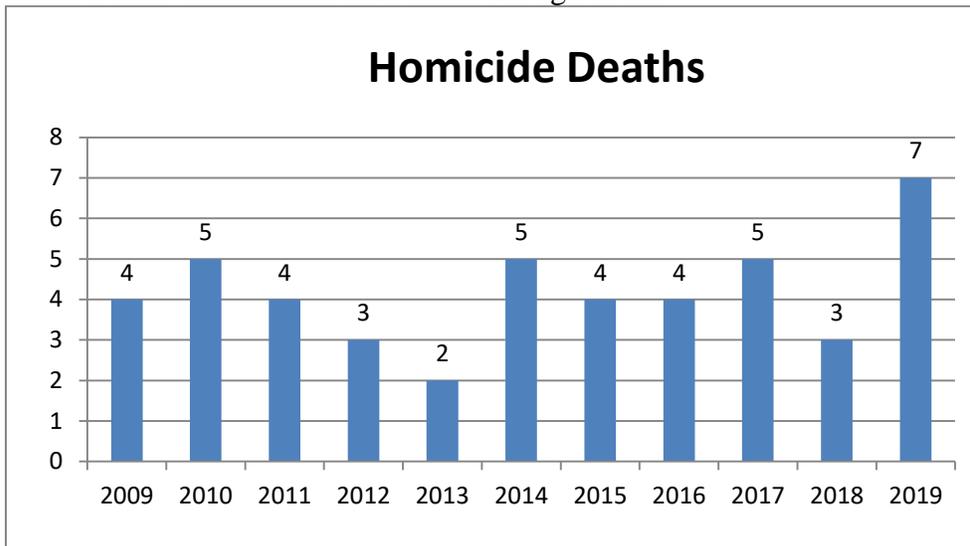
Note: The medicolegal definition of homicide is generally given as death due to the actions of another person. Sometimes there are gray areas with accidental deaths and some deaths are difficult to classify or even to come to a consensus among Coroner's. The medicolegal classification of a death as a homicide does not necessarily imply that it would be classified as a homicide or murder by the criminal justice system.

There were 7 homicides in 2019.

All 4 homicides were gunshot wounds.

And 3 classified as others and were inhalation of products of combustion from a house fire, shaken baby syndrome, and death from a beating.

There were 3 victims that were under the age of 18.

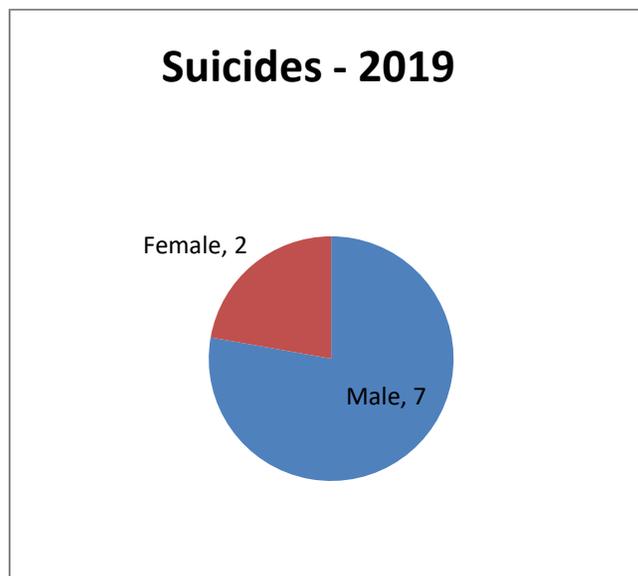
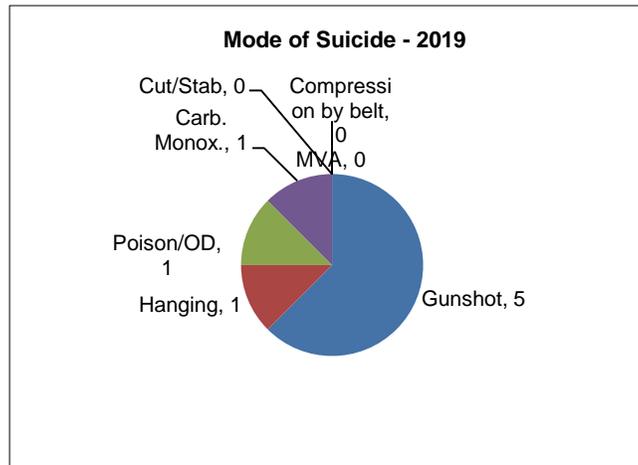


## Suicides

There were 9 suicides in 2019.

There were 7 males, and 2 females.

There were 5 that were firearm related, 1 that was a quetiapine intoxication, 1 carbon monoxide poisoning, and 1 that was a hanging

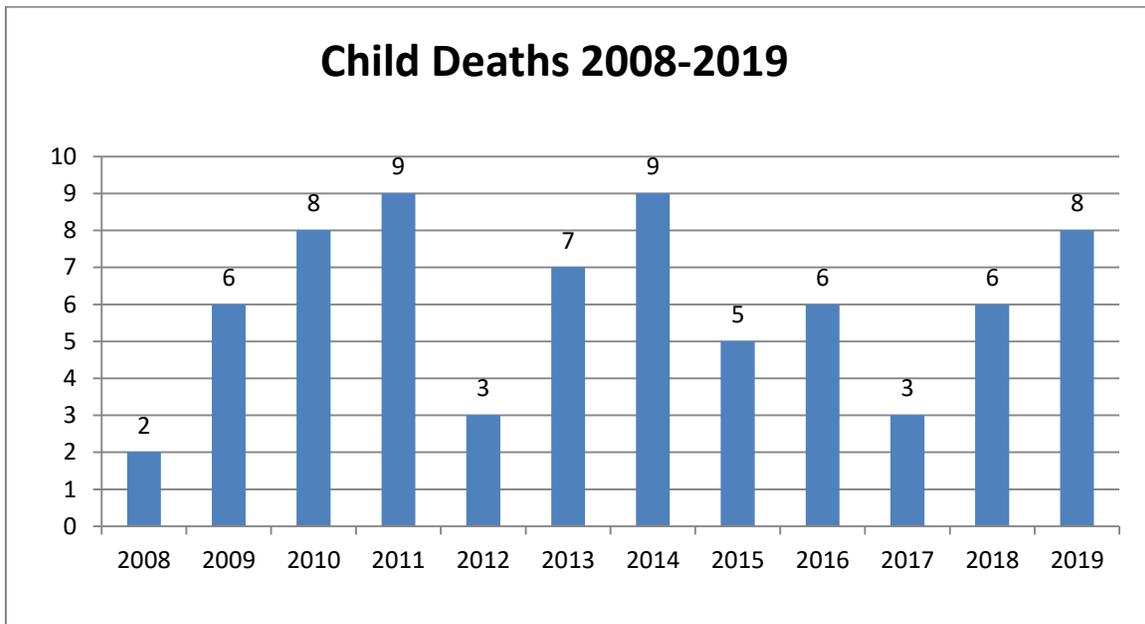


Due to the privacy of the families of the deceased, the decision was made to take out whether the decedents had previous attempts or threats, had a history of alcohol or drugs, or a history of mental illness or depression.

## Child Fatalities

There were 8 child fatalities (children younger than 18 years old) in 2019 that fell under the jurisdiction of the Richland County Coroner's Office. These numbers are artificially low since children who are transported to children's hospitals in other counties and die there or are pronounced dead there fall under that county's jurisdiction.

There were 2 ruled as natural, 3 were ruled as homicide, and 3 ruled as accidental.





**Daniel D. Burwell, DO.**

**Richland County Coroner**

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