

# DeKalb County Medical Examiner's

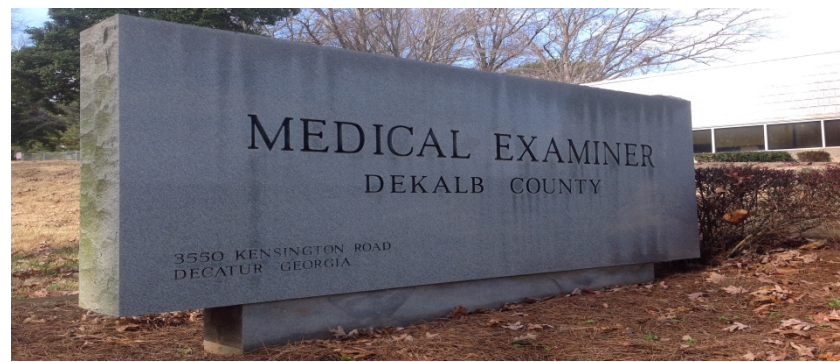


## 2014 Annual Report

Gerald T. Gowitt, MD  
Chief Medical  
Examiner

Pat Bailey  
Interim Director

# Introduction



- ▶ The DeKalb County Medical Examiner (DKME) serves all non-federal, incorporated and unincorporated areas within DeKalb County. In 2014, these areas included the cities of Atlanta, Avondale, Brookhaven, Chamblee, Clarkston, Decatur, Doraville, Dunwoody, Lithonia, Pine Lake, Stone Mountain, unincorporated DeKalb County and other areas served by special law enforcement agencies such as State Patrol, MARTA and campus police forces. DKME does not serve the few areas of State and Federal property within the county. Deaths occurring on state property are investigated by the GBI. Under the provisions of the Georgia Death Investigation Act, DKME investigates deaths that are suspected or known to have resulted from external causes such as injury or poisoning, and deaths that are sudden, unexpected, and not explained with a reasonable degree of medical probability. Other selected types of death are also investigated such as those occurring while a person is in custody of law enforcement agencies.

# Georgia Death Investigation Act (§ 45-16-24)

- ▶ The laws describing the duties of Medical Examiners in Georgia are contained mostly in Official Code of Georgia Annotated, Title 45, Chapter 16, titled the “Georgia Death Investigations Act.” In this law, the types of death required to be reported to the Medical Examiner include:
  - Violence (injury)
  - Casualty (accident)
  - Suicide
  - Suddenly when in apparent good health
  - When unattended by physician (no doctor who can sign the death certificate)
  - Suspicious or unusual
  - Children under 7 if death is unexpected or unexplained
  - Executions pursuant to death penalty (these do not occur in DeKalb County)
  - Inmate of state hospital or state, county, or city penal institution
  - Admitted to hospital unconscious and dying within 24 hours without regaining consciousness

Decisions about autopsies are not mandated and are left to the discretion of the Medical Examiner.

When a death is reported to DKME, the case is either **accepted** (AJ) or **declined** (DJ). If a case is accepted, it means that the Medical Examiner will be signing the death certificate (certifying the death). A case is **declined** for one of two reasons:

- The incidents leading to death did not occur in DeKalb County
- The death need not have been reported and there is a physician who will sign the death certificate.

A case is **accepted** if:

- It meets the criteria specified in the Georgia Death Investigation Act (§ 45-16-25), and
  - The incident leading to death occurred in DeKalb County, or
  - If the place of incident or onset of fatal events is unknown, the death occurred or the dead body was found in DeKalb County

The Medical Examiner (a forensic pathologist) generally uses one of four approaches to certify a death (to obtain information to complete the death certificate):

- **Signout.** The death certificate is signed without examining the body.
- **View.** A cursory examination is performed to further evaluate the case and rule out trauma or the need for further in-depth examination. A few simple case notes may be prepared.
- **External examination.** Formal external examination with a dictated report of the examination, usually including toxicology or chemistry tests as well.
- **Autopsy.** Complete autopsy with dictated report.
- A **limited dissection** (partial autopsy) is sometimes performed if:
  - –there is expressed objection to autopsy or significant health or safety risks exist for staff, and,
  - –a complete autopsy need not be performed.

There are basic general "rules" for classifying manner of death:

- ▶ **Natural** deaths are due solely or nearly totally to disease and/or the 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 one's self.
- ▶ **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 (more below). 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.



## General Response

When a death is reported to DKME, the case is assigned a sequential case number.

Basic information is obtained on all cases reported. Forensic Death Investigators, in consultation with the on-call Medical Examiner as needed, make decisions about whether the case should be accepted or declined, if death scene investigation is required, and whether or not the body needs to be transported to the DeKalb County Medical Examiner's Forensic Science Center.

The Medical Examiner then makes decisions about the type of examination to be conducted and the extent of additional testing to be performed.



- ▶ For further information about Medical Examiners and death investigation, please see the website of the National Association of Medical Examiners at

[www.TheNAME.org](http://www.TheNAME.org)

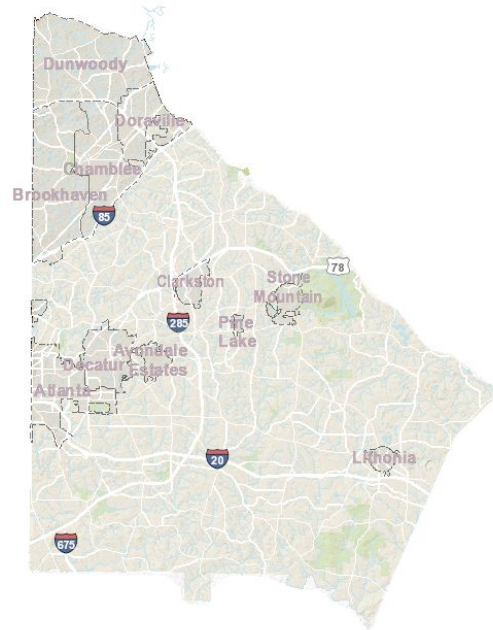


National Association of Medical Examiners

*Hic locus est ubi mors gaudet succurrere vitae*

# Geographical Information

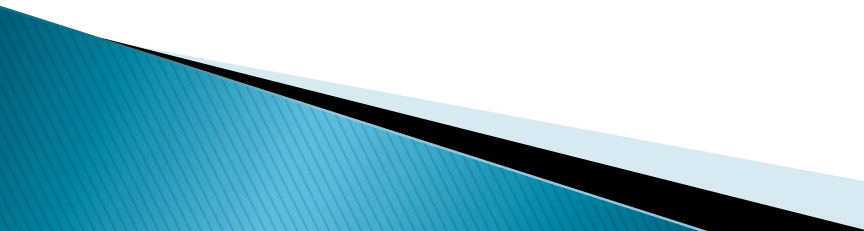
- ▶ DeKalb County covers 267.58 square miles
- ▶ DeKalb County has an estimated population of about 713,340.



# DKME Budget and Staff

The 2014 operating budget was \$2.4 million.

The DKME staff consists of 23 1/2 employees:

- 1 director
  - 2 full-time physician Medical Examiners
  - 8 investigators
  - 5 administrative support staff
  - 6 1/2 forensic technicians and morgue support staff
  - 1 facility support staff.
- 

# All Reported Cases

In 2014, there were 1667\* unique deaths reported to the office.

<u>Jurisdiction</u>	<u>Manner of Death</u>	<u>Frequency</u>	<u>Percent</u>
Accepted (AJ)	ACCIDENT (Not Traffic Fatalities)	130	7.80
	ACCIDENT (Traffic Fatalities)	74	4.44
	HOMICIDE	94	5.64
	NATURAL	416	24.96
	SUICIDE	65	3.90
	UNDETERMINED	34	2.04
	Total of Accepted Cases =		813
Declined (DJ)		854	51.23
AJ		813	48.77
TOTAL		1667	100.00

\*Each investigator handled an average of 208.375 death reports in 2014.

# Procedures on Accepted Cases

MANNER	PROCEDURE				Total
	Autopsy	External PM Exam	Limited Dissection	Signout	
ACCIDENT	56	16	13	45	130
TRAFFIC ACCIDENT	16	21	20	17	74
HOMICIDE	90	1	0	3	94
NATURAL	81	63	73	199	416
SUICIDE	15	34	15	1	65
UNDETERMINED	27	2	0	5	34
<b>Total =</b>	<b>285</b>	<b>137</b>	<b>121</b>	<b>270</b>	<b>813</b>

# Turnaround Times

Case Completion Times		
Case Completion Times	Number of Cases	Percent
0-30 days	1512	90.70%
31-60 days	110	6.6%
61-90 days	29	1.74%
91 days and over	16	0.96%
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>1667</b>	<b>100%</b>

Includes cases declined, which a Medical Examiner reviews to confirm jurisdiction.

# Management of Cases by the Medical Examiner's Office

Cases Managed		
Medical Examiner	Number of Cases	PROCEDURE
Geoffrey P. Smith, MD	245	Signout
Geoffrey P. Smith, MD	92	Limited Dissection
Geoffrey P. Smith, MD	57	External PM Exam
Geoffrey P. Smith, MD	838	Confirm DJ
Geoffrey P. Smith, MD	192	Autopsy
Gerald T. Gowitt, MD	25	Signout
Gerald T. Gowitt, MD	28	Limited Dissection
Gerald T. Gowitt, MD	76	External PM Exam
Gerald T. Gowitt, MD	16	Confirm DJ
Gerald T. Gowitt, MD	88	Autopsy
Jonathan Eisenstat, MD	2	Limited Dissection
Jonathan Eisenstat, MD	3	External PM Exam
Jonathan Eisenstat, MD	5	Autopsy

Total scene examinations by Forensic Death Investigators or Medical Examiners in 2014: 447

Total bodies transported by Forensic Death Investigators or transport service in 2014: 572

# Police Jurisdiction for Non-Natural Reports of Death in 2014

Police Jurisdiction	TOTAL Non-Natural	ACCIDENT	ACCIDENT (Traffic)	HOMICIDE	SUICIDE	UNDETERMINED
Atlanta PD	15	6	4	3	2	0
Avondale PD	4	3	0	0	0	1
Brookhaven PD	20	9	1	2	6	2
Chamblee PD	10	6	0	2	2	0
Clarkston PD	2	1	1	0	0	0
Decatur PD	10	3	2	1	2	2
DeKalb County PD	254	47	60	85	41	21
DeKalb County SO	1	0	0	0	1	0
Doraville PD	4	2	0	0	2	0
Dunwoody PD	10	1	3	0	4	2
Pine Lake PD	0	0	0	0	0	0
Stone Mountain PD	3	2	0	0	1	0
Other or Unspecified *	5	0	2	1	1	1
<b>All Cases =</b>	<b>338</b>	<b>80</b>	<b>73</b>	<b>94</b>	<b>62</b>	<b>29</b>

\*Includes other police jurisdictions such as GSP, MARTA, School Campus Police, other states, or nearby counties.



# Homicides

	<=10	11-20	21-30	31-40	41-50	51-60	61-70	71+	Age Unknown	Total
WM	0	1	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	2
WF	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	1
BM	4	11	34	12	5	3	1	1	0	71
BF	1	4	3	4	4	0	0	1	0	17
HM	0	0	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	2
HF	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
AM	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	1
AF	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Other	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
<b>Total</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>39</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>94</b>

Causes	
Type	Number
Asphyxia-Strangulation	1
Asphyxia-Suffocation	1
Blunt Force	2
Gun (not specified)	36
Gun-Assault	2
Gun-Handgun	25
Gun-Pistol	17
Gun-Revolver	2
Gun-Rifle	1
Head Trauma-Pediatric	1
Homicidal Violence (not specified)	1
Sharp Instrument	2
Sharp Instrument-Knife	3
<b>Total</b>	<b>94</b>

# Suicides

	<=10	11-20	21-30	31-40	41-50	51-60	61-70	71+	Age Unknown	Total
WM	0	0	2	4	9	9	6	2	0	32
WF	0	0	1	2	3	3	1	1	0	11
BM	0	3	6	3	2	1	0	2	0	17
BF	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
HM	0	0	0	1	0	1	0	0	0	2
HF	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
AM	0	0	1	0	1	0	0	0	0	2
AF	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Other	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
<b>Total</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>65</b>

Mechanism	Number
Asphyxia-Hanging	17
Asphyxia-Strangulation	1
Drug Death-Poisoning	10
Fall-From Height	4
Gun	3
Gun-Handgun	11
Gun-Pistol	6
Gun-Revolver	7
Gun-Rifle	3
Gun-Shotgun	2
Sharp Instrument-Knife	1
<b>Total</b>	<b>65</b>

# Motor Vehicle Accidents

	<=10	11-20	21-30	31-40	41-50	51-60	61-70	71+	?	Total
WM	0	1	7	1	1	3	0	1	0	14
WF	0	1	0	1	0	0	0	3	0	5
BM	1	5	11	3	7	6	3	1	0	37
BF	0	0	2	1	1	3	1	1	0	9
HM	0	0	2	1	1	0	0	0	0	4
HF	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
AM	1	0	0	1	0	1	0	0	0	3
AF	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	1
Other	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	1
<b>Total</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>22</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>74</b>

Motor Vehicle Accidents	
Location	Number
MVA-Bicyclist	3
MVA-Driver	31
MVA-Motorcyclist-Driver	6
MVA-Motorcyclist-Rider	1
MVA-Occupant	9
MVA-Pedestrian	24
<b>Total</b>	<b>74</b>

**Please contact our office at**

**404-508-3500**

**If you have any questions**

**THANK YOU!**