

# DeKalb County Medical Examiner's

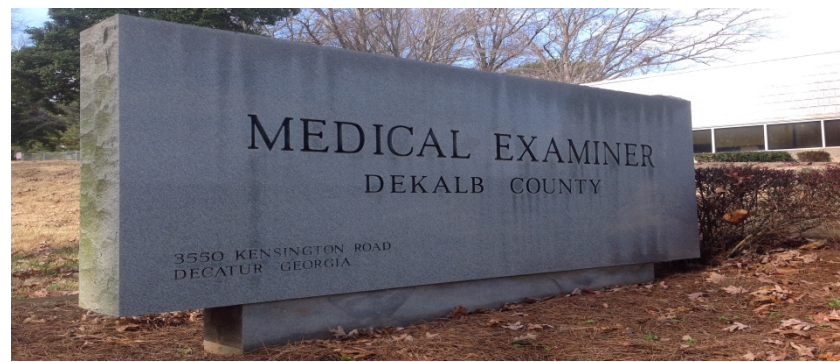


## 2015 Annual Report

Gerald T. Gowitt, MD  
Chief Medical  
Examiner

Pat Bailey  
Director

# Introduction



- ▶ The DeKalb County Medical Examiner (DKME) serves all non-federal, incorporated and unincorporated areas within DeKalb County. In 2015, 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)

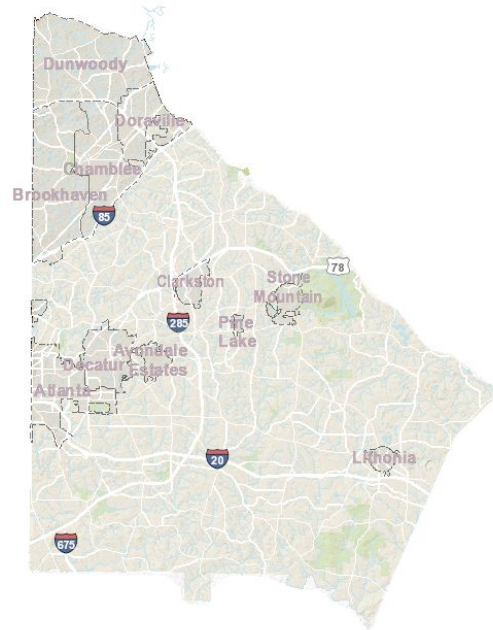


National Association of Medical Examiners

*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 2015 operating budget was \$2.4 million.

The DKME staff consists of 23 employees:

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

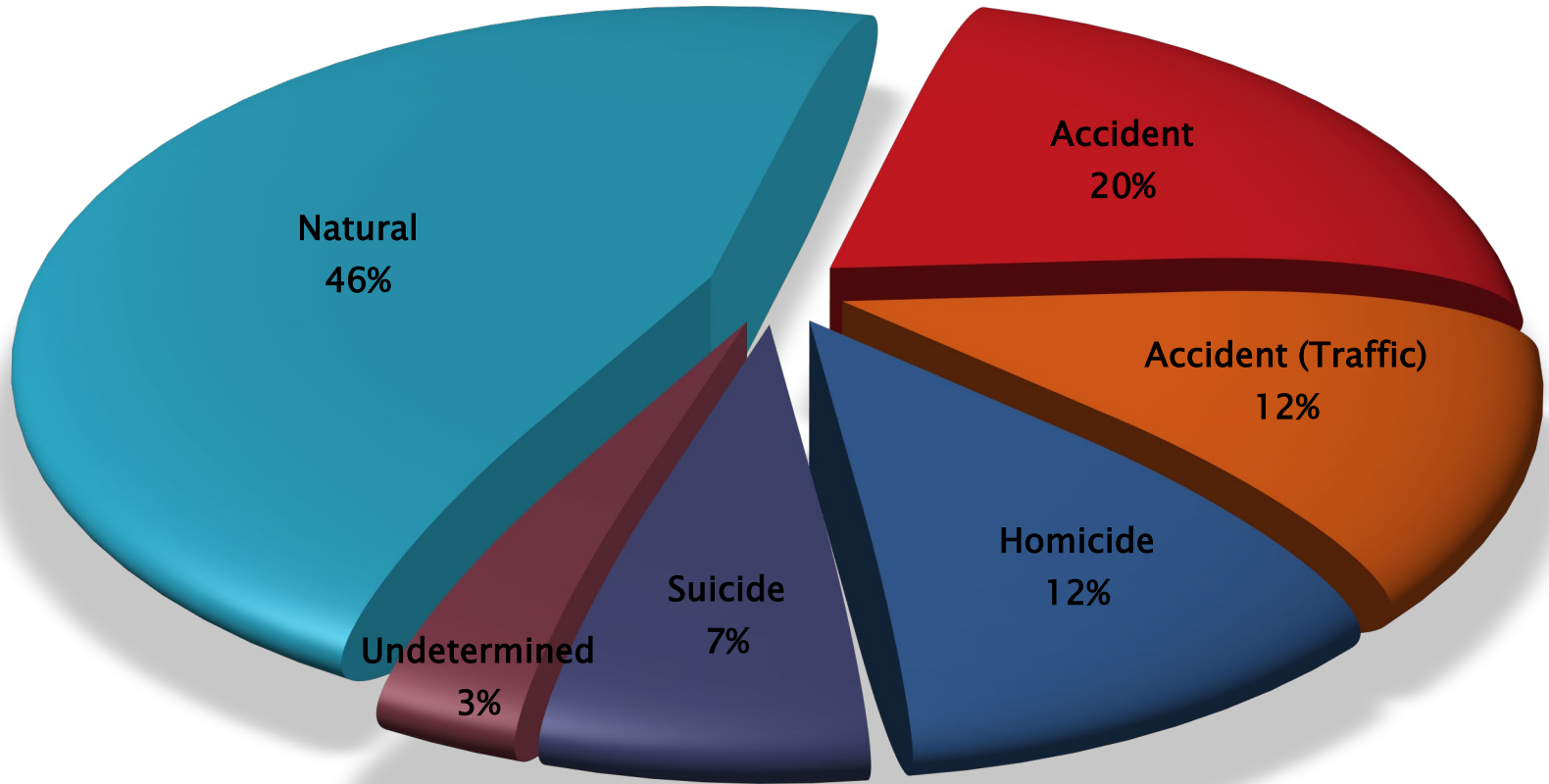
# All Reported Cases in 2015

There were 1774 unique deaths reported to the office.

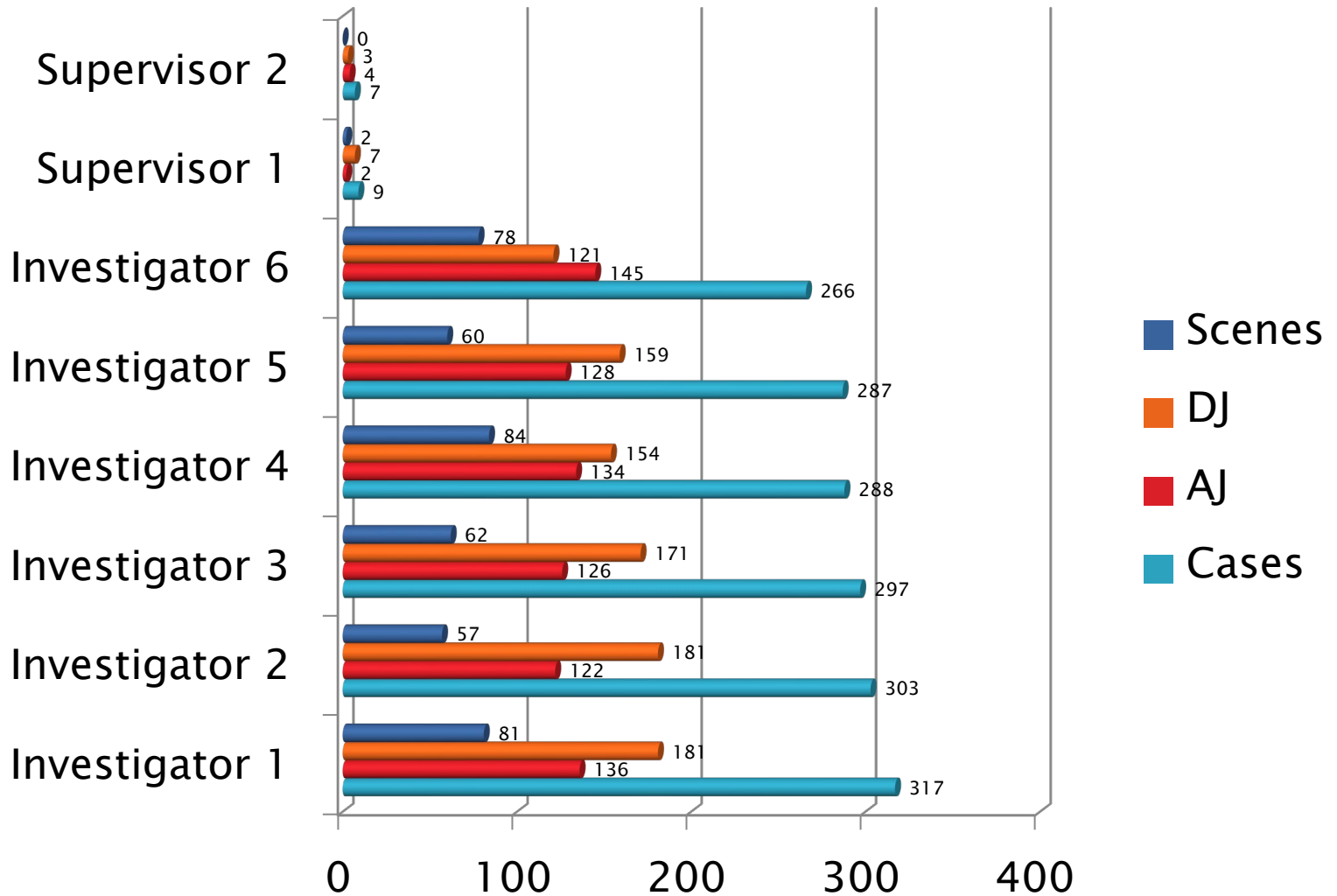
<u>Jurisdiction</u>	<u>Manner of Death</u>	<u>Frequency</u>
Accepted (AJ)	ACCIDENT (Not Traffic Fatalities)	159
	ACCIDENT (Traffic Fatalities)	97
	HOMICIDE	90
	NATURAL	360
	SUICIDE	57
	UNDETERMINED	26
	Cases still open from 2015	9
	Total of Accepted Cases =	798
Declined (DJ)		976
AJ		798
TOTAL		1774

# Manners of Death

2015



# Investigator/Supervisor Case Load in 2015



# Procedures on Accepted Cases

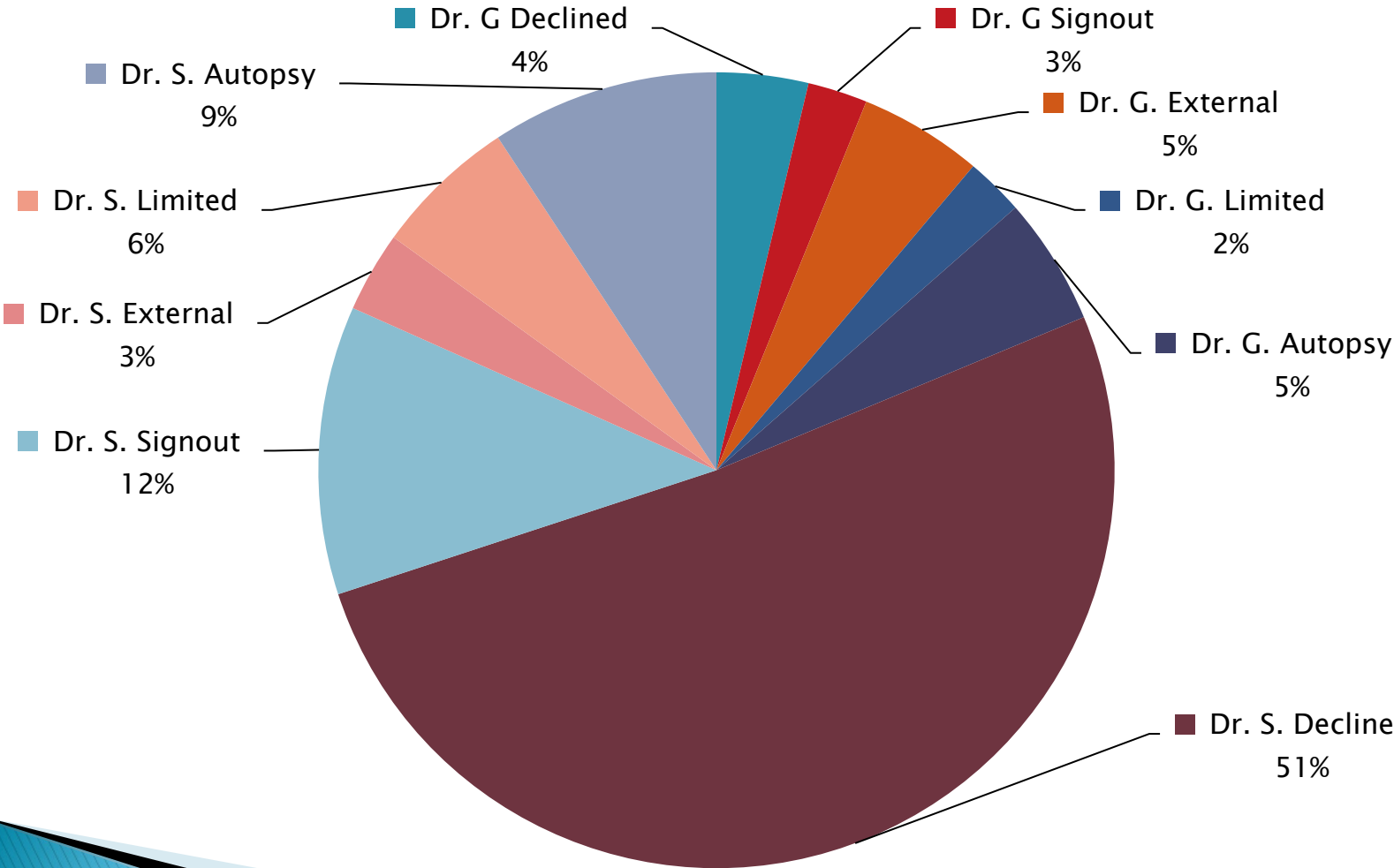
MANNER	PROCEDURE				Total
	Autopsy	External PM Exam/View	Limited Dissection	Signout	
ACCIDENT	59	26	20	54	<b>159</b>
TRAFFIC ACCIDENT	14	31	37	15	<b>97</b>
HOMICIDE	90	0	0	0	<b>90</b>
NATURAL	52	52	79	177	<b>360</b>
SUICIDE	15	34	6	2	<b>57</b>
UNDETERMINED	21	2	3	0	<b>26</b>
(Pending Cases)	5	2	0	2	(9)
<b>Total =</b>					<b>798</b>

# Procedure Totals for Each Medical Examiner

<b>Medical Examiner</b>	<b>Number of Cases</b>	<b>Procedure</b>
<b>Geoffrey P. Smith, MD</b>	<b>208</b>	<b>Signout</b>
<b>Geoffrey P. Smith, MD</b>	<b>103</b>	<b>Limited Dissection</b>
<b>Geoffrey P. Smith, MD</b>	<b>58</b>	<b>External PM Exam</b>
<b>Geoffrey P. Smith, MD</b>	<b>909</b>	<b>Confirm DJ</b>
<b>Geoffrey P. Smith, MD</b>	<b>164</b>	<b>Autopsy</b>
<b>Gerald T. Gowitt, MD</b>	<b>43</b>	<b>Signout</b>
<b>Gerald T. Gowitt, MD</b>	<b>42</b>	<b>Limited Dissection</b>
<b>Gerald T. Gowitt, MD</b>	<b>89</b>	<b>External PM Exam</b>
<b>Gerald T. Gowitt, MD</b>	<b>66</b>	<b>Confirm DJ</b>
<b>Gerald T. Gowitt, MD</b>	<b>92</b>	<b>Autopsy</b>



# Pathologist Procedures



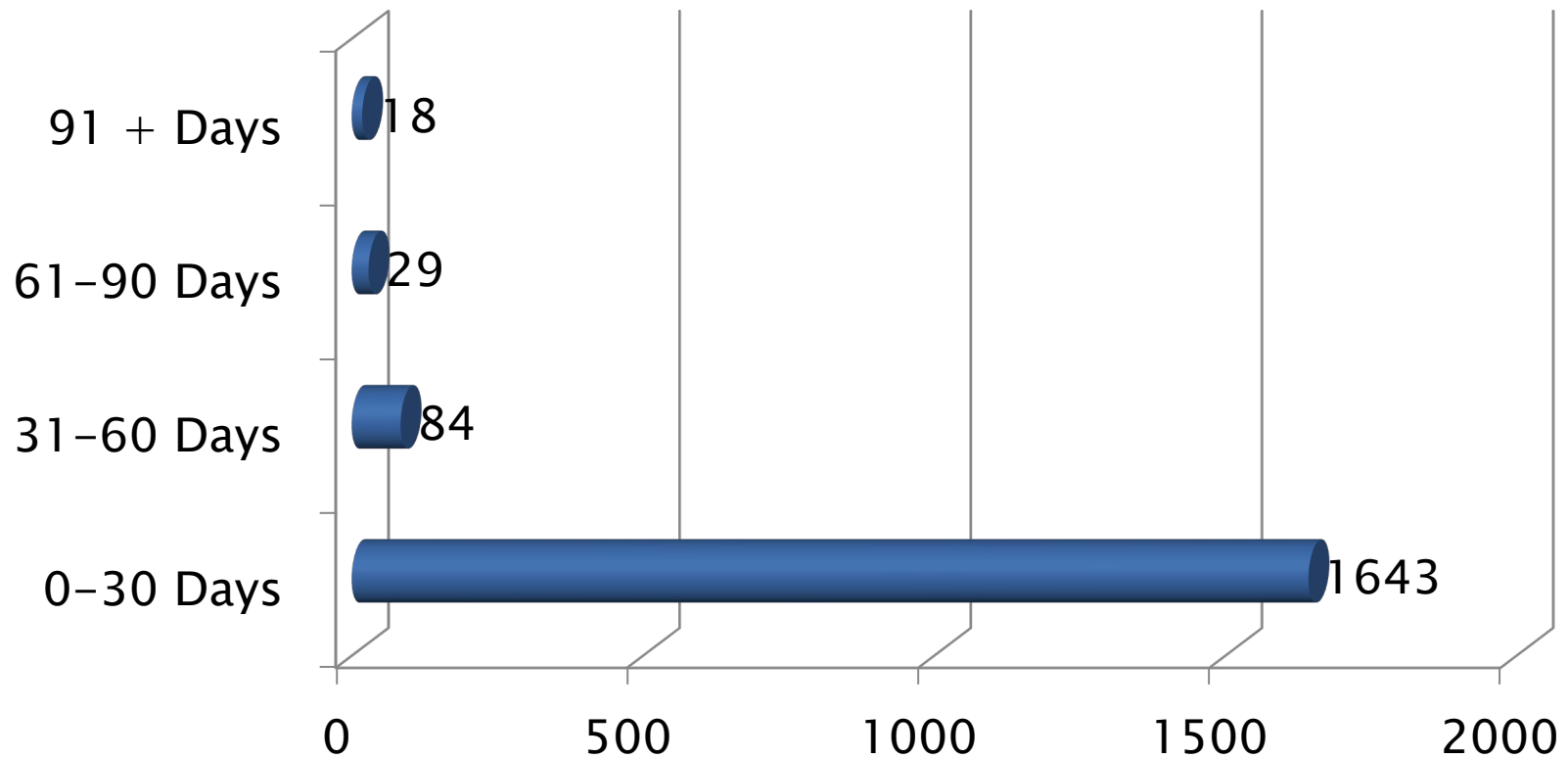
# Turnaround Times

Case Completion Times		
Case Completion Times	Number of Cases	Percent
0-30 days	1643	92.62%
31-60 days	84	4.74%
61-90 days	29	1.64%
91 days and over	18	1.00%
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>1774</b>	<b>100.00%</b>

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

# Turnaround Times

## Cases



# Police Jurisdiction for Reports of Death

Police Jurisdiction	ACCIDENT	ACCIDENT (Traffic)	HOMICIDE	SUICIDE	UNDETERMINED	NATURAL DEATHS
Atlanta PD	6	5	2	4	1	9
Avondale PD	0	0	0	0	0	0
Brookhaven PD	6	2	3	4	2	7
Chamblee PD	3	3	2	4	2	11
Clarkston PD	2	1	2	2	0	5
Decatur PD	2	2	0	0	0	8
DeKalb County PD	57	72	79	32	18	173
DeKalb County SO	1	0	0	1	0	1
Doraville PD	2	5	0	0	0	7
Dunwoody PD	7	4	1	6	1	6
Lithonia PD	0	0	1	0	0	0
Pine Lake PD	0	0	0	0	0	0
Stone Mountain PD	3	0	0	0	0	2
*Other Reporting Agencies	2	2	0	0	0	5

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

	<=10	11-20	21-30	31-40	41-50	51-60	61-70	71+	Age Unknown	Total
AF	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
AM	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
BF	1	2	3	3	0	0	0	0	0	9
BM	1	17	34	17	0	1	1	0	0	71
HF	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	1
HM	0	4	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	4
WF	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
WM	0	0	1	1	1	0	1	0	0	4
Other	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
<b>Total</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>23</b>	<b>39</b>	<b>22</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>90</b>

# Homicides

Cause	Number of Deaths
Asphyxia	1
Asphyxia-Strangulation	2
Blunt Force	4
Fire death	1
Gun	26
Gun-Assault	1
Gun-Handgun	30
Gun-Pistol	16
Gun-Revolver	2
MVA-Pedestrian	1
Sharp Instrument	2
Sharp Instrument-Knife	3
Sharp Instrument-Scissors	1

# Suicides

	<=10	11-20	21-30	31-40	41-50	51-60	61-70	71+	Age Unknown	Total
AF	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	1
AM	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
BF	0	0	3	0	0	0	0	1	0	4
BM	0	4	8	3	3	3	0	0	0	21
HF	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
HM	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	1
WF	0	0	1	0	1	2	1	1	0	6
WM	0	0	3	0	7	7	3	2	0	22
Other	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	
<b>Total</b>		4	17	3	12	13	4	4		57

## CodeList

Cause	Number of Deaths
Asphyxia-Hanging	20
Asphyxia-Suffocation	4
Drug Death-Poisoning	6
Gun	2
Gun-Handgun	8
Gun-Pistol	11
Gun-Revolver	4
Gun-Rifle	1
Gun-Shotgun	1

	<=10	11-20	21-30	31-40	41-50	51-60	61-70	71+	Age Unknown	Total
AF	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
AM	0	0	1	0	1	1	0	0	0	3
BF	3	1	7	5	1	2	3	0	0	22
BM	3	5	16	7	6	2	2	1	0	42
HF	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
HM	0	1	2	2	1	0	0	0	0	6
WF	0	2	2	1	1	0	0	0	0	6
WM	0	0	5	1	2	2	4	3	0	17
Other	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	1
<b>Total</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>33</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>4</b>		<b>97</b>

Cause	Number of Deaths
Asphyxia-Positional	1
Blunt Force	3
Fire death	1
Fire death from explosion	1
MVA	1
MVA-Bicyclist	1
MVA-Driver	36
MVA-MotorcyclistDriver	7
MVA-MotorcyclistRider	1
MVA-Occupant	22
MVA-Pedestrian	21
MVA-Rider	1
Train-Commerical	1

# Motor Vehicle Accidents

	<=10	11-20	21-30	31-40	41-50	51-60	61-70	71+	Age Unknown	Total
AF	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	2
AM	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	1
BF	1	0	1	2	3	5	2	6	0	20
BM	0	1	3	5	1	9	3	10	0	32
HF	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	1
HM	0	1	2	0	1	1	0	0	0	5
WF	0	1	3	4	5	2	2	13	0	30
WM	0	2	17	11	9	5	6	16	0	66
Other	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	1	0	2
<b>Total</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>26</b>	<b>23</b>	<b>19</b>	<b>23</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>48</b>		<b>159</b>

# Accidents (Non-Traffic Related)

Cause	Number of Deaths
Asphyxia-Café Coronary	2
Asphyxia-Hanging	3
Blunt Force	3
Burn-Thermal-Not Fire	1
Cardiac	1
Cardiac-Hypertension	1
Drowning	4
Drug Death-Adverse Effect	3
Drug Death-Poisoning	76
Drug Death-Poisoning+Disease	1
Drug-Death-Chronic Abuse	1
Fall	2
Fall- Down Steps	4
Fall-From Height	3
Fall-From moving object	1
Fall-Standing Height	42
Fire death	1
Hyperthermia-Exogenous	1
Hypothermia-Exogenous	4
MVA-Pedestrian	1
Neoplasm	1
Senescence	2
Thromboemboli	1



**Please contact our office at**

**404-508-3500**

**If you have any questions**

**THANK YOU!**