

Office of the Chief Medical Examiner
Annual Activity Report 2013 -14

Message from the Chief Medical Examiner

I hereby present the 2013-14 Activity Report of the Office of the Chief Medical Examiner. This report was prepared in accordance with the provisions of the *Transparency and Accountability Act*. My signature below is indicative of my accountability for the results reported.

As a Category 3 Government Entity, the Office of the Chief Medical Examiner is required to report at an activity level. The information presented in this report outlines the activities of the Office from April 1, 2013 to March 31, 2014. Specific data reported are for the calendar year of 2012, the most recent year for which completed records are available.



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Overview

The Office of the Chief Medical Examiner is located in the Health Sciences Centre, Prince Philip Drive, St. John's. Independence of the Office of the Chief Medical Examiner is heightened and enhanced through the employment of the Chief Medical Examiner as a Full Professor in Memorial University of Newfoundland's Faculty of Medicine.

Administrative support is provided by an Administrative Officer with additional clerical support provided for a portion of the year. Files related to the investigations conducted by the Office are presently stored at the central office in St. John's for the previous five years. Older files are stored off site.

During the calendar year 2012, the Office of the Chief Medical Examiner investigated 445 deaths that were reportable under the *Fatalities Investigations Act*, Chapter F-6.1, SNL 1995. According to the *Report on the Program Expenditures and Revenues of the Consolidated Revenue Fund Year Ended 31 March 2014*, actual expenditures of the Office of the Chief Medical Examiner was \$857,613.

Mandate

The mandate of the Office of the Chief Medical Examiner is contained in the *Fatalities Investigations Act*. The Chief Medical Examiner is responsible for operation of the *Act* in relation to the reporting, investigating and recording of deaths, the appointment of physicians as medical examiners and supervision of the performance of their duties required by the *Act*, the appointment of medical examiner's investigators and the education of persons required to perform functions in accordance with the *Act*.

Vision

An environment where the Office of the Chief Medical Examiner responds to those deaths that are appropriately reported in accordance with the *Fatalities Investigations Act*.

Facts of Interest

During the calendar year 2012, the Office of the Chief Medical Examiner investigated 445 deaths that met the criteria for reporting under sections 5, 6, 7 and 8 of the *Fatalities Investigations Act*. The geographic location of reportable deaths were as follows:

1. Avalon Peninsula	227 (which includes 193 from metro St. John's)
2. Central Newfoundland	122
3. Western Newfoundland	73
4. Labrador	23

And included:

1. Natural deaths	287
2. Accidental deaths	96
3. Suicides	45
4. Homicides	4
5. Undetermined	13

Of the 96 accidental deaths, 54 included:

Motor vehicle deaths	35
Drownings	15
House fires	4

The Office of the Chief Medical Examiner also performs a number of other duties. The information provided is from the 2012 calendar year, which was the most recent year for which the information was available at the time this report was prepared.

The Office receives many requests during the year to analyze bones found by citizens or police throughout the province. These bones are analyzed to determine whether or not they are human remains. During 2012, the Chief Medical Examiner received eight requests from police jurisdictions for examination. In seven cases the bones were of animal origin, and in one case the bone was of human origin.

The Office of the Chief Medical Examiner also reviews all requests for cremations in the province. During the year 2012, the Office reviewed 1,647 requests for cremations and issued the appropriate permits.

The Chief Medical Examiner also reviews certain non-fatal trauma cases. This occurs at the request of the police or crown attorneys for an analysis of trauma. During the year 2012, the Chief Medical Examiner reviewed nine non-fatal trauma cases.

The Office also provides statistics to various organizations regarding specific causes or manner of death. In 2012, the Office of the Chief Medical Examiner provided detailed information on the following:

Manner of Death	#
Drowning	15
Motor Vehicle Accident	35
Suicide	45

Report on Activities

Issue 1: Compliance with Fatalities Investigations Act

The Office of the Chief Medical Examiner responds to reportable deaths as defined by the *Fatalities Investigations Act*. The response to a particular death is dependent upon the circumstances of the deceased's health, level of health care at the time of death and the suspected cause of death. Some cases may involve a review of information submitted by a medical examiner, a post-mortem examination or the assistance of a Forensic Anthropologist.

The following information reports on the activities of the Office of the Chief Medical Examiner during fiscal year 2013-14, which is the final year of the current plan.

Objective 1: During the timeframe 2011-14, the Office of the Chief Medical Examiner will have responded to deaths that are reported in accordance with the *Fatalities Investigations Act*.

Measure: Responded to reported deaths

Indicators	Results
Conducted file reviews of medical examiner's reports	445
Ordered and/or conducted post-mortem examinations, as appropriate	160
Ordered and/or conducted autopsies, as appropriate	183
Recorded and reported on cause of death	445

Opportunities and Challenges Ahead

Since the implementation of the *Fatalities Investigations Act* in 1996, the number of deaths reported has declined from 703 in 1997 to 445 in 2012, and remains fairly consistent at this level. This decline was expected given that the criteria for reporting deaths is better defined than it was under the *Summary Proceedings Act*, the regime for reporting deaths is clearer, and knowledge of the *Fatalities Investigations Act* has increased. Under-reporting of deaths does occur, particularly in unnatural deaths that occur in health facilities and deaths that occur from workplace exposure, especially in cases where there is a time span between the incident and death. Educational sessions are provided to senior medical students as part of their curriculum in an effort to address these issues.

Toxicological analysis on deaths investigated by the Office of the Chief Medical Examiner in 2012 included 70 full toxicological analysis and 32 urine screens, compared to 76 full toxicological screens in 2011, 68 in 2010, 45 in 2009 and 44 in 2008. Monitoring of drug and drug-related deaths in the Province of Newfoundland and Labrador continues to be an important element of death investigation and presents potential challenges given the development of designer drugs. The appearance of designer drugs in society is placing demands on toxicological services. As of May 2013, the Office of the Chief Medical Examiner has included detection of the designer drug called “Bath Salts” in routine drug screening. Other synthetic designer drugs require specific analysis and are not routinely tested at this time. Also, the number of synthetic marijuana analogs are so numerous that routine screening is not practical at this time.

Financial Statements

Expenditure and revenue figures included in this document are unaudited and based on public information provided in the Report on the Program Expenditures and Revenues of the Consolidated Revenue Fund for the Year Ended 31 March 2014 (unaudited). The Office of the Chief Medical Examiner is not required to provide a separate audited financial statement.

2.3.03. OFFICE OF THE CHIEF MEDICAL EXAMINER

	Actual \$	Estimates	
		Amended \$	Original \$
01. Salaries.....	410,366	412,400	376,200
02. Employee Benefits.....	3,945	4,800	4,700
03. Transportation and Communications.....	11,320	16,200	13,200
04. Supplies.....	1,990	3,800	3,800
05. Professional Services.....	104,144	118,000	130,000
06. Purchased Services.....	325,848	348,600	132,600
07. Property, Furnishings and Equipment.....	-	400	2,500
Total: Office of the Chief Medical Examiner.....	857,613	904,200	663,000