



Jeff Martin – Boulder County Coroner

Robert Glassmire – Garfield County Coroner

Coroners Offices 101 for County Commissioners



Colorado Coroner History

- The “coroner” system dates to 910 A.D.
- Appointed by the king and charged with looking into all deaths to make sure death duties (taxes) were paid to the king.
- First American colonized coroner was appointed in 1637 and by the mid 16th century coroners had become an elected official.
- Amendment to the Colorado Constitution in 1902 added coroners as well as other county officials.



Early 2000s and beyond:



Referendum C took effect in 2006 allowing the general assembly to establish qualifications of the coroner.



Circa 2006ish, Colorado Coroners were added to the salary bills and compensation was set by state legislature versus a county commissioner determination.



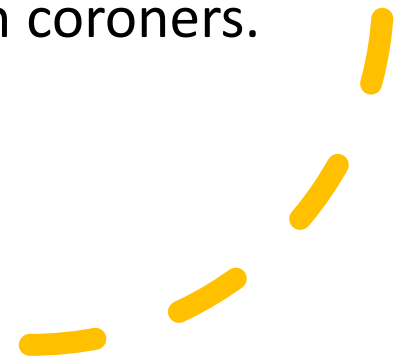
2022, Colorado Coroners in category II, III, and IV counties were allowed to be compensated for full time work.



2024, Colorado Coroners with a population of 150k or more will need to be a forensic pathologist or ABMDI certified to be elected coroner.

Colorado County Coroners

- 64 counties, 63 county coroners. Broomfield City/County contracts with Adam's County for services.
- 16-2.5-104 – Coroner is a peace officer.
- 30-10-604 – Coroner shall act as sheriff when.....
- Five elected/appointed coroners are forensic pathologist.
- Some coroners are physicians.
- Most coroners are non-physician coroners.



What is a coroner??

A coroner is a public servant who specializes in the investigation into the cause and manner of death of a person who dies under the jurisdiction of the coroner.

A coroner must be caring and compassionate while also having the ability ask difficult questions.

A coroner won't be able to make a situation better, they **must** never make the situation worse





Myths of Colorado Coroners

- Coroners are not able to arrest the sheriff.
- Coroners just pick up the body and transport it to the funeral home.
- Coroners are medical doctors.
- Coroners perform autopsies.

False: The Coroner is the only one that can arrest the Sheriff.

Colorado Attorney General spokesman Nate Strauch said Tuesday that “any certified police officer can make the arrest” of a county sheriff. – Steamboat Pilot 10/31/2007

Colorado state statutes require that “when the sheriff for any cause is committed to the jail of his county, the coroner shall be keeper of such jail during the time the sheriff remains a prisoner.” – Steamboat Pilot 10/31/2007

A little bit about
the Garfield
County
Coroner's Office



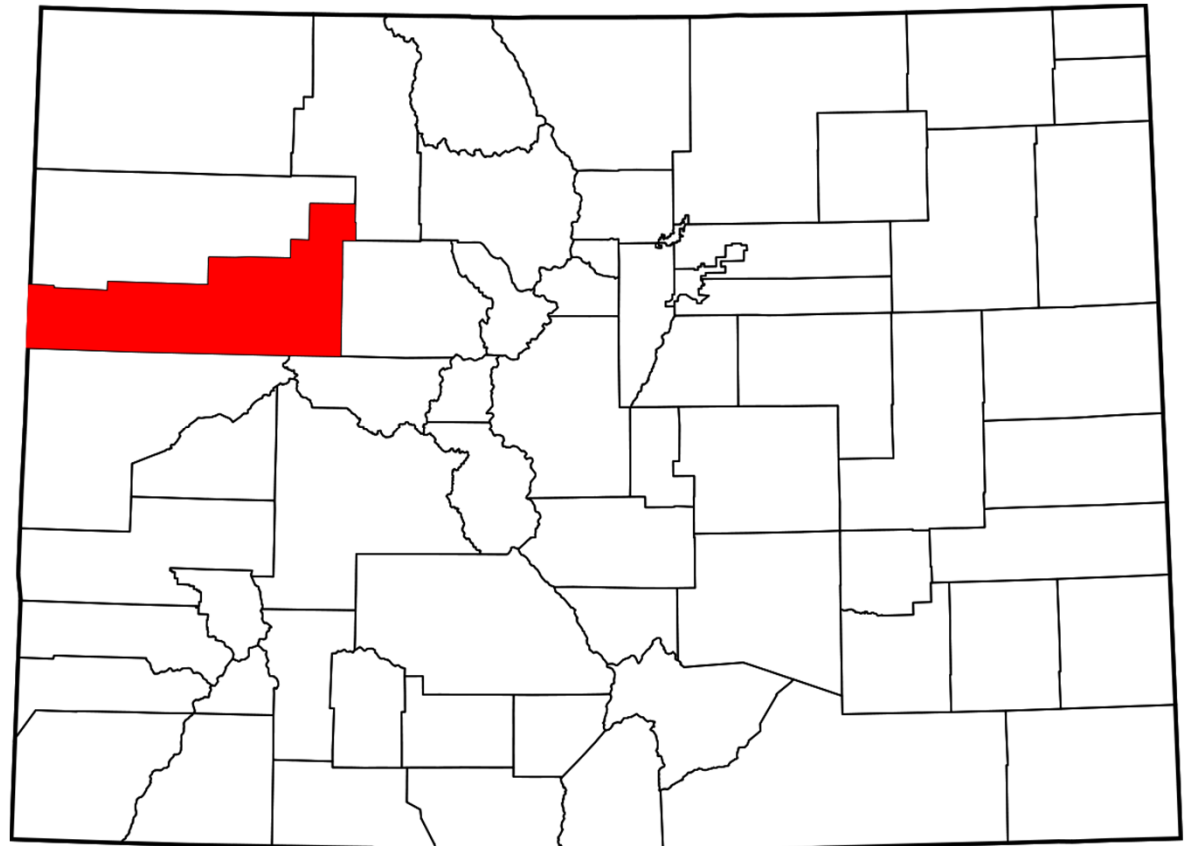
Garfield County, CO

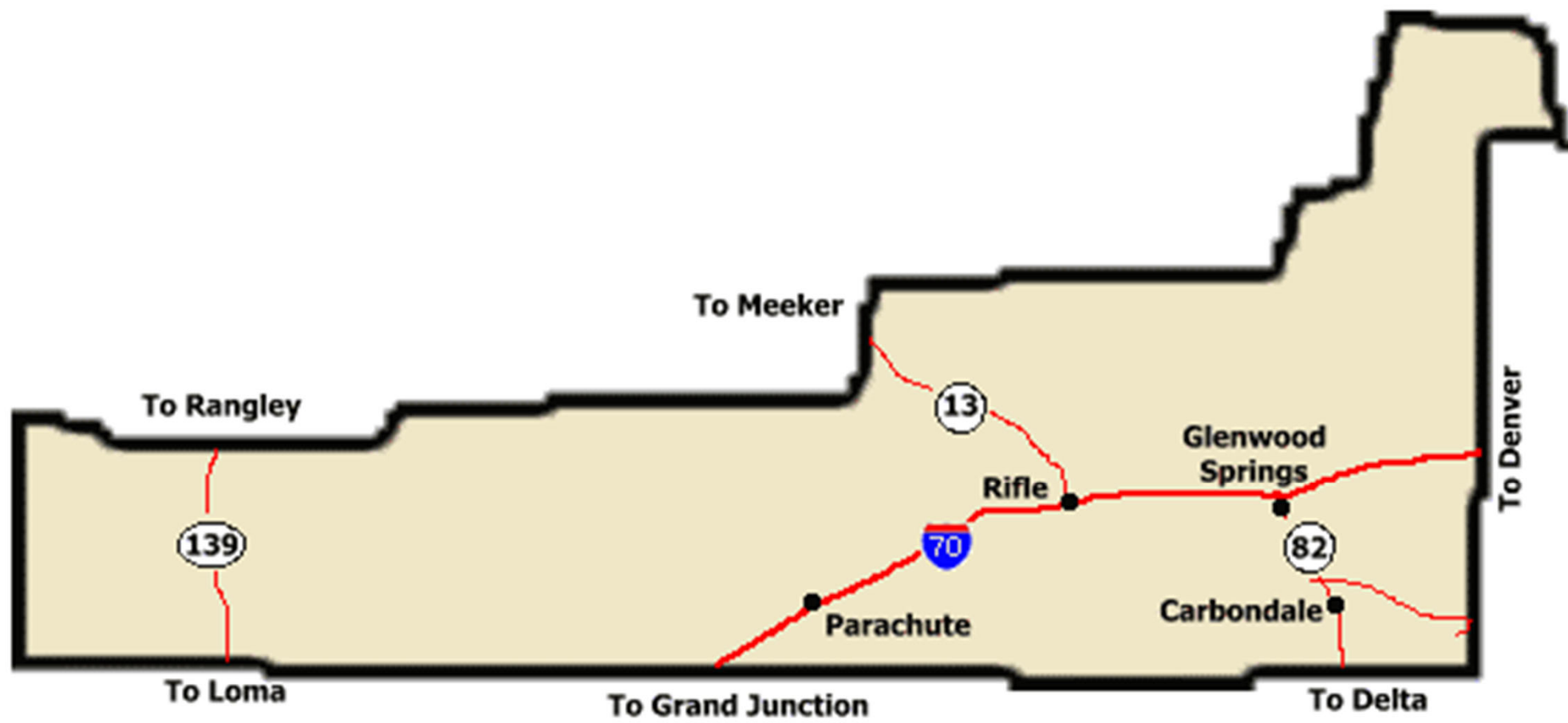
Population – 61,685 (13th most populated County in Colorado)



2,947 Square Miles (8th Largest in Colorado)

Garfield County Coroner's Office





2023 Statistics

Investigations – 153

- Scene Investigations – 135
- Body transports – 130

Notifications (Hospice/Hospital) – 251

Autopsies performed - 70



Garfield County Coroner's Office

- Four vehicles (F150 truck)
One full time coroner, two full time investigators, one part-time investigator, two (as needed) investigators.
- Coroner's office with morgue, office space, break room, shower, exam room, and storage for personal effects & evidence.



A little bit about the Boulder County Coroner's Office

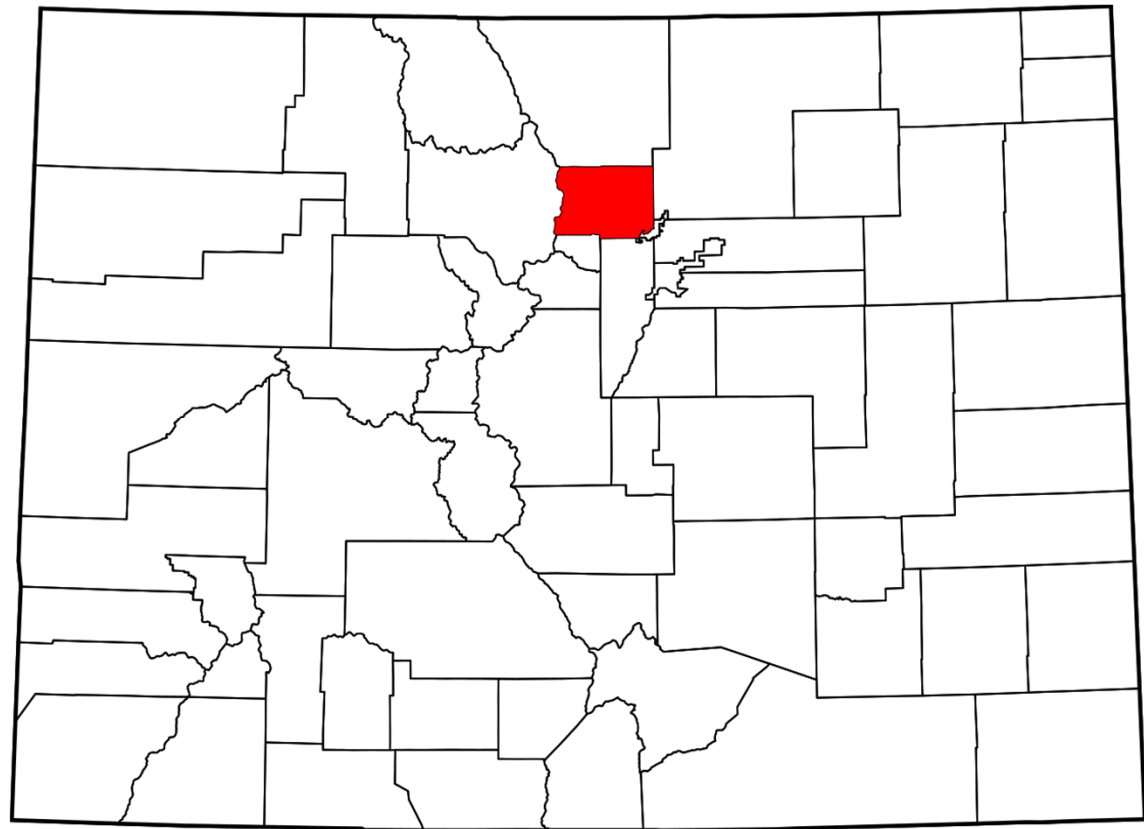
Boulder, CO

Population – 327,468 (9th most populated County in Colorado)



740 Square Miles (52nd Largest in Colorado)

Boulder County Coroner's Office



2023 Statistics



Deaths Reported – 2,079



Investigations – 524

Scene Investigations – 430
Body transports – 270



**Notifications
(Hospice/Hospital) –
1,601**



**BCCO Examinations
performed – 270**



**Outside County
Examinations performed
– 62**

(Summit and Clear Creek
County)



Boulder County Coroner's Office

- Four transport vehicles.
- One full time coroner, seven full time investigators, one part-time investigator, two full time autopsy technicians, two full time admin staff, one full time family assistance coordinator and two part time technicians.
- Standalone coroner's office with morgue, two 60 person coolers, office space, break room, shower, and storage for supplies & evidence.

The role of the County Coroner's Office – statutory

- Respond to and investigate certain deaths in the County.
 - Accidents, homicides, suicides, many natural deaths.
- Collect personal effects.
- Collect medications.
- Collect evidence of death.
- Identifying next of kin.
- Notify next of kin.
- Participate in the local child fatality review team.
- Attend a minimum of 20 hours of continuing education.





Coroner's Office Case Timeline

- Initial Call
- Response to scene.
- Investigation
- Transport to office.
- Administrative duties:



Initial Call & Response to Scene

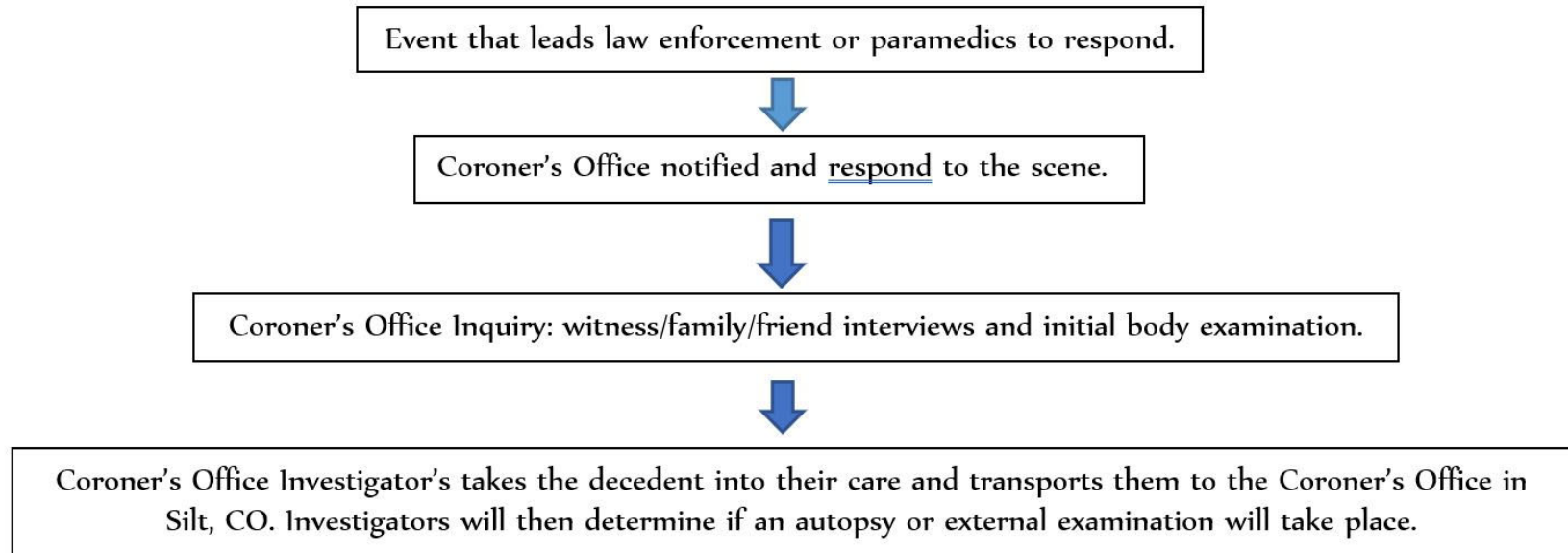
- Any time day or night, comes without notice and often requires an immediate response or action.
- Shortest response – 0.25 Miles (.5miles of driving)
- Longest response – 133 miles – 2 hours, 53 minutes.
- Other notable responses: Helicopter & Snowmobile, Hiking, ATV.
- Often little information known about the circumstances.



Investigations

- Witness Interviews
- Body Examination
- Law Enforcement/EMS information.
- Medical history.
- Social history (drugs, alcohol, tobacco)
- Activities prior to the incident.

Investigation Flow Chart



Most Cases

- Are routine.
- Have a clear etiology for cause of death and circumstances for death.
- Have a traditional course of action in terms of investigation and disposition.

Some cases are not routine...

- This is where the experience from routine cases will give the foundation for investigators to make good decisions about how to proceed.
- It's important to have quality investigators, staff, and support to accomplish these not so routine cases.
- Child fatalities, difficult families, homicides, law enforcement/in custody deaths, plane/transportation disasters, or increase in volume in a short time.

Plane Crash

- Remote backcountry location with a one-mile hike on difficult terrain.
- Four victims, multiple locations.
- Large scene with debris field.
- Logistically difficult.
- Late afternoon, mid-fall response.
- Necessitated another day of recovery.
- Active flames and burning.





Planning & Execution of Day 2.

- Initial Response was Friday, late afternoon.
- Saturday was planning and resource gathering.
- Sunday a team of 30 responded back to the scene.
- Agency assists (SAR, Sheriff's Office, Forest Service, NTSB).
- Transportation concerns – 2.5 hours of driving, 30 minutes on ATV & side by sides.
- All day recovery of human remains.
- Late return to the office.



IMPACT

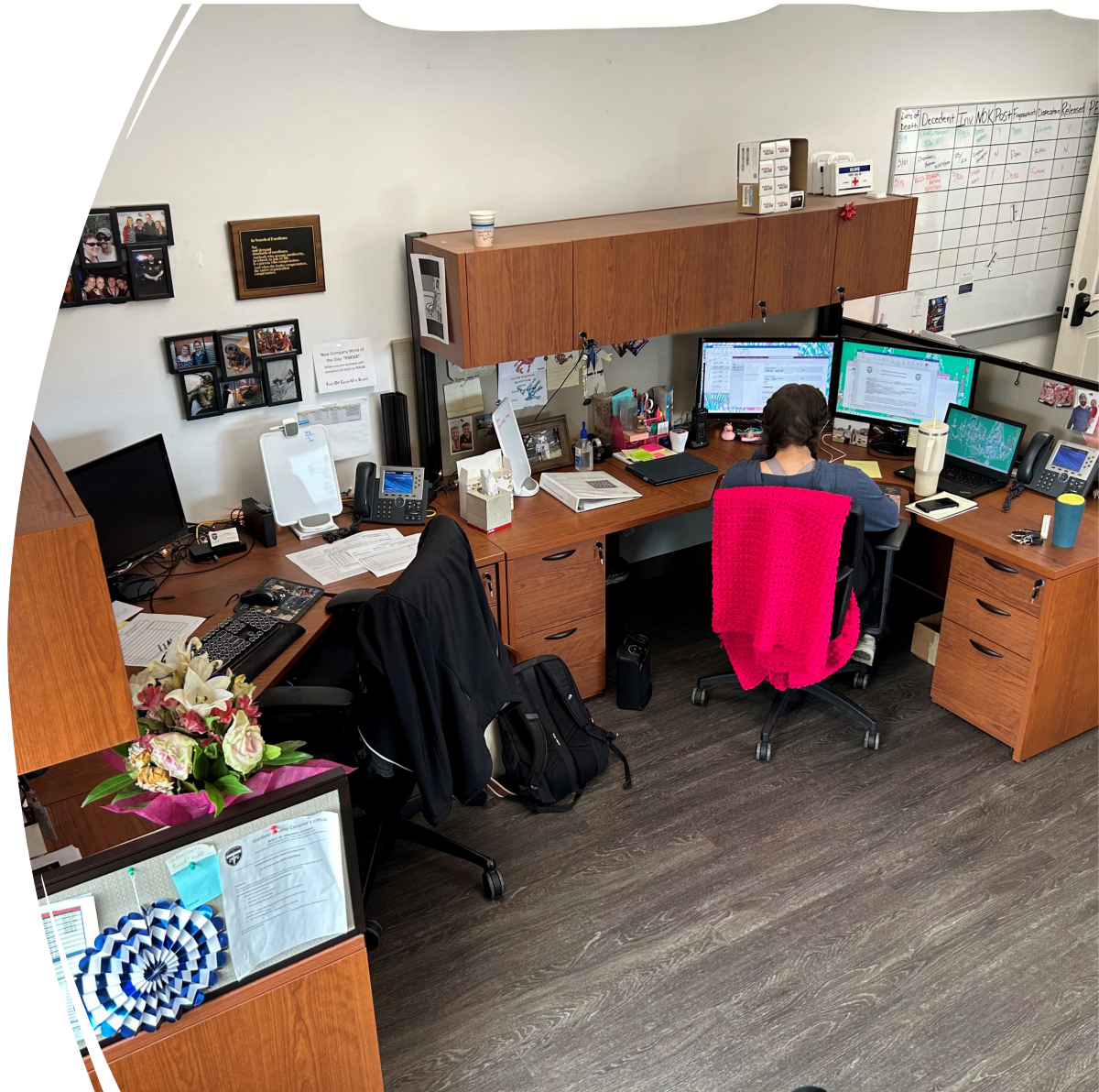
Work-Related Stress Among Medicolegal Death Investigators (MDIs): A National Survey and Impact Study

Hazards with the plane crash response

- Active flames
- Smoke inhalation
- Fuel concerns/Hazmat concerns
- Parachute deployment cannister
- Bodily fluid exposure
- Hazards associated with the backcountry
- Mental Health of first responders**

After the initial scene response

- External examination or autopsy.
- Report writing
- Information gathering
- Finding and notifying next of kin.
- Documenting personal effects
- Working with funeral homes.
- Getting ready for the next case.



What happens during a post-mortem exam?



Opening body cavities, cutting blood vessels, and subsequent direct examination of dissected organs release a large volume of blood and other body fluids. Contemporary autopsy techniques are essentially unchanged from those employed by the great anatomists of the eighteenth century and nineteenth century. Sharp instruments (scalpels, scissors, and knives) and blunt dissection were and are the low-tech mainstays of the dissection procedure. The orthopedic oscillating saw has replaced the traditional handsaw for removal of the skullcap. The oscillating saw may also be used to remove the chest plate. Needles and syringes are used to collect fluids from the eyes, heart, urinary bladder, and femoral area. Running water is used to rinse organs during dissection.



Scalpels, scissors, knives, and needles carry an obvious risk of injury. There is near-continuous handling of or proximity to sharp instruments during an autopsy, as well as potential exposure to fractured or cut ends of bone, broken glass, and other sharp objects. Virtually all internal areas of the body and eviscerated organs are bathed in body fluids, especially blood.

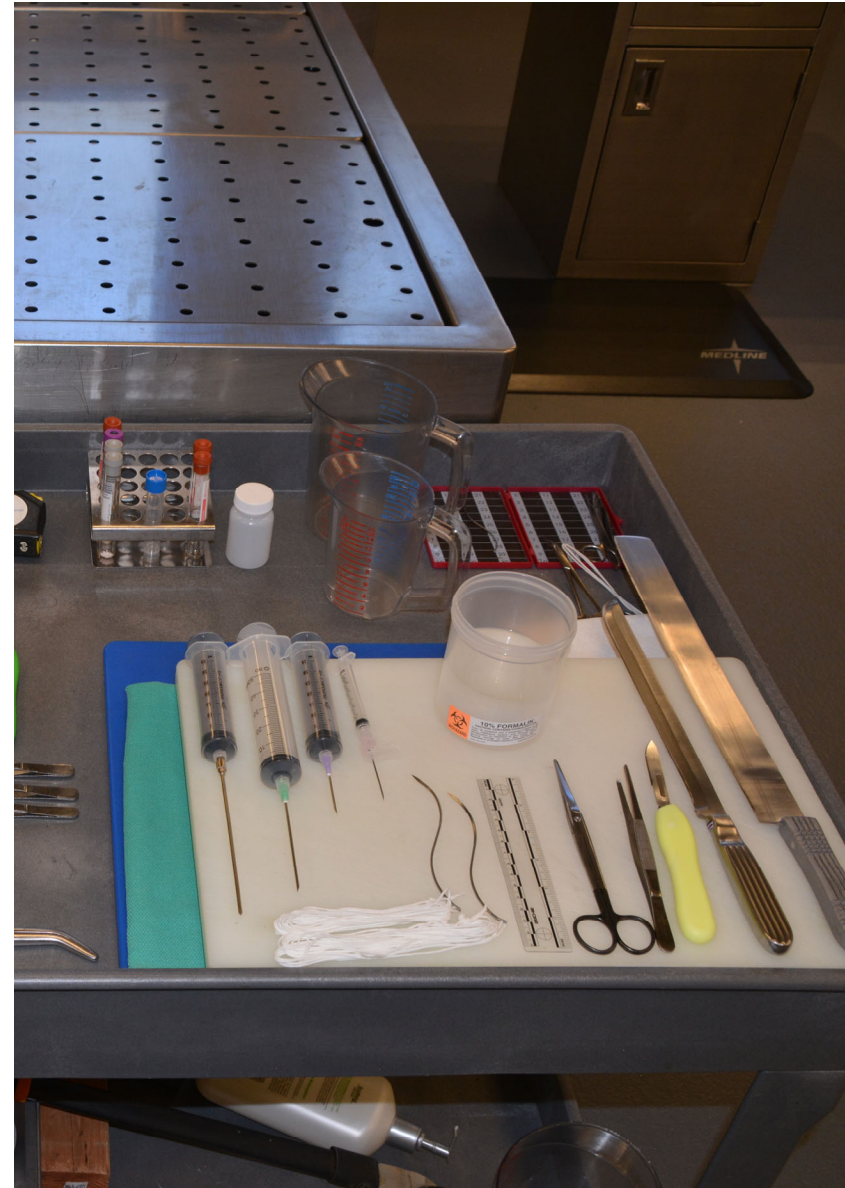


A bloodborne pathogen is a disease-causing organism that may be transmitted from one person (or body) to another person via exposure to infected blood. Especially in the forensic autopsy population staff is exposed to a myriad of bacteria, viruses and fungi.

An airborne pathogen may be transmitted from both living and dead patients via aerosols or droplets. In the case of a deceased patient, manipulation of infected organs (especially the lungs) and use of an oscillating saw aerosolize potentially infectious material. Just look at one's face shield after an autopsy.

Even gentle application of water to organs from a hose creates aerosols and droplets. Manual manipulation of organs may also produce aerosols and droplets.

Oscillating saws produce an extraordinary concentration of aerosolized particles.



AUTOPSY PPE



Non- Statutory duties.

- Attending public safety meetings.
- Attending county elected official/county admin meetings.
- Participating in county functions.
- Interacting with Public Health, providing information, statistics, and other information.
- Public & Social functions – high school education, law enforcement academies, community organizations, etc.
- Budget, procurement, inventory management, scheduling, etc.

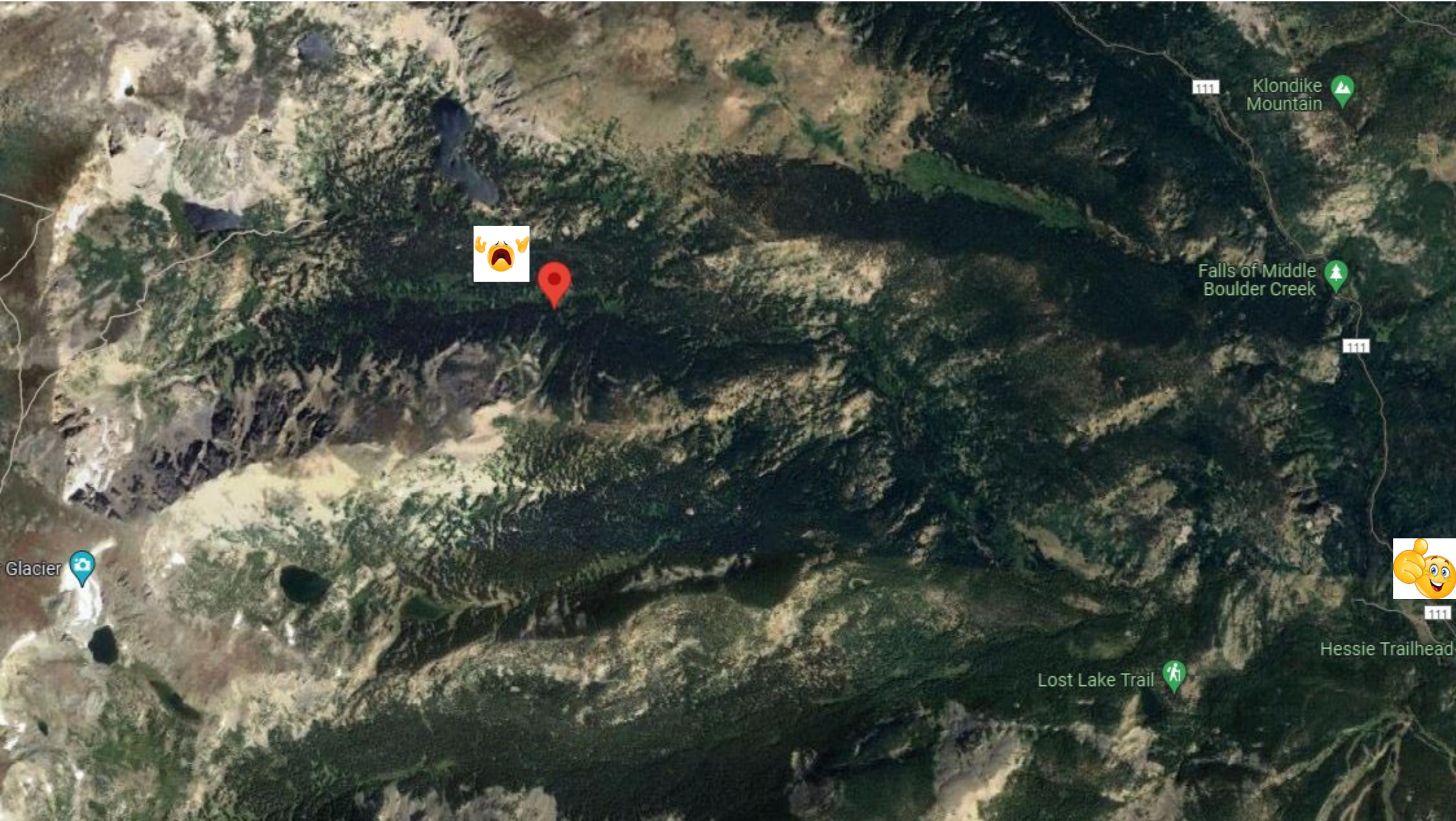




Scene Hazards



Scene Hazards



Klondike Mountain

Falls of Middle Boulder Creek

Lost Lake Trail

Hessie Trailhead

Glacier

111

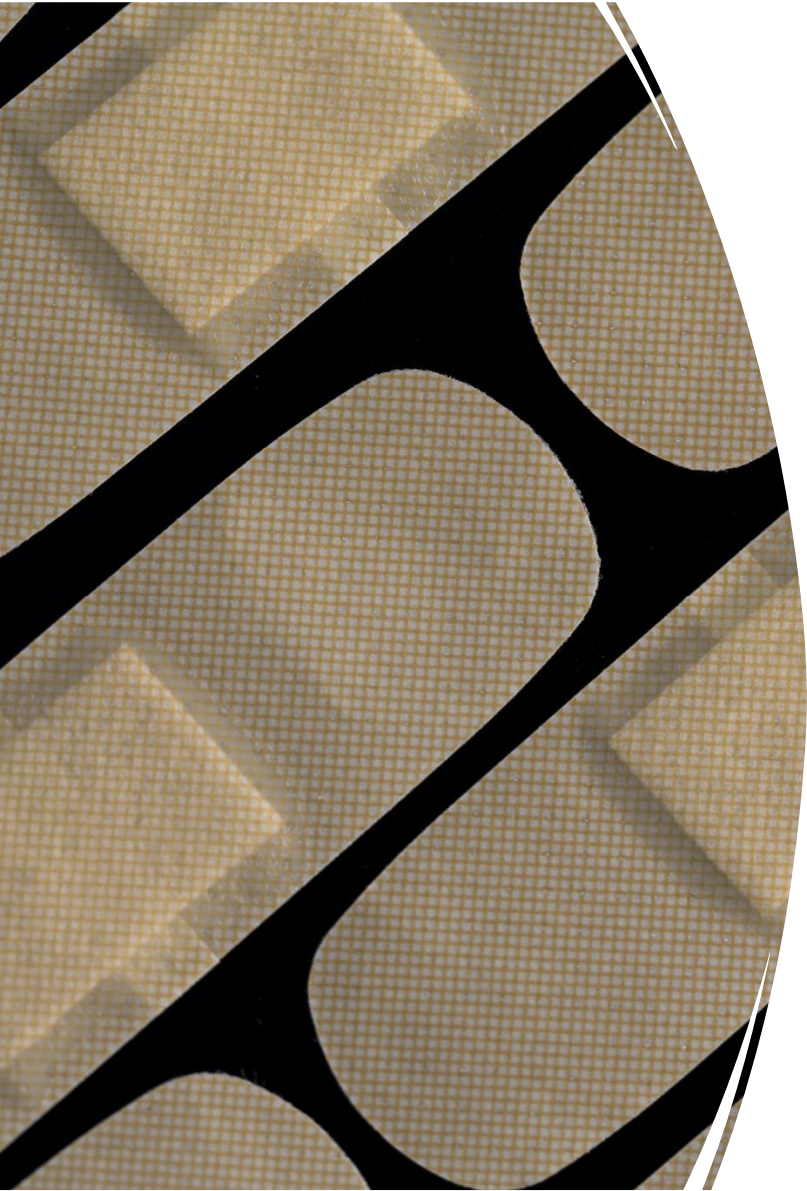
111

111

Bio-hazardous Exposure

- Disease
 - COVID
 - HIV
 - Hepatitis
 - Tuberculosis
 - Meningitis
- Fluids
 - Blood
 - Urine
 - Feces
 - Gastric Contents
 - Decomposition
- Debris
 - Glass
 - Chemicals
 - Gases
 - Drug Paraphernalia
- Drug
 - Fentanyl
 - Cocaine / Meth
 - Heroin
- Instruments
 - Scalpel
 - Needle
 - Bone Saw
- Formalin
- Radiation
- **UNKNOWN!**





General Occupational Hazards

- Use of heavy equipment
- Lifting and Transporting Bodies
- Defibrillators/Pacemakers
- Cuts, punctures, splashes
- Stress
- Hyperfocus and attention
- Human Suffering
- Shock / Electrocutation

How BOCCs can support their coroners.

Meet	Provide	Discuss	Understand	Assist	Consider
Meet with your coroner frequently.	Provide sufficient budget to meet the needs of the county.	Discuss the wants and needs of the coroner's office.	Understand the statutory duties of the coroner.	Provide guidance when needed.	Consider the job the coroner and coroner staff does, not what you think they do.

Questions??

Rob Glassmire – Garfield County Coroner

Rglassmire@garfield-county.com

970-309-1042

Jeff Martin – Boulder County Coroner

Jbmartin@bouldercounty.gov

303-441-3580