

HENNEPIN COUNTY
MEDICAL EXAMINER
2015 ANNUAL REPORT



Hennepin County Medical Examiner's Office

Proudly Serving Hennepin, Dakota, and Scott Counties



Location and Hours

Main Office:

530 Chicago Avenue
Minneapolis, Minnesota 55415
Phone: (612) 215-6300

Hours:

The Medical Examiner's Office operates 24 hours per day, 7 days per week.
The business office is open to the public: 8:00 a.m. to 4:30 p.m., Monday through Friday
except for official Hennepin County holidays.

Body and Evidence Release Hours:

Evidence is released to the investigating law enforcement agency upon appointment.
Bodies may be released 24 hours per day, 7 days per week.
Preferred body release times: 9:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m.

www.hennepin.us/me

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LETTER FROM THE CHIEF MEDICAL EXAMINER

Welcome to the 2015 Hennepin County Medical Examiner’s Office annual report. This report reflects a statistical breakdown of the total caseload of the three counties—Hennepin, Dakota, and Scott—which the Hennepin County Medical Examiner provides with forensic death investigation and autopsy services. The Hennepin County Medical Examiner also provides forensic autopsy services on a referral basis to counties throughout Minnesota and Wisconsin.

All physicians at the Hennepin County Medical Examiner’s Office are certified by the American Board of Pathology in Anatomical and Forensic Pathology. Other board certifications — Neuropathology and Clinical Pathology — are also represented among the physician staff. Death investigators are certified by the American Board of Medicolegal Death Investigators.

The Hennepin County Medical Examiner’s Office is accredited by the National Association of Medical Examiners and administers an American College of Graduate Medical Education approved fellowship in forensic pathology.

The year 2015 was marked by increased case volumes, the addition of a religious objection law to the medical examiner statute, and organizational restructuring. Our current strategic initiatives include positioning ourselves for continued growth of the Hennepin-Scott-Dakota model into a Regional Center of Excellence for medical examiner services. This includes planning for a new regional facility with the resources to handle the needs of a growing population beyond 2040, while continuing to meet and exceed our resident expectations.

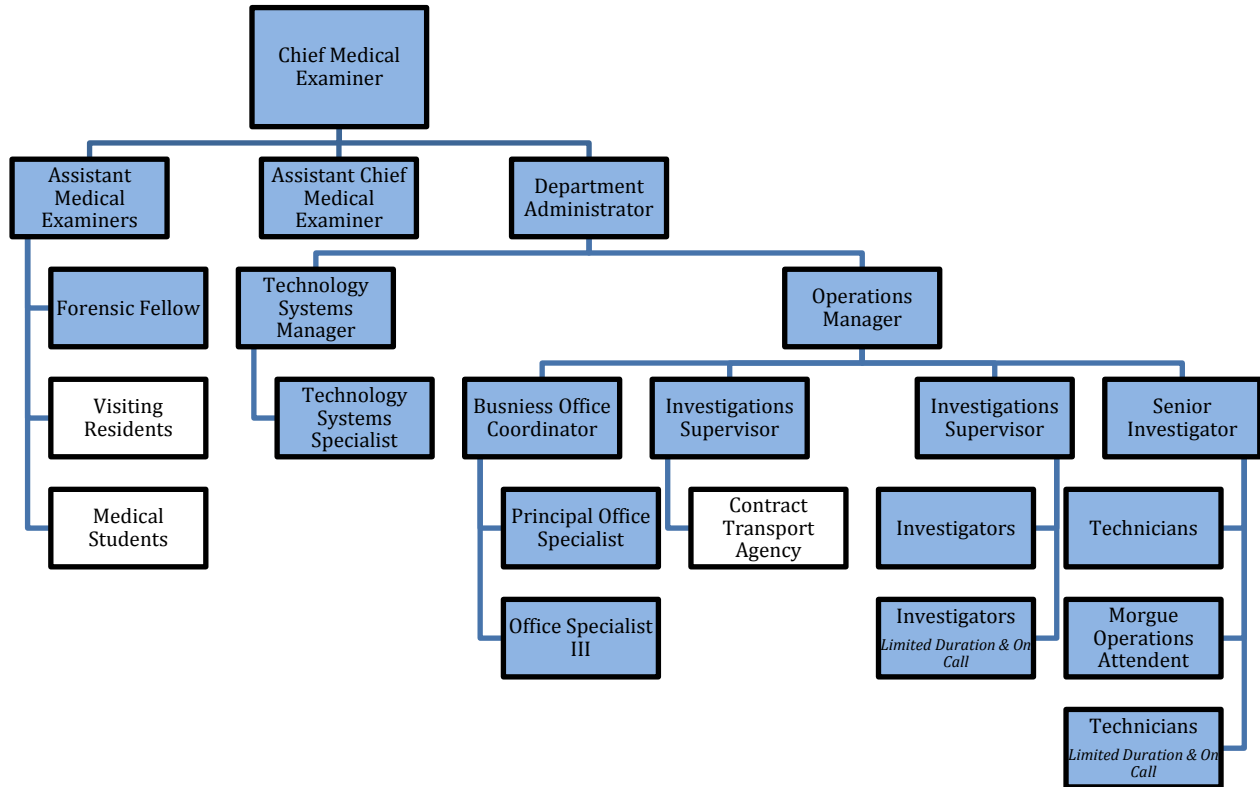
The culmination of this knowledge and expertise is brought forth in this report for 2015.

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'A. Baker M.D.', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Andrew Baker, MD
Chief Medical Examiner

Organizational Chart 2015



Mission

To investigate and determine cause and manner of death in all cases within the jurisdiction of the office in compliance with Minnesota statutes, and to advance the knowledge of death investigative professionals and partnering agencies through training and education to improve health, safety and quality of life.

Vision

The Medical Examiner envisions a standard of excellence whereby death investigative professionals conduct thorough, accurate death investigations by harnessing innovative technologies and solutions in a regional office that serves a diverse population with timely, accurate and compassionate investigations run by professional staff equipped with state-of-the-art technology and resources.

Medical Examiner Budget 2013-2015

Budget Summary:	2013 Actual	2014 Actual	2015 Actual
Budgeted Property Tax Requirement*	\$3,337,965	\$3,376,570	\$3,609,678
Other Taxes			
Federal			
State			
Local	1,453,320	1,482,386	1,512,034
Investment Earnings			
Fees for Services	134,950	121,975	121,975
Fines and Forfeitures			
Licenses and Permits	231,000	252,000	249,529
Bond Proceeds			
Other Revenue	111,000	240,500	228,000
Total Revenues	\$5,268,235	\$5,473,431	\$5,721,216
Personal Services	4,179,410	\$4,294,572	\$4,346,693
Commodities	84,356	70,756	101,001
Services	966,804	1,008,603	1,162,322
Public Aid			
Capital Outlay			
Other Charges	37,665	99,500	111,200
Total Expenditures	\$5,268,235	\$5,473,431	\$5,721,216

**Reflects adjusted property tax requirement budget, not actual property tax*

Budgeted Positions:	2013	2014	2015
Full-time Equivalents	34.0	34.0	33.0

History of the Medical Examiner's Office

In 1963, the Office of the Hennepin County Medical Examiner was established to replace the Coroner's Office, under the leadership of Dr. John Coe (1963-2003). Since then, the department has been directed by forensic pathologists Dr. Garry Peterson (1983-2004) and Dr. Andrew Baker (2004-present).

The Hennepin County Medical Examiner's Office was first accredited by the National Association of Medical Examiners in 1978, and has maintained full accreditation status for the past 38 years. The department was most recently inspected in 2014. This accreditation represents the highest standards of medicolegal death investigation.

The department has occupied several spaces in its history, including Hennepin County General Hospital, Hennepin County Medical Center, and its current location in the Forensic Sciences Building in downtown Minneapolis.

In 2013, the office partnered with the former Minnesota Regional Medical Examiner's Office (Hastings, MN) to provide medical examiner services to Hennepin, Dakota and Scott counties. Hennepin County is now home to the largest medical examiner's office in Minnesota, serving roughly one-third of the population of the state.

Hennepin County Medical Examiner has a close relationship with the University of Minnesota, providing training for medical students and residents. The department has an accredited fellowship program in forensic pathology. Past fellows hold positions in medical examiner offices across the state, regionally, nationally, and internationally.

Jurisdiction

The current law outlining the duties of the office, Minnesota Statutes, Chapter 390, states:

"All sudden or unexpected deaths, and all deaths that may be due entirely, or in part, to any factor other than natural disease processes must be promptly reported to the coroner or medical examiner for evaluation. ... No person, other than the county coroner or medical examiner ... shall file or amend the cause or manner of death information with the state registrar in cases of likely or suspected accidental, suicidal, homicidal, violent, or mysterious deaths occurring in the county."

Reportable Cases

Deaths that occur within the borders of Hennepin, Dakota or Scott County must be reported, if they meet certain criteria, whether the injury was sustained in these counties or elsewhere. All sudden or unexpected deaths and all deaths that may be due entirely, or in part, to any factor other than natural disease must be reported. These include, but are not limited to:

1. Unnatural deaths, including violent deaths arising from homicide, suicide, or accident;
2. Deaths due to a fire or associated with burns or chemical, electrical, or radiation injury;
3. Unexplained or unexpected perinatal and postpartum maternal deaths;
4. Deaths under suspicious, unusual or unexpected circumstances;
5. Deaths of people whose bodies are to be cremated or otherwise disposed of in such a manner that the bodies will later be unavailable for examination;
6. Deaths of inmates of public institutions and people in custody of law enforcement officers, who have not been hospitalized primarily for organic disease;
7. Deaths that occur during, in association with, or as the result of diagnostic, therapeutic, or anesthetic procedures [these include operating room deaths];
8. Deaths due to culpable neglect;
9. Stillbirths of 20 weeks or longer gestation, unattended by a physician;
10. Sudden deaths of people not affected by recognizable disease;
11. Unexpected deaths notwithstanding a history of underlying disease;
12. Deaths in which a fracture of a major bone such as a femur, humerus, or tibia has occurred within the past six months;
13. Deaths unattended by a physician, occurring outside of a licensed health care facility or licensed residential hospice program;
14. Deaths of people not seen by their physician within the past 120 days;
15. Deaths occurring in an emergency department;
16. Stillbirths or deaths of newborn infants in which there has been maternal use of or exposure to unprescribed controlled substances, including street drugs, or in which there is history or evidence of maternal trauma;
17. Unexpected deaths of children;
18. Solid organ donors;
19. Unidentified bodies;
20. Skeletonized remains;
21. Deaths occurring within 24 hours of arrival at a health care facility, if death is unexpected;
22. Deaths associated with the decedent's employment;
23. Deaths of nonregistered hospice patients or patients in unlicensed hospice programs; and
24. Deaths attributable to acts of terrorism.

Functions of the Medical Examiner

Death Reports

When a reportable death occurs, the physician, law enforcement officer, mortician, or other individual connected with the case makes a report to the Medical Examiner's Office. That report includes the decedent's name, address, age, sex, race, marital status, next of kin, a summary of medical history, physical findings, name of last attending physician, and other pertinent data.

Preserving Evidence

At the location of the death, the Medical Examiner Investigator provides direction for the removal or alteration of the body, personal property and associated evidence. Interference with the body or scene of death with intent to mislead the Medical Examiner or conceal evidence, including clothing, effects or any part of the scene, including moving weapons or items near the body, is a gross misdemeanor (Minnesota Statute §609.502).

Investigation

The Medical Examiner is an independent entity and does not work for the County Attorney's Office or any law enforcement agency. After completing a preliminary investigation, the Medical Examiner's Investigator decides who has jurisdiction of the case.

The Medical Examiner reserves the right to accept or decline jurisdiction. If an attending physician has seen the decedent within 120 days and the manner of death is natural, jurisdiction is usually declined. Any death in which there is uncertainty as to whether it is a Medical Examiner's case should be reported and discussed with the Medical Examiner's Investigator.

If jurisdiction is assumed or the death is due in part to any injury, the death certificate may only be signed by the Medical Examiner.

Tissue, Eye and Organ Donation

In all instances of organ donation, the Medical Examiner must be notified by the responsible agency prior to arrangements being made for the recovery of any organ. Authorization for tissue and eye donation must be approved by the Medical Examiner before procurement.

Autopsy

Autopsies are done to answer medical and legal questions in the "public interest," to protect public health, or to address a question of law. The Medical Examiner will determine whether a compelling state interest requires an autopsy to be performed. Autopsies are performed at the Hennepin County Morgue. In some cases, an autopsy may be performed by the hospital pathologist if he or she has a valid autopsy permit.

As of July 1, 2015, Minnesota law includes recognizes an individual's religious right to objection to an autopsy.

Cause and Manner of Death

The Medical Examiner assists families, law enforcement agencies, and the legal system by determining a scientifically unbiased and logical cause and manner of death.

In many instances, families can provide information that may be helpful in the case. Families also can benefit from the investigation process because even in straightforward natural deaths, information from the death investigation or autopsy may help surviving family members protect their own health.

Body Release

Final disposition of the body is the responsibility of the family, or other person(s) as designated by Minnesota Statute §149A.80. The authorized party should contact the funeral home of their choice for assistance in removing the body from the Medical Examiner's Office.

Cremation Approval

When the deceased is to be cremated, the funeral director is responsible for obtaining approval from the Medical Examiner's Office prior to cremation of the body. This process is completed electronically in the Minnesota Registration and Certification system.

Death Certificates

In cases where the Medical Examiner assumes jurisdiction, the manner and cause of death will be recorded electronically upon completion of the investigation, autopsy, and ancillary studies. The process is completed in the Minnesota Registration and Certification system. The funeral home is responsible for providing the family with the paper death certificates. They may also be obtained from the local recorder's office or Office of Vital Records.

Autopsy Reports

Immediate family members may submit a written request for an autopsy report to the Hennepin County Medical Examiner's Office. Autopsies occurring outside of the Medical Examiner's Office will require the family to contact the agency that performed the exam for an autopsy report. A nominal fee is charged for this report.

The decedent's attending physician may obtain a copy of the autopsy report at no charge upon written request.

Public and Private Information

Basic demographic information and the cause and manner of death are matters of public record under Minnesota law (Minnesota Statute §13.83). The rest of the information that is gathered is confidential and treated similarly to a medical record. This information is available only to immediate next-of-kin, legal representatives of the decedent's estate, and treating physicians.

In cases of homicide, Medical Examiner information and autopsy reports can only be provided to the law enforcement agencies that are investigating the death and to the prosecutor in the county where the homicide occurred.

At a Glance

Hennepin, Dakota, and Scott counties: 2015 Aggregate data

Total Cases Referred	7289
Jurisdiction Accepted	2051
Jurisdiction Declined	5199
Referral Cases	39
Jurisdiction Accepted	2051
Natural	897
Accident (not traffic)	706
Traffic Accident	96
Suicides	214
Homicide	81
Undetermined	57



Total Medical Examiner autopsies	1176
HCME autopsies (not HCMC)	965
Autopsies at other institutions	4
Partial autopsies	52
External examinations	8
Referral autopsies	39
HCME-HCMC inpatient autopsies	58
HCME-HCMC ER autopsies	58
Donations (total)	444
Eyes	191
Tissue/bones	203
Organs	50



Scene visits by investigators	1392
Cremations approved	8019
Subpoenas answered	94
Data Requests answered	1788



Hennepin County: 2015

<u>Total Cases Referred</u>	5496
Jurisdiction Accepted	1611
Jurisdiction Declined	3885
<u>Jurisdiction Accepted</u>	1611
Natural	688
Accident (not traffic)	563
Traffic Accident	81
Suicides	154
Homicide	72
Undetermined	53



<u>Total Medical Examiner Autopsies</u>	894
<u>Donations (total)</u>	333
Eyes	127
Tissue/bones	156
Organs	50
Scene Visits by Investigators	1001

Dakota County: 2015



<u>Total Cases Referred</u>	1375
Jurisdiction Accepted	343
Jurisdiction Declined	1026
<u>Jurisdiction Accepted</u>	343
Natural	166
Accident (not traffic)	113
Traffic Accident	9
Suicides	45
Homicide	7
Undetermined	3

Total Medical Examiner Autopsies **191**

<u>Donations (total)</u>	70
Eyes	42
Tissue/bones	28

Scene Visits by Investigators **299**

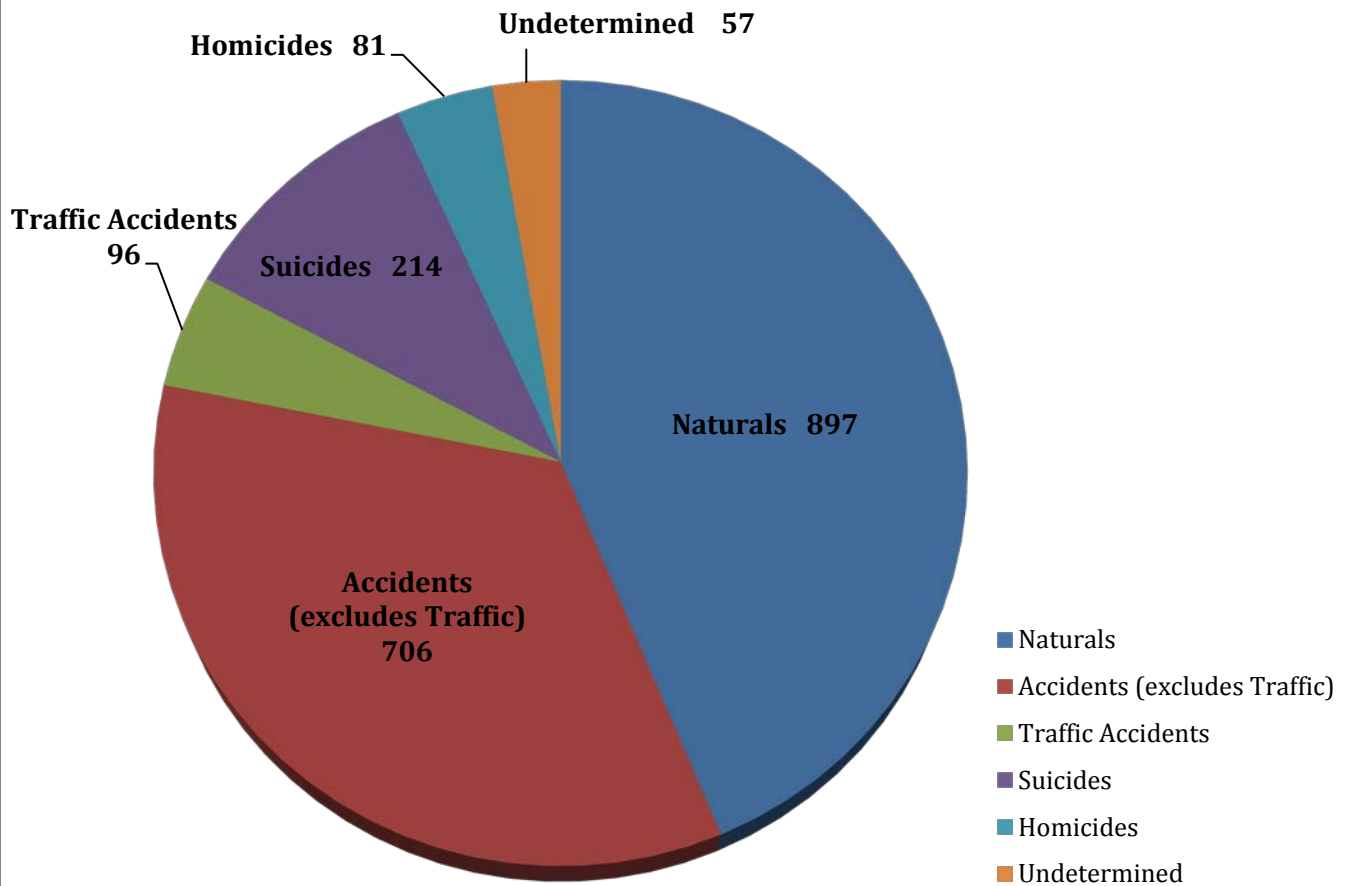
Scott County: 2015

Total Cases Referred	384
Jurisdiction Accepted	97
Jurisdiction Declined	287
Jurisdiction Accepted	97
Natural	43
Accident (not traffic)	30
Traffic Accident	6
Suicides	15
Homicide	2
Undetermined	1



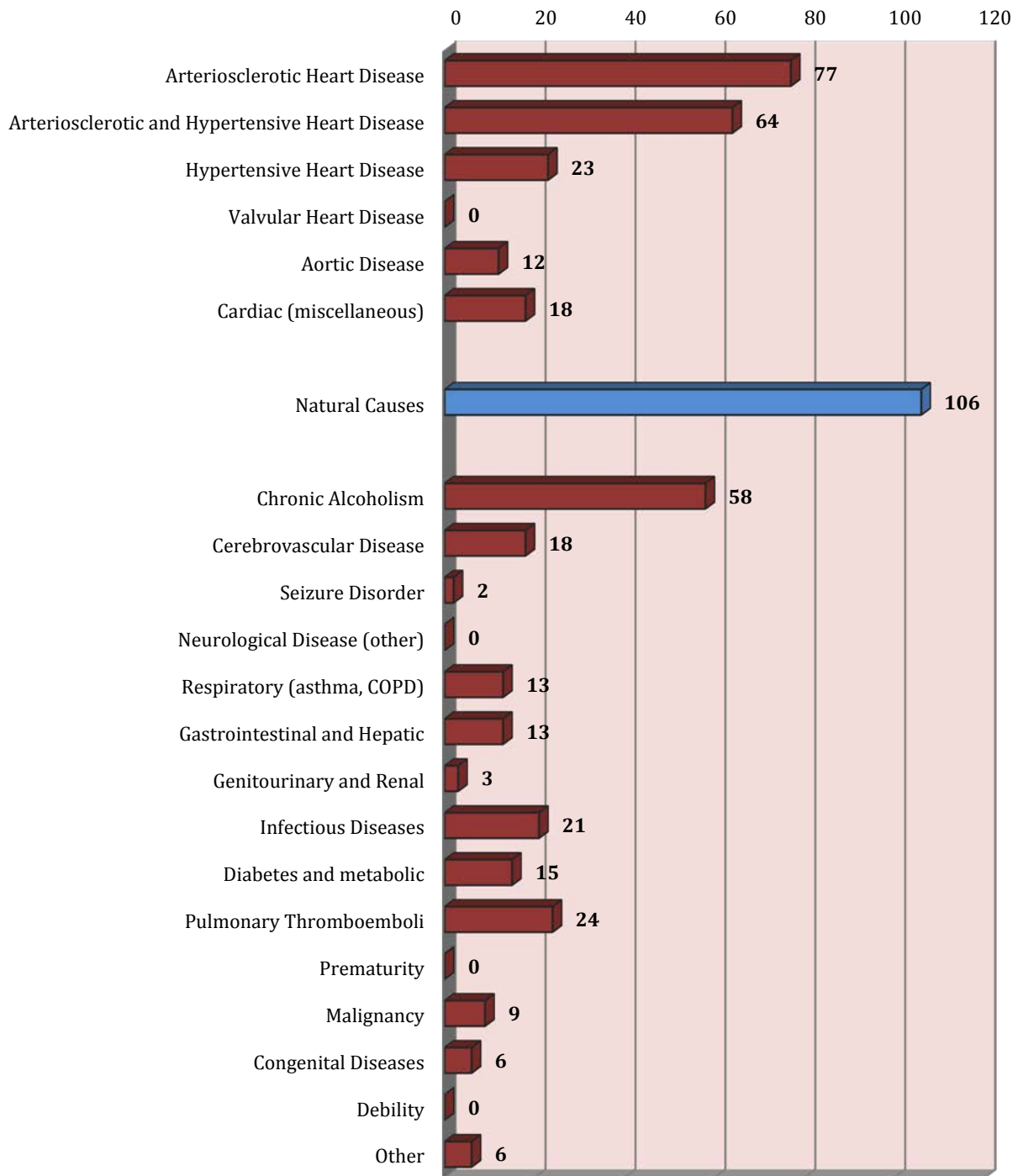
Total Medical Examiner Autopsies	52
Donations (total)	36
Eyes	19
Tissue/bones	17
Scene Visits by Investigators	92

Accepted Cases by Manner Of Death: Hennepin, Dakota, and Scott Counties 2015

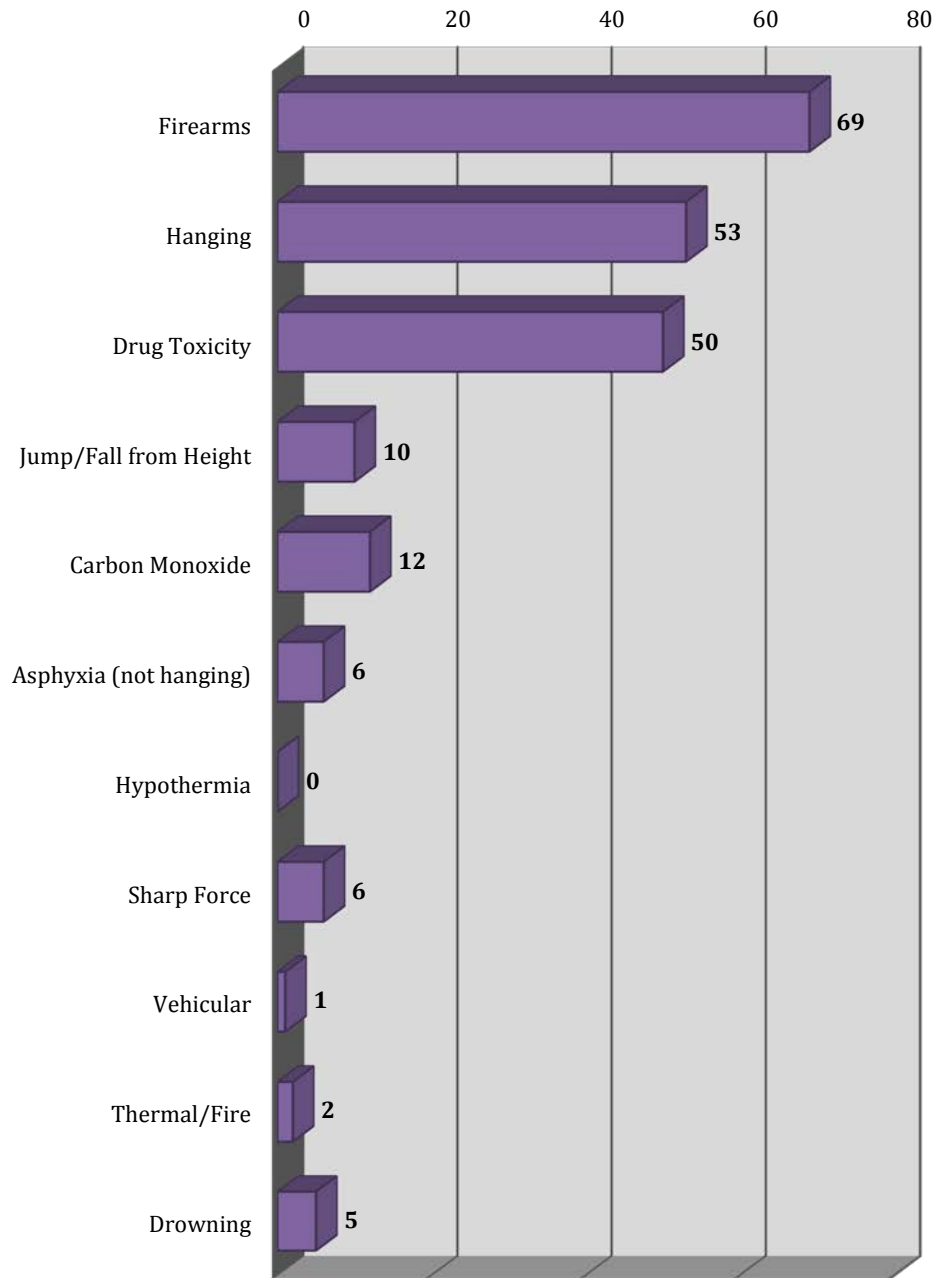


NATURAL DEATHS (AUTOPSIED) : 488

HENNEPIN, DAKOTA, AND SCOTT COUNTIES 2015

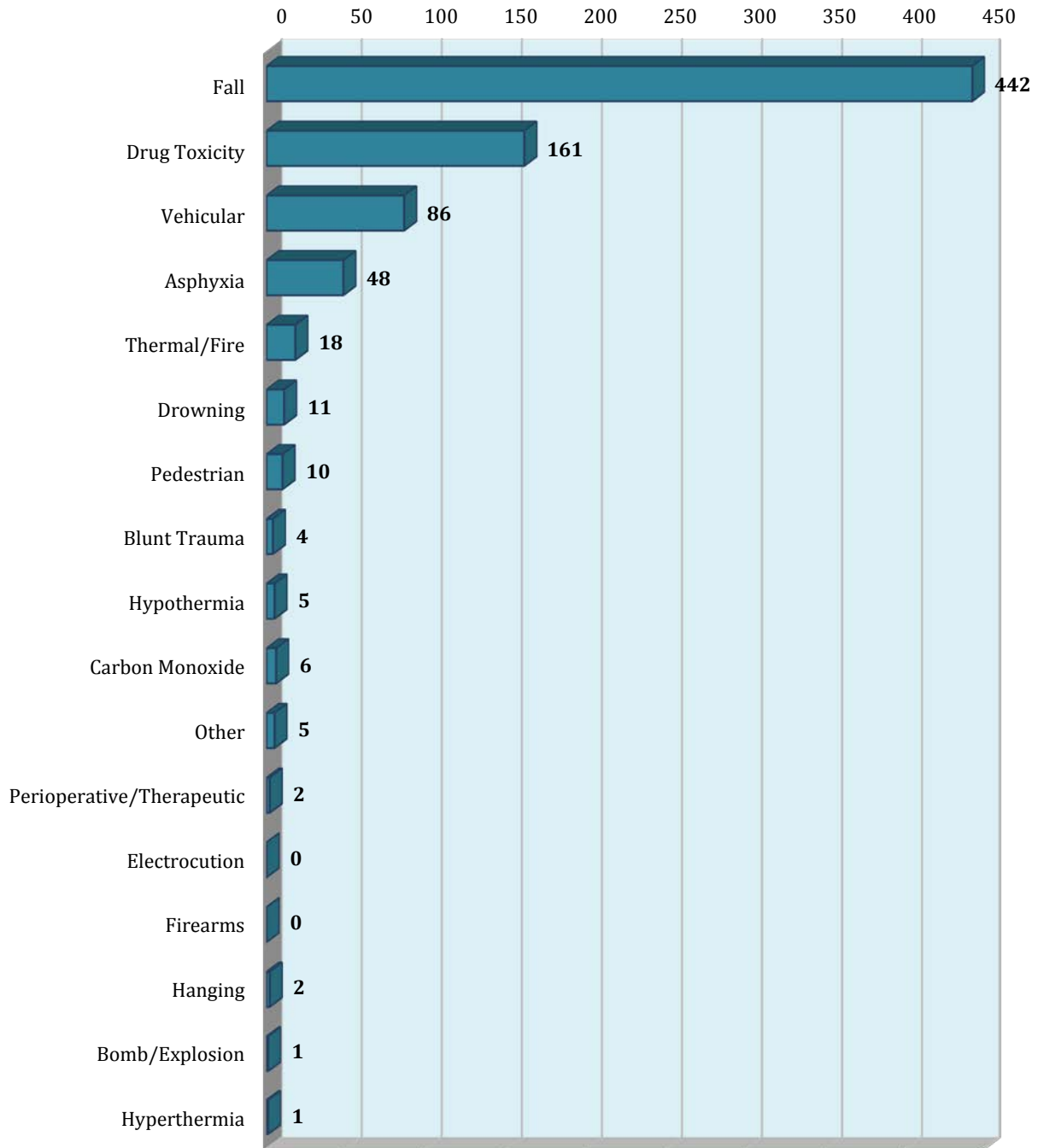


SUICIDE DEATHS : 214
HENNEPIN, DAKOTA, AND SCOTT COUNTIES 2015



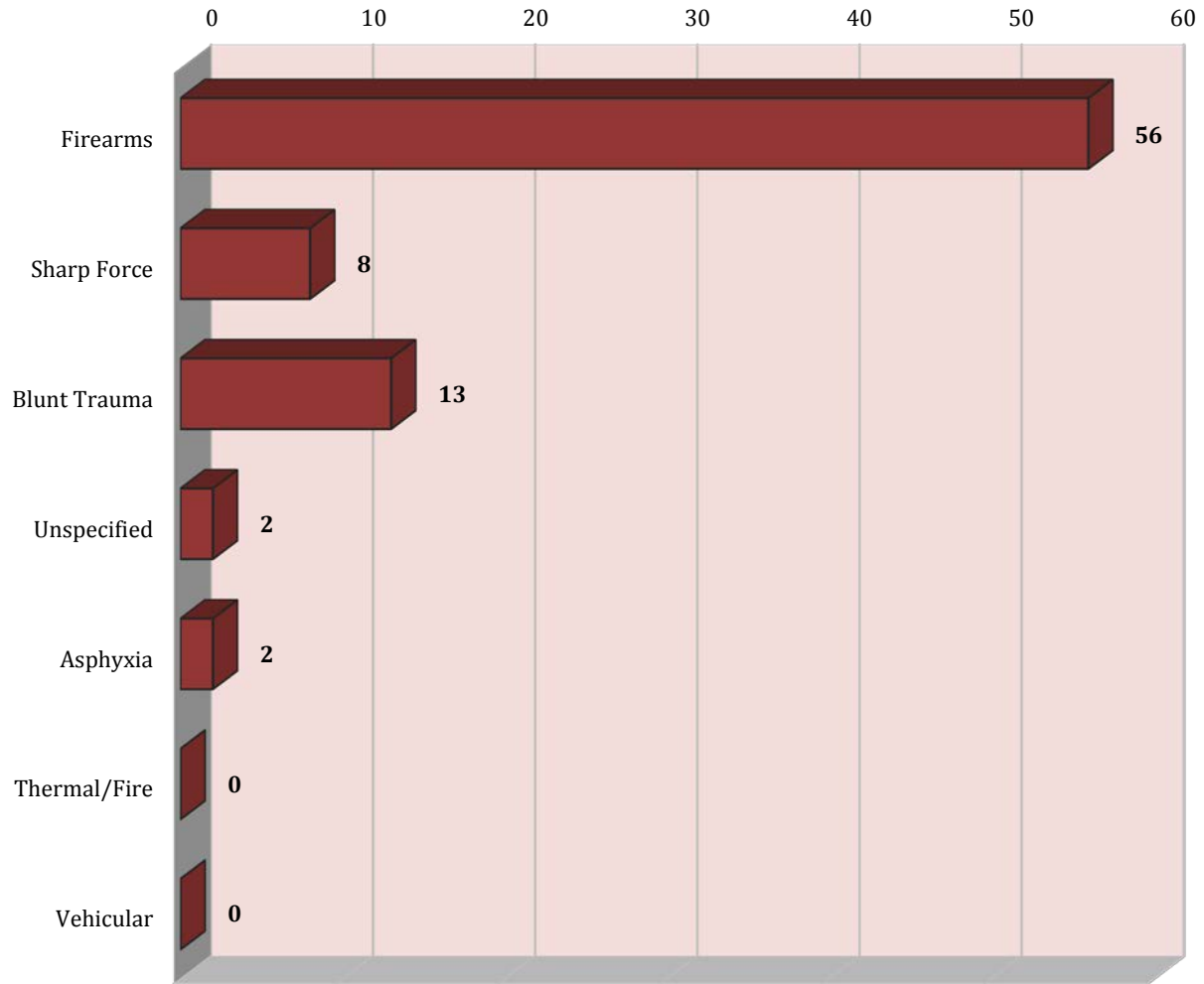
ACCIDENT DEATHS : 802

HENNEPIN, DAKOTA, AND SCOTT COUNTIES 2015



HOMICIDE DEATHS : 81

HENNEPIN, DAKOTA, AND SCOTT COUNTIES 2015



Historical Data

Hennepin County: 2014

<u>Total Cases Referred</u>	5074
Jurisdiction Accepted	1558
Jurisdiction Declined	3286
<u>Jurisdiction Accepted</u>	1558
Natural	698
Accident (not traffic)	548
Traffic Accident	90
Suicides	138
Homicide	43
Undetermined	41



<u>Total Medical Examiner Autopsies</u>	831
<u>Donations (total)</u>	322
Eyes	100
Tissue/bones	172
Organs	50
Scene Visits by Investigators	954

Historical Data
Dakota County: 2014



<u>Total Cases Referred</u>	1322
Jurisdiction Accepted	285
Jurisdiction Declined	1034
<u>Jurisdiction Accepted</u>	285
Natural	141
Accident (not traffic)	82
Traffic Accident	11
Suicides	39
Homicide	3
Undetermined	9

<u>Total Medical Examiner Autopsies</u>	145
<u>Donations (total)</u>	66
Eyes	35
Tissue/bones	31
Scene Visits by Investigators	304

Historical Data

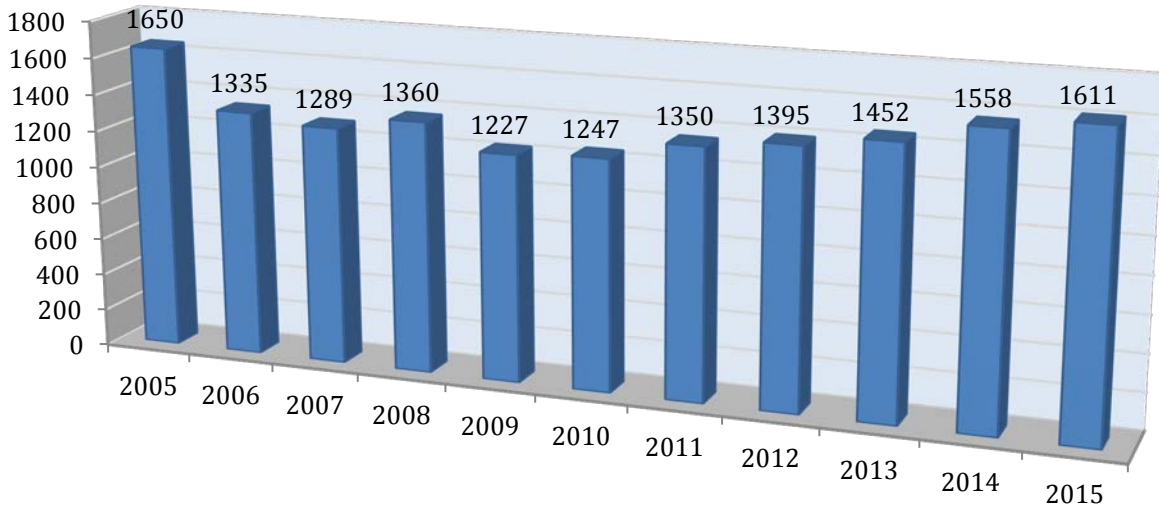
Scott County: 2014

Total Cases Referred	326
Jurisdiction Accepted	88
Jurisdiction Declined	237
Jurisdiction Accepted	88
Natural	40
Accident (not traffic)	33
Traffic Accident	3
Suicides	10
Homicide	0
Undetermined	2

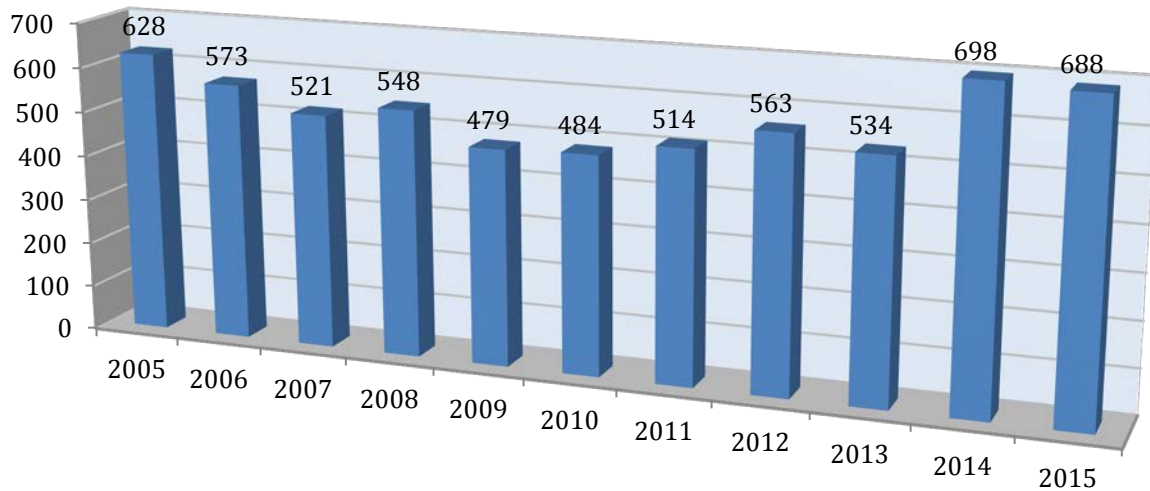


Total Medical Examiner Autopsies	44
Donations (total)	19
Eyes	6
Tissue/bones	13
Scene Visits by Investigators	93

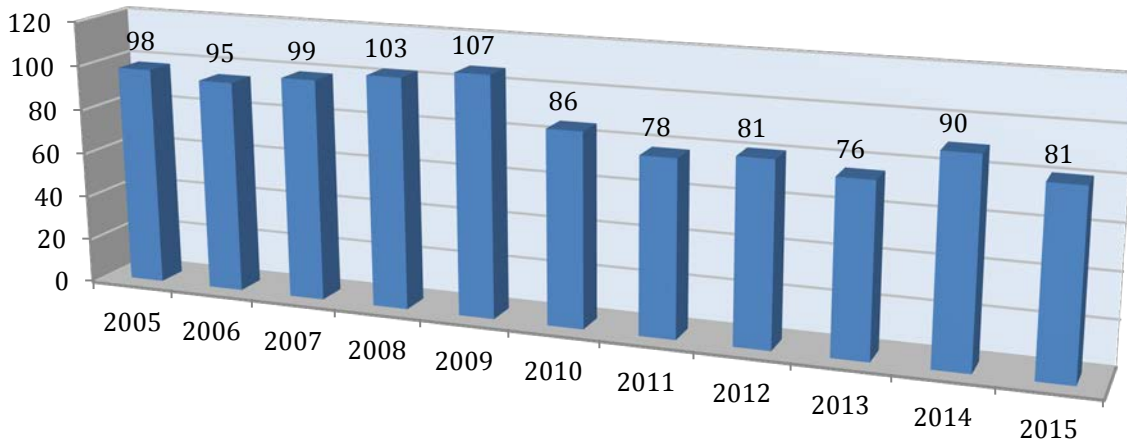
Cases Accepted: Hennepin County, 2005-2015



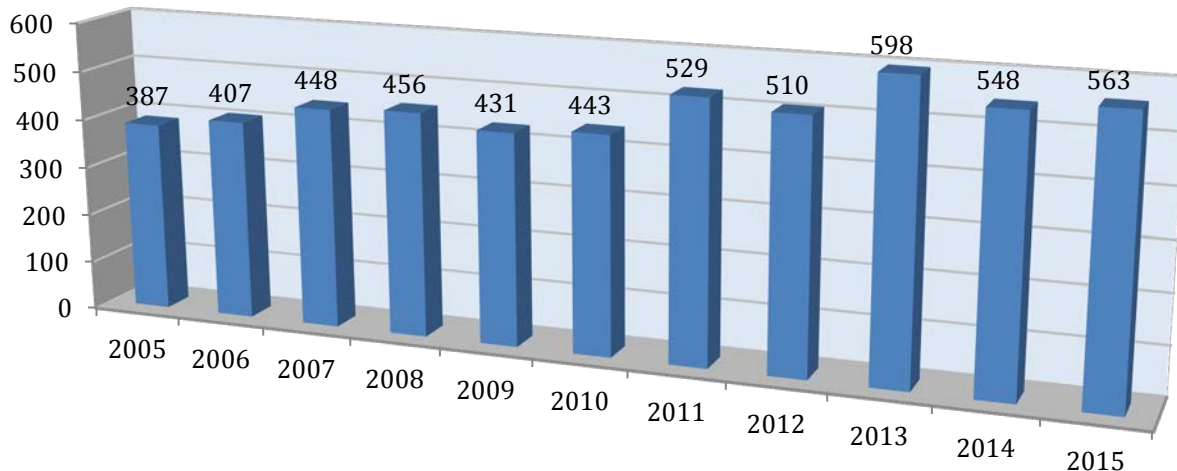
Natural Deaths: Hennepin County, 2005-2015



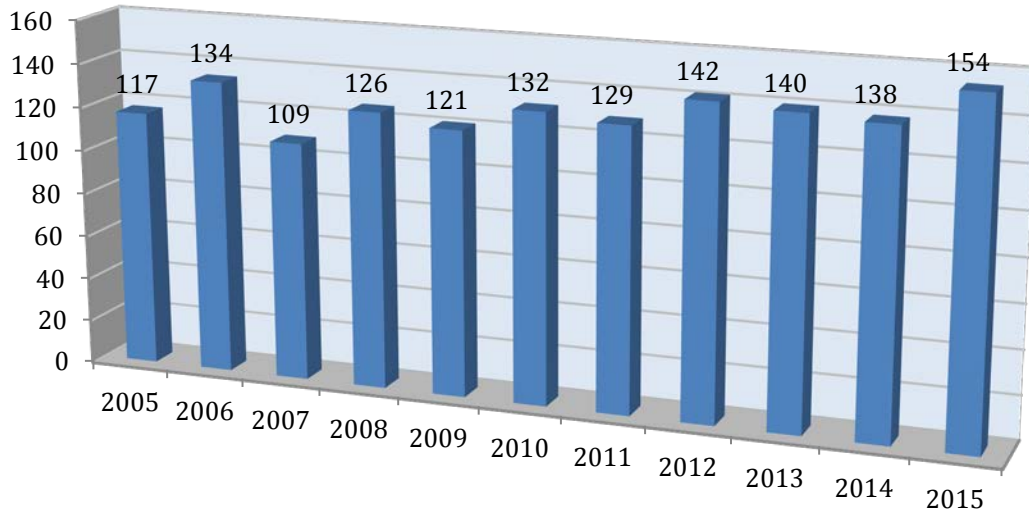
Traffic Accident Deaths: Hennepin County, 2005-2015



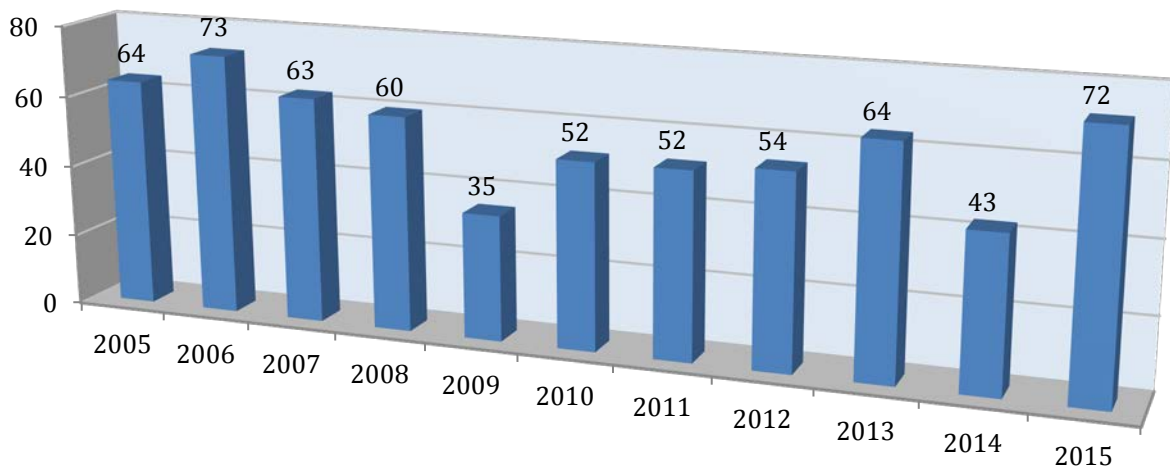
Accident (Non-Traffic) Deaths: Hennepin County, 2005-2015



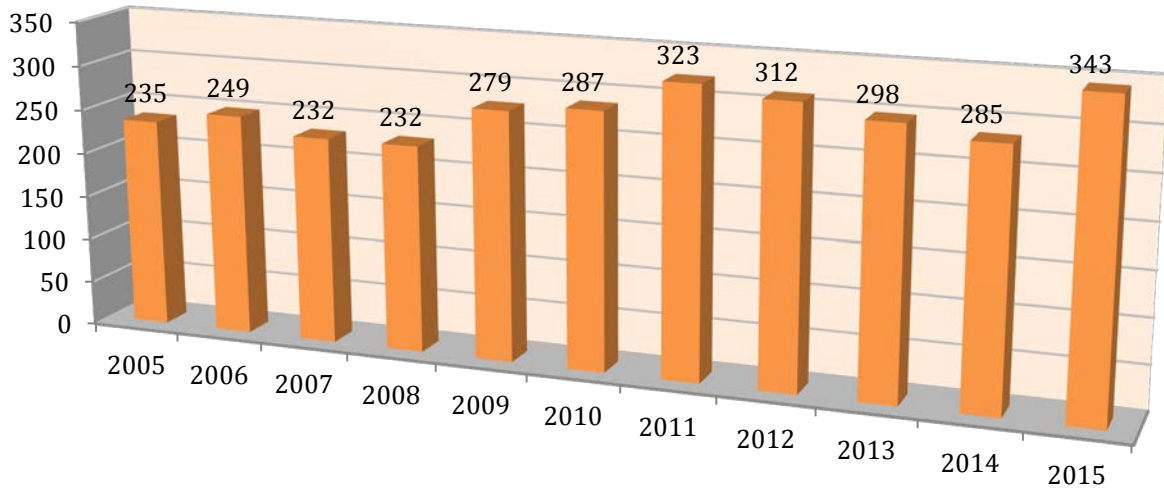
Suicide Deaths: Hennepin County, 2005-2015



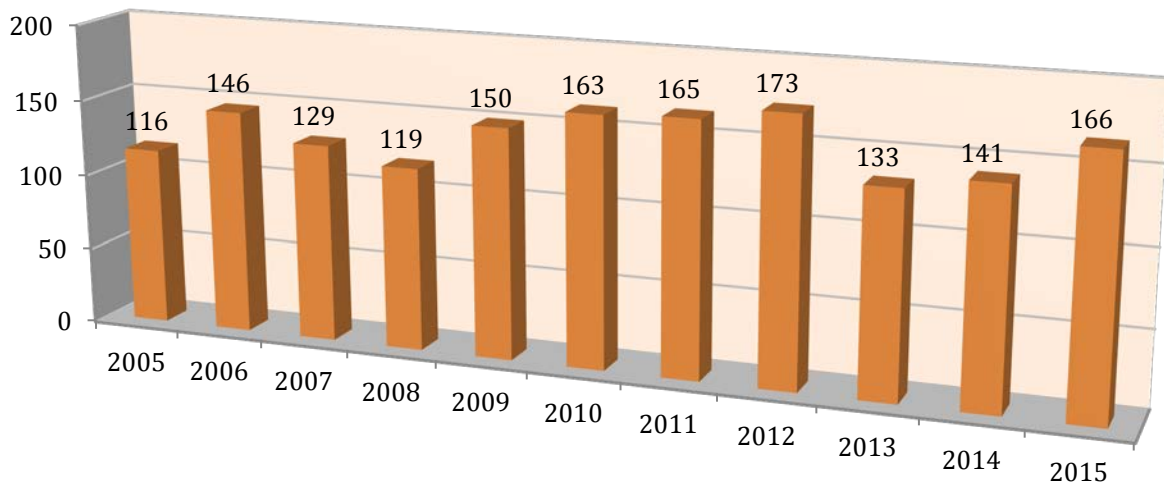
Homicide Deaths: Hennepin County, 2005-2015



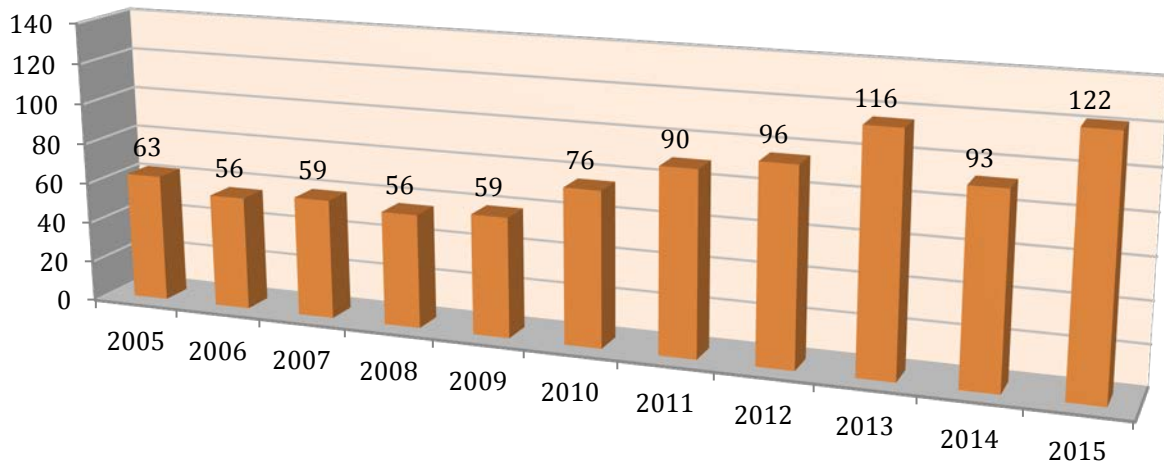
Cases Accepted: Dakota County, 2005-2015



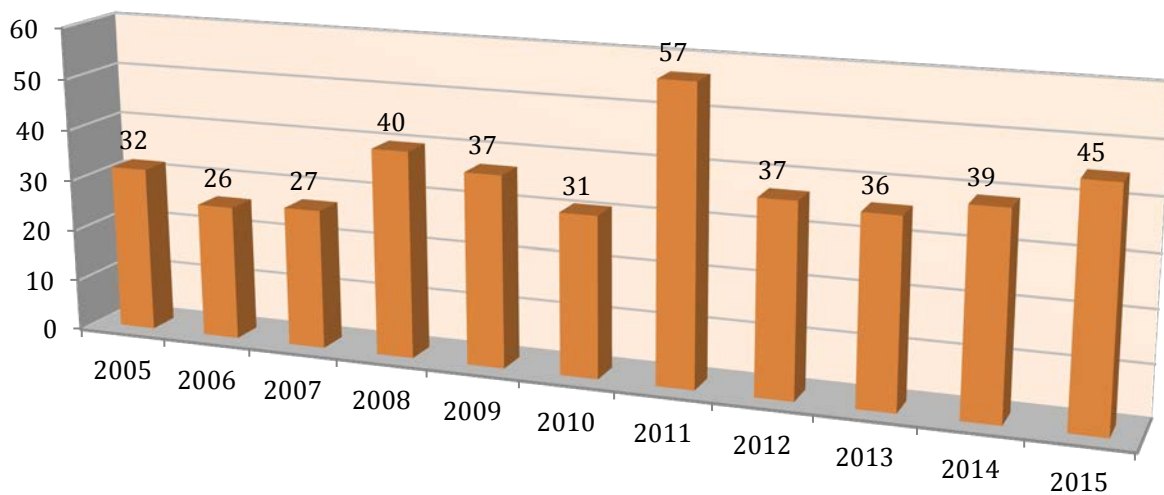
Natural Deaths: Dakota County, 2005-2015



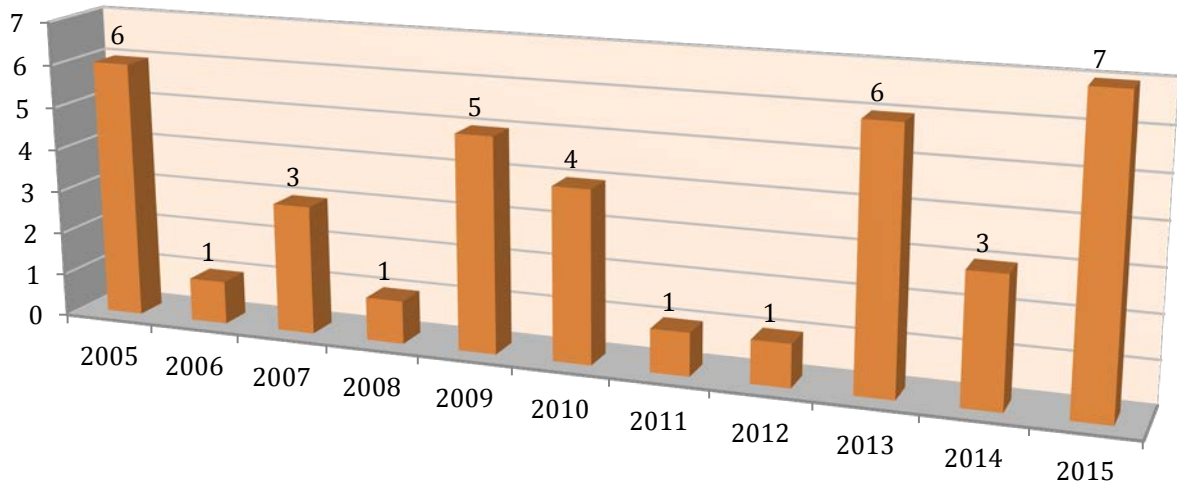
Accident Deaths: Dakota County, 2005-2015



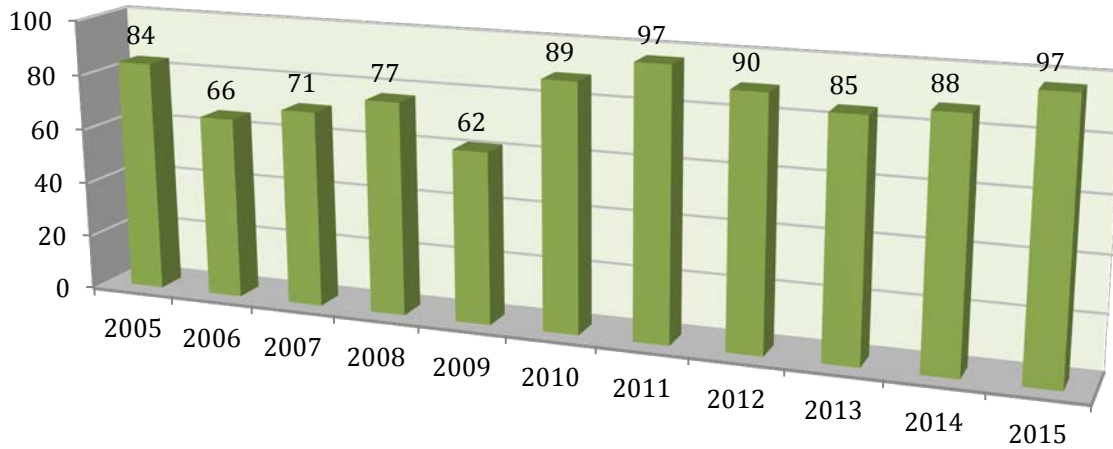
Suicide Deaths: Dakota County, 2005-2015



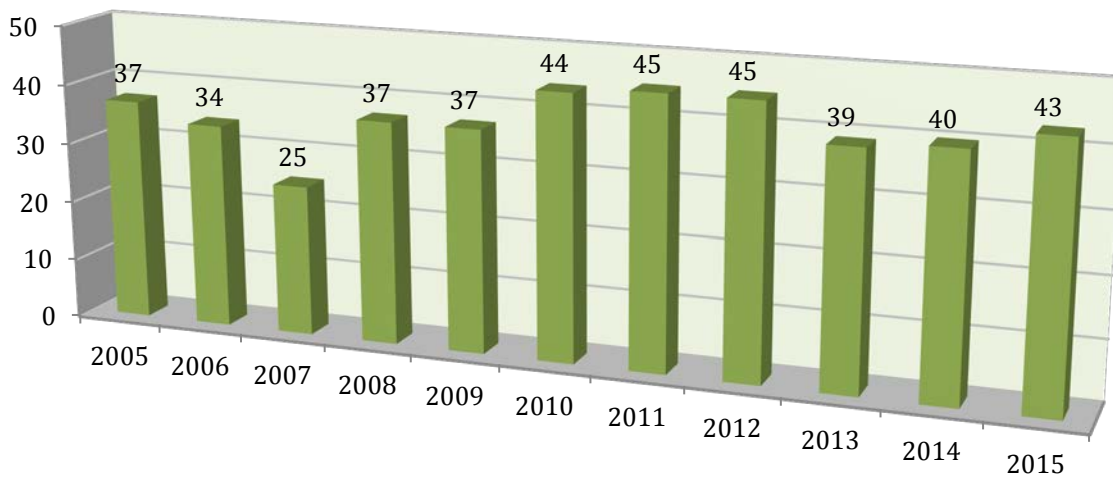
Homicide Deaths: Dakota County, 2005-2015



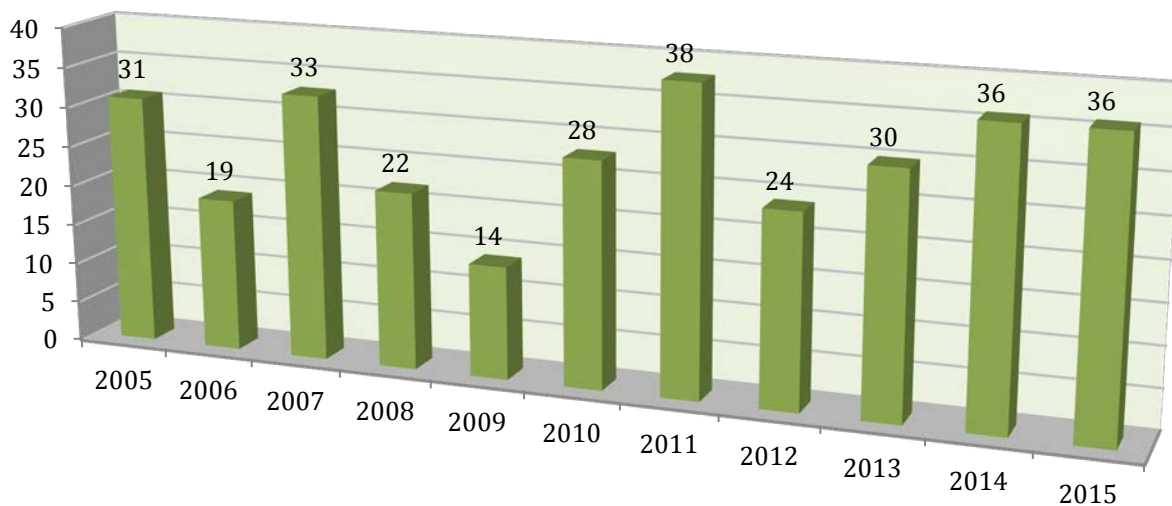
Cases Accepted: Scott County, 2005-2015



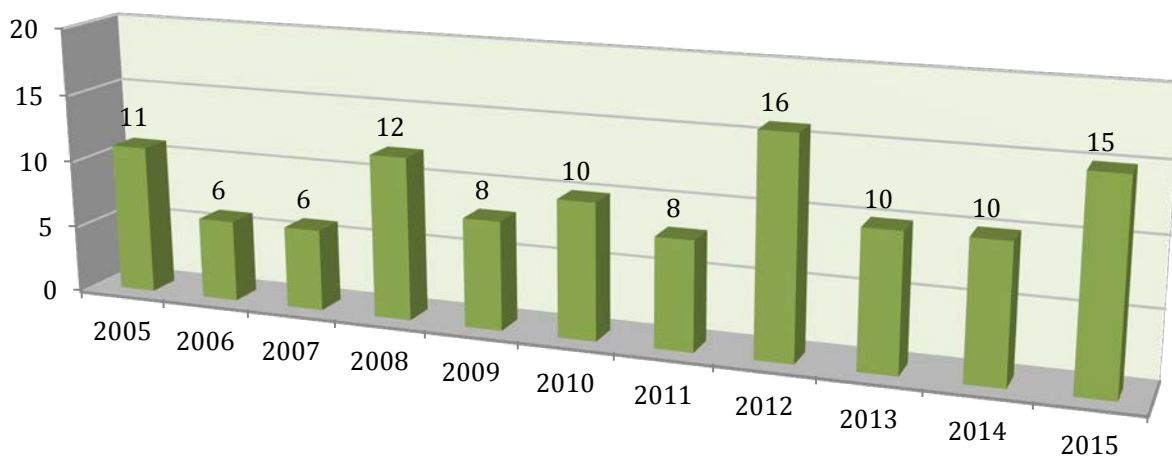
Natural Deaths: Scott County, 2005-2015



Accident Deaths: Scott County, 2005-2015



Suicide Deaths: Scott County, 2005-2015



Homicide Deaths: Scott County, 2005-2015

