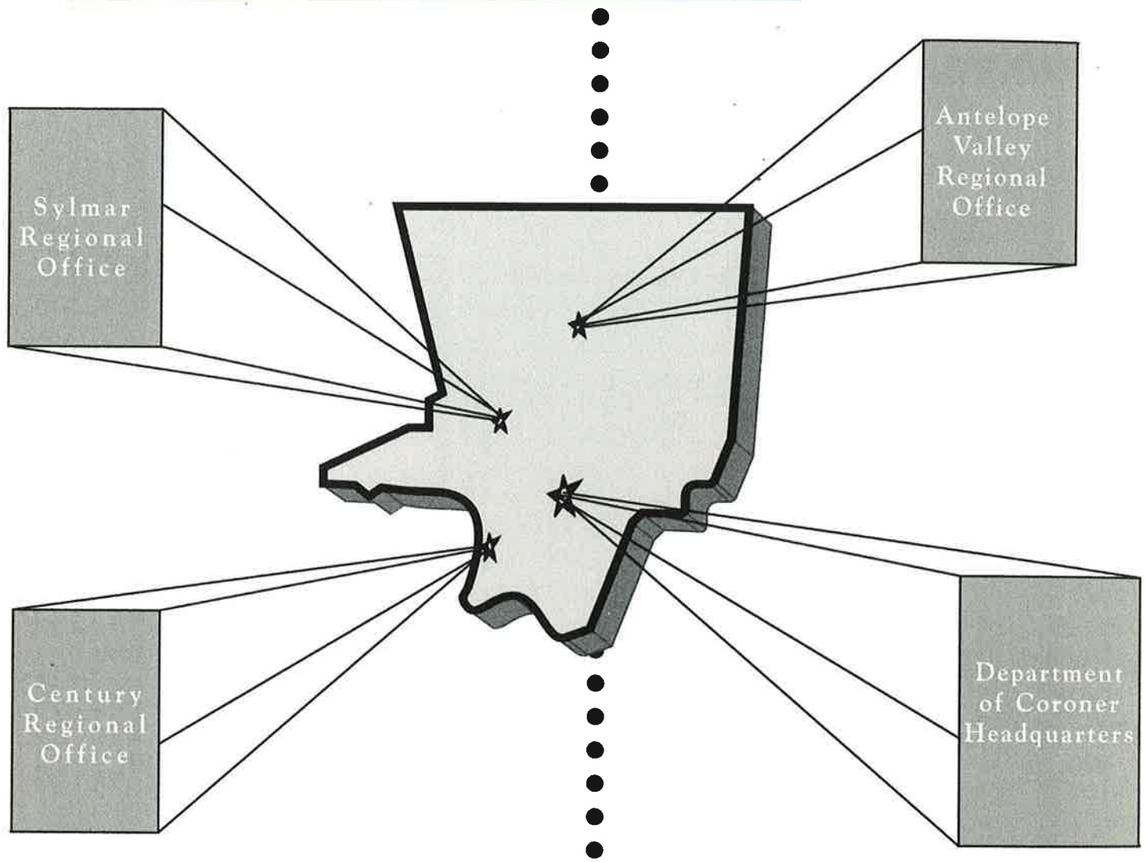
COUNTY OF LOS ANGELES
DEPARTMENT OF CORONER

Biennial Report Fiscal Years 1970-1972

REGIONAL FACILITIES



SATELLITE FACILITIES

Los Angeles County - University of Southern California Medical Center

Harbor - University of California at Los Angeles Medical Center

Cedars - Sinai Medical Center

"SHOW ME THE MANNER IN WHICH A NATION OR COMMUNITY CARES FOR ITS DEAD, AND I WILL MEASURE WITH MATHEMATICAL EXACTNESS THE TENDER SYMPATHIES OF ITS PEOPLE, THEIR RESPECT FOR THE LAWS OF THE LAND AND THEIR LOYALTY TO HIGH IDEALS."

William E. Gladstone,
Former Prime Minister of Great Britain

DIRECTOR'S MESSAGE

COUNTY OF LOS ANGELES
DEPARTMENT OF CORONER
1104 NO. MISSION RD., LOS ANGELES, CALIFORNIA 90033
(213) 343-0786 FAX (213) 221-9768

ILONA LEWIS
Director
(213) 343-0786

L. SATHYAVAGISWARAN, M.D.
Chief Medical Examiner-Coroner
(213) 343-0512

October 19, 1992

Honorable Board of Supervisors
County of Los Angeles
383 Hall of Administration
500 W. Temple Street
Los Angeles, CA 90012

Dear Supervisors:

LOS ANGELES COUNTY DEPARTMENT OF CORONER 1990-92 BIENNIAL REPORT

The Department of Coroner has undergone significant changes over the past two years to improve the quality of services provided to the County. The enclosed 1990-92 Biennial Report summarizes these changes and the significant accomplishments achieved by the department.

By your Board Order, the former Department of Chief Medical Examiner - Coroner was changed in 1990 to the Department of Coroner with administrative, investigative, laboratory, and other ancillary functions managed by a Director and medical operations overseen by a Chief Medical Examiner. As a result of this reorganization, the department has been able to achieve a 48-hour turnaround time for most cases and improve scene response by opening regional offices in Antelope Valley, Sylmar, and South Central Los Angeles.

The department's new focus on prevention has resulted in several innovative programs including Tissue for the Living, Youthful Drunk Driving Prevention, Gang Diversion, and the Mass Fatality Management Program. The department received the highest accreditation possible for our Forensic Resident Training Program and Continuing Medical Education at four and three years accreditation respectively. The department was also accredited to teach Advanced Peace Officers Standards and Training.

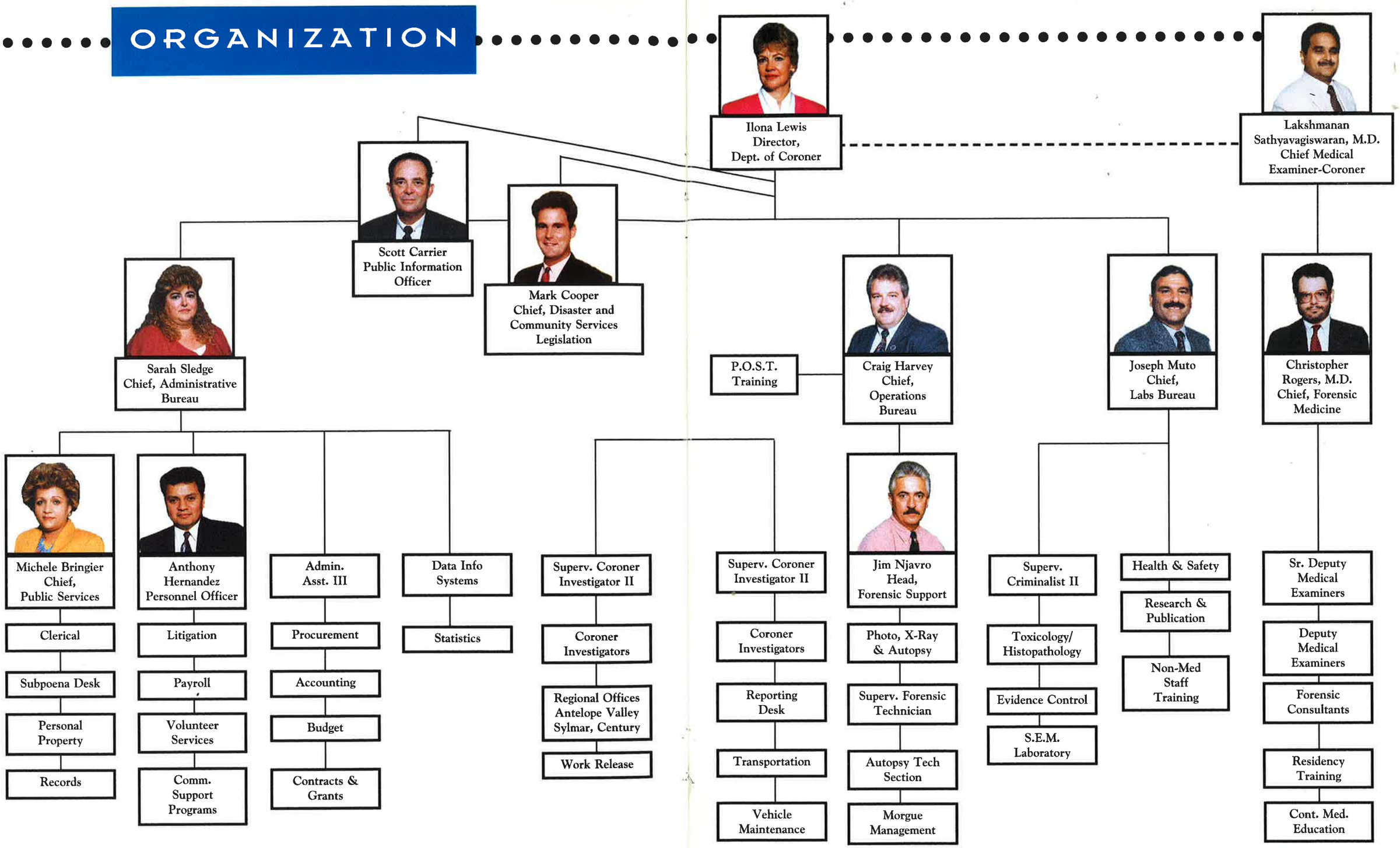
The Department of Coroner will continue to make efficient service and prevention a priority. We will also remain committed to providing cost effective programs while maintaining dignity for decedents and sensitivity toward their loved ones.

Respectively submitted,

Ilona Lewis

ILONA LEWIS
Director

ORGANIZATION



HISTORY

The word Coroner comes from the Latin word, "Coronae" which means crown. The title was first used in England in written records about the year 1184 A.D. Persons using this title were responsible for verifying the deaths of nobility, and represented the crown's interests in disputes over property.

Charged with both Public Administrator and Coroner functions, the Los Angeles County "Coroner's Office" was established in 1850 when the county population was approximately 3,530.

In 1956, Los Angeles County voted a charter amendment which separated the Public Administrator and Coroner's Office. According to the new law, the Coroner now had to be a Pathologist and the Department was designated "Chief Medical Examiner-Coroner."

On December 7, 1990, an ordinance approved by the Los Angeles County Board of Supervisors created a new Department of Coroner under the direction, management, and control of a nonphysician director.

The ordinance repealed and reenacted the County code to create the Department of Coroner, with specific new directives and duties for the nonphysician Director, while redefining the duties of the Chief Medical Examiner-Coroner to include State statutorily mandated functions.

Under the ordinance, the nonphysician director is given specific authority to manage and direct all nonphysician operations and staff within the department, subject to the general direction of the Board of Supervisors. The ordinance places the responsibility for all physician staff and functions under the control of the Chief Medical Examiner-Coroner, subject to the general direction of the Board of Supervisors.

With a population of over 9,000,000 persons, the Department of Coroner processes more than 18,000 cases per year placing the Department of Coroner in the top three in the nation for volume.

LAWS

JURISDICTION

Government Code Section 27491

It shall be the duty of the Coroner to determine the circumstances, manner, and cause of all deaths, other than natural. However, said section also requires that the Coroner take jurisdiction of all deaths from contagious disease that constitute a public hazard, deaths from occupational disease or hazard, and deaths of patients in state mental hospitals.

PROPERTY

Government Code Section 27491.3

In any death into which the Coroner is to inquire, he may take charge of any and all personal effects, valuables, and property at the scene of death hold and safeguard- until lawful disposition is made - lock and seal - but not to interfere with law enforcement - if investigating.

DOCUMENTATION

Health & Safety Code Section 10252

The Coroner shall within three days after examining the body, deliver the death certificate to the attending Funeral Director. Cause, antecedent causes, other significant conditions contributing to death, and such other medical and health section data as required shall be completed.

AUTOPSY

Government Code Section 27491.4,5

These sections give the basic discretional power to autopsy and analyze tissues and contents. In addition, the laws state how the Coroner will certify a cause of death without inquest or autopsy; investigate and get statements through medical consultation with a licensed physician.

ACCOMPLISHMENTS

- The department has implemented and maintained the disposition and release of 80% of Coroner's cases within a 48-hour period.
- Regional offices were opened in Antelope Valley, Sylmar, and South Central Los Angeles to improve response time for the department.
- In response to the department's designation as a lead emergency management department, the Disaster Services Division was established in 1991 as the planning unit for emergency and disaster response.
- The department received the highest accreditation possible for the Forensic Resident Training Program and Continuing Medical Education at four and three years accreditation respectively. The department was also accredited to teach Advanced Peace Officers Standards and Training.
- The Youthful Drunk Driving Program was implemented as a prevention tool for the courts to use for youth offenders sixteen years old and younger. The department is in the process of establishing a Gang Diversion Program for at-risk and high-risk youth.
- The Forensic Laboratories Division was automated by the installation of several systems including the Laboratory Robotics System and an automated solid phase extraction system. The Robotics System provides cocaine drug screening for Coroner cases.
- A Research and Publications Committee was formed to study and prioritize all requests for research and present recommendations to the Director.
- The department received the National Association of Counties awards for Expanding the Availability of Corneal and Other Tissues to the Community, Laboratory Robotics System, Visiting Foreign Physician Program, and the Mass Fatality Management Program (MFMP). The Mass Fatality Management Program also received the 1992 Challenge Award from the County Supervisors Association of California.
- In 1991, the department entered into a three year contract with Tissue Banks International (TBI) to provide funding to enhance tissue collection activity and allow for an increased availability of tissue for transplantation in the community.
- The department developed and implemented quality assurance programs throughout the organization.
- The department participated in several committees to detect and prevent child abuse. In addition, this department conducts a secondary review of all child deaths.

EVENTS

The Department of Coroner responded to two major emergencies in 1991 and 1992 that enhanced its disaster response capabilities and promoted the importance of Coroner services to the County's emergency management program.

The Los Angeles International Airport Disaster in 1991 resulted in 34 fatalities when a Boeing 737 landed on top of a twin-engine commuter plane. The Department of Coroner was the only County department involved in the response, and successfully completed three days of recovery with the assistance of the Los Angeles City Fire Department and other agencies. The incident resulted in the department's membership to the County's Emergency Management Council, the working body for the Board of Supervisors. The department was also asked to serve on Mayor Tom Bradley's Airline Passenger Fire and Life Safety Task Force. A training film was produced on the incident and has received acclaim from the emergency management community.

The 1992 Los Angeles Civil Unrest also provided an excellent opportunity for the Department of Coroner to exercise its emergency response. The verdict from the Rodney King Trial resulted in a cross jurisdictional emergency response to the 52 confirmed fatalities. During the first 72-hours, over one hundred missing person reports had been filed with the Los Angeles Police Department alone. In response, the Department of Coroner requested and received mutual aid from the state for dog fatality teams to search burned-out buildings for additional deaths.

HOMICIDES INCREASE

In August 1992 the Department of Coroner handled a record 263 reported homicides in Los Angeles County. The 517 reported homicides in July and August 1992, eclipsed the previous record of 471 in 1991, which broke the old mark of 460 homicides in 1990.

The violence in the county and increased homicide rate can be attributed to increases in narcotic-related and gang-related incidents. If the pattern of homicides continues for the months of November and December 1992, the Coroner estimates handling 2,610 reported homicides. This total will be an increase of 48% from the 1988 total of 1,522. An increase in homicides affects the department's staff dramatically as the autopsy of a homicide case takes 3-4 times the amount of work as other cases.

MISSION

The Department of Coroner is mandated by law to inquire into and determine the circumstances, manner, and cause of all violent, sudden, or unusual deaths occurring within Los Angeles County. This includes all homicides, suicides, accidental deaths, and natural deaths where the decedent had not been seen by a private physician within 20 days prior to death. The department's programs are structured specifically to facilitate this mandate and to ensure that appropriate interface with various law enforcement agencies, and mortuaries are maintained. Unstated in the mandate is the commitment of this department to a customer service orientation, and the development of special prevention programs designed to help the living.

EXECUTIVE

The Executive Division is responsible for the overall direction and coordination of the department and of various other programs including Disaster Services, Marketing, and the Public Information Officer (PIO). This section ensures that mission goals and objectives are being met to guarantee the best service to the public. The Executive Division works closely with the Board of Supervisors and the Chief Administrative Officer and coordinates with all other public and private agencies.

PUBLIC INFORMATION OFFICER

This person is responsible for releasing decedent information to all the various medias including television, radio, and press. In the event of a disaster or major incident, this individual would represent the department as the sole source for confirmed fatality figures. This person acts as the liaison with the local funeral directors.

MARKETING SECTION

This group formulates, evaluates, and implements a variety of ideas to enhance the image of the department as well as increase revenue. Marketing programs include laboratory services to other counties, companies and agencies. Production and sale of videos such as training in forensic science, health and safety procedures, scene investigation and evidence collection procedures. Department involvement in the LAX air crash and the Los Angeles riots is also depicted in video format.

DISASTER SERVICES SECTION

This section is the operational "hub" of the department's Emergency Operations Center (EOC). In the event of a major incident or disaster the coordination of each division's responsibility is assigned through the activation of the Incident Command System. This structured system is utilized by virtually all emergency response agencies and the Coroner is one of eight lead county departments which is immediately activated. Presentations on mass fatality management are an integral part of the responsibility assumed by the Coroner in educating public and private agencies. This section is involved with the implementation of a county wide mortuary response plan which would allow for shared resources in the event of a disaster or major incident.

ADMINISTRATIVE

This division is responsible for all departmental financial operations including budget preparation, accounting, payroll, personnel, procurement, forensic data information systems, statistics, and other related functions which support the department's personnel. The department's budget appropriation increased from $13,054,000 in fiscal year 1990-91 to $15,242,000 in fiscal year 1991-92. With state funding curtailments to local county governments in fiscal year 1992-93 the department's budget was reduced to $13,014,000.

BUDGET/ACCOUNTING SECTION

The budget team is composed of individuals from various administrative sections which through financial reports, constantly monitor the department's expenditures on services and supplies, salaries and employee benefits, fixed asset equipment, and overtime. County budgetary changes which impact the Coroner are discussed with the budget analyst from the Chief Administrative Office (CAO) and the budget team.

The accounting section is responsible for the generation of all financial reports to all division managers. They also reconcile invoices from contract vendors and county departments along with revenue collection from law enforcement agencies for autopsy protocols and photographs.

PERSONNEL/PAYROLL SECTION

Due to the recent decentralization in the County's Personnel Division this section has assumed greater responsibility for recruitment, examinations, labor negotiations, and grievances. Other duties include dissemination of employee benefit information, coordination of the Employee Transportation Programs, coordination of the department's volunteer program, and implementation of programs to increase employee health and safety awareness.

On a bimonthly basis this section processes timecard records for over 200 temporary and permanent employees. Due to the 24-hour shift requirement in which the department operates, several hours are spent with timecard adjustments such as overtime, call back, night shift, bonuses, and bilingual pay.

PROCUREMENT SECTION

This section is responsible for the purchasing of all services and supplies for the various divisions and processing the associated invoices. All requests for fixed asset equipment acquisitions are coordinated and the related annual inventory are completed. All service requestz for equipment repair or building alterations are assessed and forwarded to the proper outside agency or other county department for handling.

FORENSIC DATA INFORMATION SYSTEM/STATISTICS SECTION

This section is responsible for maintaining the department's minicomputer system which contains information on all Coroner cases. The department's three regional offices have the ability via a modem to input and extract data from the mini system. Management and statistical reports are generated from this system.

The statistics section converts specific demographic data on each Coroner case into reports which are often requested from the press, along with public and private agencies. Two major areas of reporting information include child deaths and drug overdoses.

PUBLIC SERVICES

The Public Services Division consists of 33 employees who interact directly with the public. This division's major areas of responsibility include:

DOCUMENT SALES

Document Desk processes all public requests for Coroner reports. Approximately 3000 reports are purchased each year.

PROPERTY SECTION

Approximately 2,700 of the 4,200 cases requiring follow-up to effect the release of personal properties, were actually claimed by families. All properties are housed in a vault until released. The office of the Public Administrator is consulted when next of kin resides out-of-state or their whereabouts are unknown.

CRIMINAL AND CIVIL SUBPOENAS

Approximately 4,000 criminal subpoenas are answered per year by this unit which is staffed by two (2) full-time Senior Clerks. A total of 365 civil subpoenas were answered in a year's time. The unit is also responsible for scheduling the physician staffs' appointments and court appearances on a daily basis.

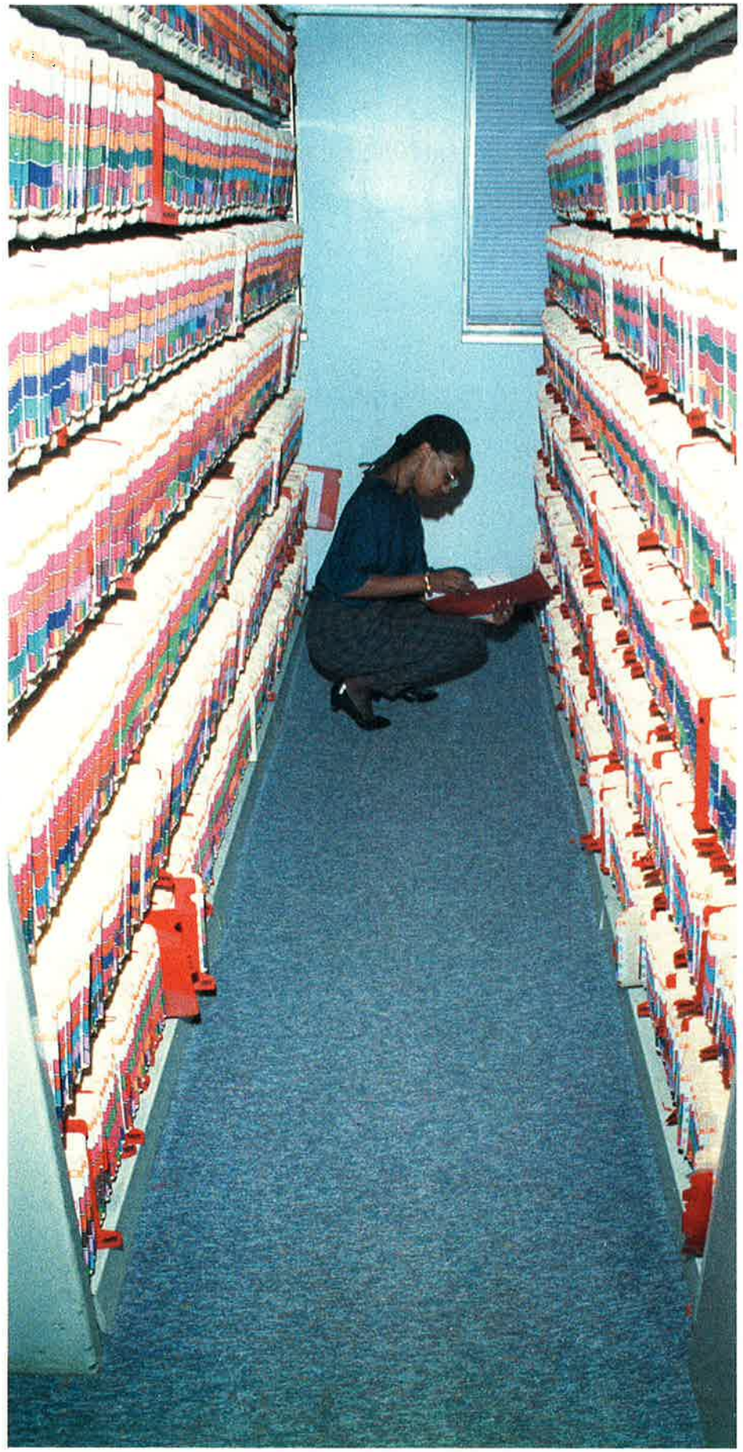
TRANSCRIBING UNIT

More than 4,100 Autopsy Reports are transcribed each year. An in- house team of six transcribers type each case ordered by the District Attorney, Law Enforcement Agencies, and the general public.

MICROFILM

All inactive casefiles are microfilmed and retained permanently. Approximately 11,000 are filmed every year. More than 15,500 pages are copied from microfilm upon requests received by the public each year.

Active cases are housed in the Record Room for a period of two years from the date of death.

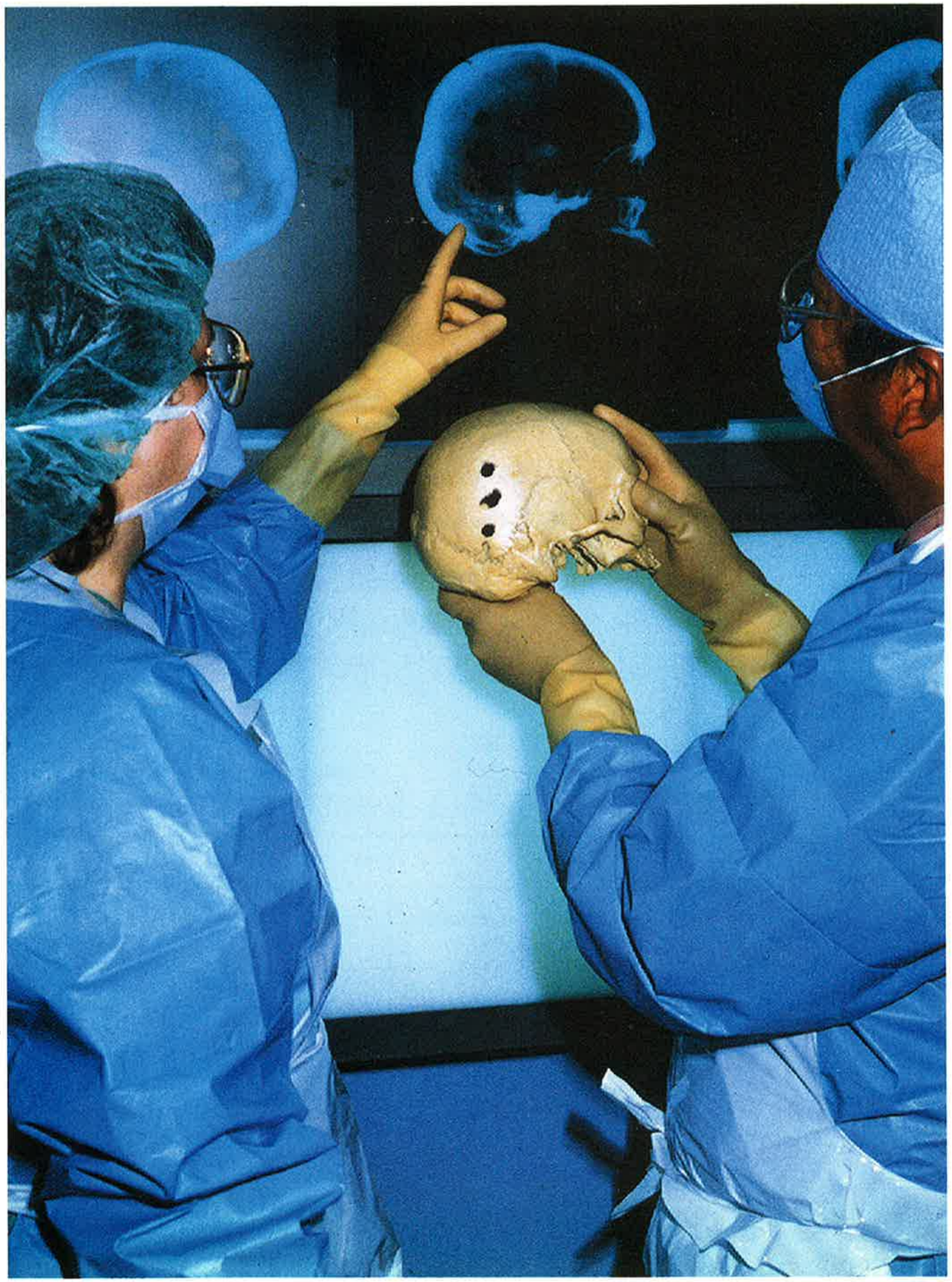


MEDICAL

The Forensic Medicine Division's full-time permanent staff consists of Board-certified Deputy Medical Examiners who are responsible for the medical investigation and determination of the cause and mode of each death handled by the department. Our physicians are experts in the evaluation of sudden, unexpected, natural deaths, unnatural deaths such as deaths from firearms, sharp objects, and blunt force trauma. Deputy Medical Examiners are frequently called to court to explain their medical findings and interpretations on cause of death, particularly in homicide cases.

Other activities of the Forensic Medicine Division include consultation on living patients with injuries of medicolegal importance; teaching and public relations work in a variety of settings; and training medical students and general pathology residents in forensic autopsy procedures. The division also works with several academic centers in conducting research.

The department has consultants in forensic neuropathology, odontology, anthropology, and radiology to assist the medical examiners in evaluating cases. The Forensic Medicine Division is approved by the California Medical Association for Continuing Medical Education activities and the Accreditation Council for Graduate Medical Education for resident training in forensic pathology.



FORENSIC LABORATORIES

This Division is responsible for the collection, preservation and analyses of all physical and medical evidence obtained from our Coroner cases.

Laboratories Division generates revenue with its Urine Drug Screening contracts, solid dose identifications, Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV) testing, and Scanning Electron Microscopy (SEM) examinations.

This Division performs the following specific tasks:

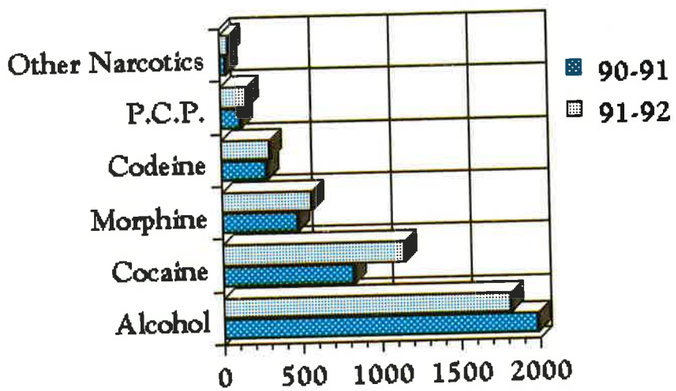
TOXICOLOGY

Using state-of-the-art equipment and methods, Senior Criminalists perform chemical and instrumental analyses on post-mortem specimens to determine whether or not drugs or other chemicals played any role in the cause or manner of death. Toxicology handles over 6,000 cases and conducts over 35,000 tests every year. The laboratory also holds and maintains California State Licensing for Forensic Alcohol Analyses.

CRIMINALISTICS

Specially trained scientists respond to crime scenes for the proper documentation, collection and preservation of physical evidence used by the courts, law enforcement agencies, and this department.

Toxicological Statistics

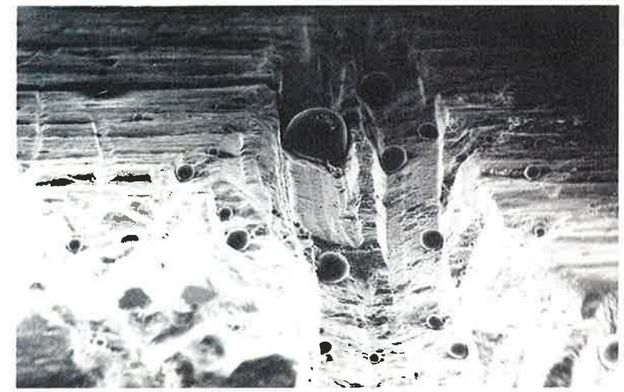


Laboratory Statistics

	90-91	91-92
Total Cases Processed by DOC	17,606	18,087
Cases Tested for 1 or more Drugs	7,200	7,200
Individual Tests Performed	55,844	63,977
Positive Test Results	7,652	9,567
Positive for 1 or more Drugs	3,024	3,240

SCANNING ELECTRON MICROSCOPY (SEM)

Using the latest technology in SEM analyses, this section makes gunshot residue determinations and tool mark comparisons that aid not only our department in determining the cause and manner of death, but also aid law enforcement agencies in their criminal investigations.



HISTOPATHOLOGY

This section prepares gross tissue specimens for microscopic examination by the Deputy Medical Examiners. With a part-time Histotech and help from an outside contractor, over 15,000 slides are processed every year.

EVIDENCE CONTROL

This section is responsible for maintaining all of the physical evidence generated by our Coroner cases. Our evidence custodians receive, document, preserve, and ultimately release or dispose of the physical evidence while always maintaining the proper chain of custody.

OPERATIONS

INVESTIGATIONS DIVISION

In accordance with state law, all law enforcement, health facilities, and funeral directors are required to report deaths which may fall under the jurisdiction of the Department of Coroner. The reports initiate an investigation from this Division which may require dispatching an investigator to the scene of a homicide, accident, suicide, or natural death. The investigator may also respond to a hospital or mortuary to conduct the investigation. The investigator is ultimately responsible for the collection of evidence, positive identification of the deceased, and notification of the death to the next of kin. Additionally, the investigator must interview witnesses, follow-up informational leads, interface with other public service agencies, and protect the deceased person's assets.

Investigators are also responsible for testimony in court on Coroner's cases along with preparation of investigative reports for use in the determination of cause, manner, and mode of death. Because of the nature of the job, investigators work in all environments, under adverse conditions and may be required to use special equipment to accomplish their specific task. Under the law, investigative staff are considered peace officers and must pass in-depth background checks along with intensive training.

FORENSIC SUPPORT DIVISION

The Division is responsible for providing direct support in the autopsy room to the deputy medical examiner/physician. Their duties include, but are not limited to, preparation of decedents for medical examination and autopsy, assisting the deputy medical examiner with the autopsy and collection of toxicology, x-ray, photographic, dental and fingerprint evidence. Additionally, they process all John/Jane Doe's for more comprehensive examinations, perform various embalming procedures, and assist in releasing remains to mortuaries.

An additional specialty of this Division is the expanded photo and video capabilities which enhance efforts at the scene of a disaster or major incident. The Division also produces fine quality graphics and displays to aid in communication to others about specific cases or the mission of the department.

FORENSIC SERVICES DIVISION

This Division is responsible for the transportation, processing, storage, and release of decedents. The assigned staff respond to the scene of a death to remove remains at the direction of the field investigator. The staff also respond to hospitals and mortuaries to recover remains falling under jurisdiction of the Department of Coroner.

The processing includes the weighing and measuring of the remains, fingerprinting, collection of evidence and recovery and accounting for personal effects. The staff also ensure the case is appropriately and accurately tagged to prevent misidentification.

SPECIAL PROGRAMS

GANG DIVERSION PROGRAM

In an effort to stem the growing tide of needless death, the Los Angeles County Department of Coroner (DOC) is planning the Gang Diversion Program. Working in cooperation with other government agencies and community organizations, the DOC will provide tours of the autopsy floor in an attempt to pursuade "high-risk" youths to stay away from the gang lifestyle.

YOUTHFUL DRUNK DRIVING VISITATION PROGRAM

The department participates with the courts in a program of visitation to the Coroner's facility by youthful drunk drivers as a term of probation. The program sessions are held five times a month and to date has 'graduated' in excess of 800 people.

REGIONALIZATION-SATELLITE OFFICES

The investigation and autopsy capabilities have been expanded to offices in the Antelope and Santa Clarita Valleys. This provides a more rapid Coroner's response to the location of death in these areas due to the close proximity of the regional facility. The department has recently established a new regional office near the Los Angeles International Airport to serve the Airport and South Central Los Angeles areas.

TISSUE RECOVERY PROGRAM

The Departmtent of Coroner extends its services to help the living, and is in the forefront in the fight against blindness. A unique contract arrangement with the DOC positions Tissue Banks International as the organization solely responsible for all tissue recovery programs in this facility. This program provides corneas and other tissues (skin, bone, and heart valves) to all in need in the community. Other organizations under the TBI umbrella include: Red Cross, Pacific Coast Tissue Bank, Southern California Tissue Bank, and Lions Doheney Eye Bank.

VOLUNTEER PROGRAM

The volunteer program was designed to encourage participation of qualified volunteers for the various dfepartment functions. Each participating unit trains and evaluates its volunteers.

PEACE OFFICER'S STANDARDS AND TRAINING (P.O.S.T.)

The department's investigators are accredited by the Commission on P.O.S.T. The department must comply with all the hiring, qualification, and in-service training requirements of P.O.S.T. and is now an approved, accredited training facility.

VISITING PHYSICIAN SCHOLAR PROGRAM

The department has visiting physicians from around-the-world rotating for a one to two year period. They perform autopsies under the supervision of department doctors. This offers a learning experience to these physicians and also fosters international friendship.

SUDDEN INFANT DEATH SYNDROME (SIDS) PROGRAM

The department participates in the implementation of the state mandated SID's autopsy and investigators protocol.

INTERAGENCY COUNCIL ON CHILD ABUSE AND NEGLECT (ICAN)

The department participates in ICAN. This department also has its own Child Death Review Committee.

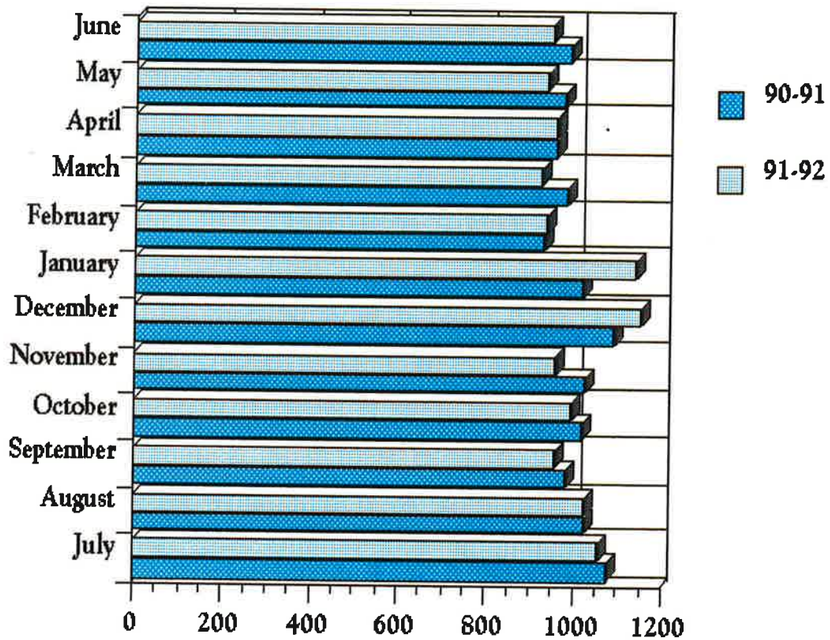
IDENTIFICATION OF UNIDENTIFIED BODIES (SB 90)

The department participates in state mandated programs to examine dental records for the identification of John and Jane Does.

TISSUE BANKS INTERNATIONAL
Tissue Recoveries at Department of Coroner

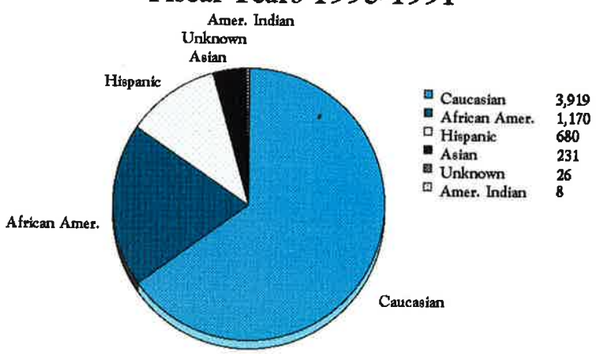
Tissue	1990-1991	1991-92
Corneas	1892	1799
Skin	31	22
Bone	75	89
Heart Valve	9	14
Saphenous Veins	1	3
Total Recoveries	2008	1927

Total Cases by Month



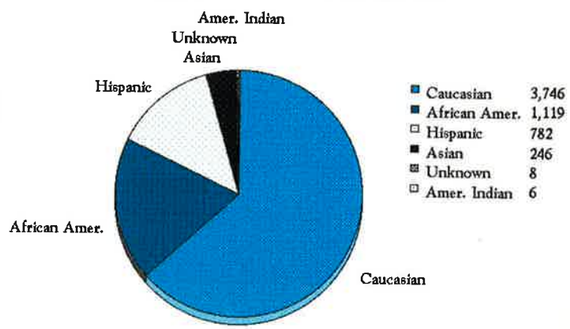
Source: Department of Coroner

Total Natural Deaths by Race
Fiscal Years 1990-1991



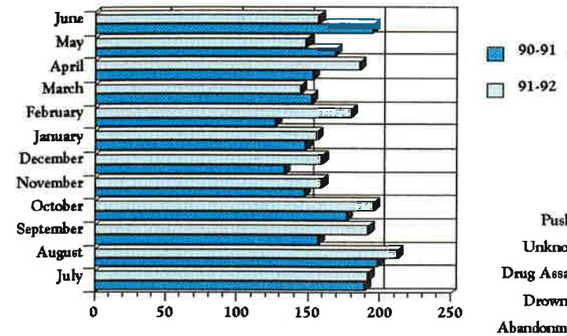
Source: Department of Coroner

Total Natural Deaths by Race
Fiscal Years 1991-1992



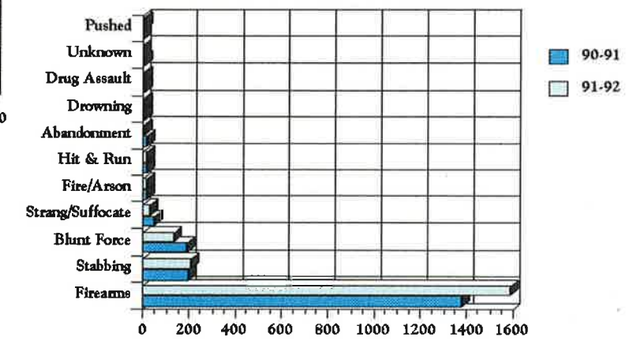
Source: Department of Coroner

Total Homicides by Month



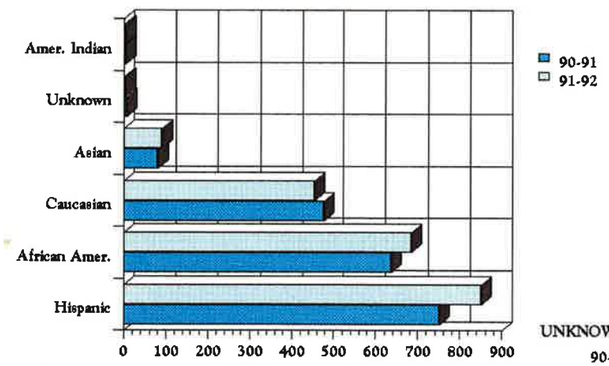
Source: Department of Coroner

Total Homicides by Type
Fiscal Years 1990-1992



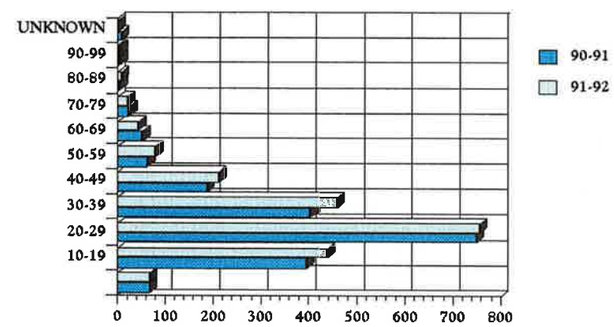
Source: Department of Coroner

Total Homicides by Race
Fiscal Years 1990-1992



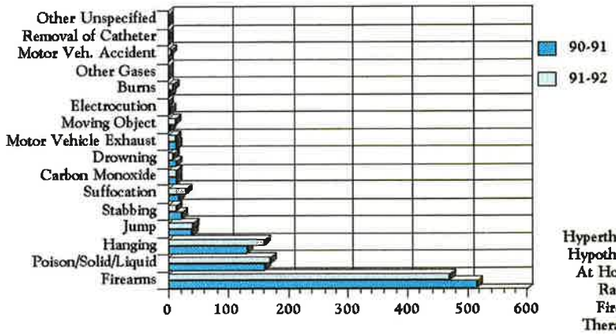
Source: Department of Coroner

Total Homicides by Age
Fiscal Years 1990-1992



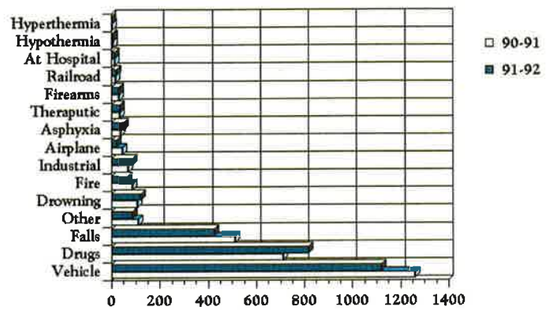
Source: Department of Coroner

Total Suicides by Type
Fiscal Years 1990-1992



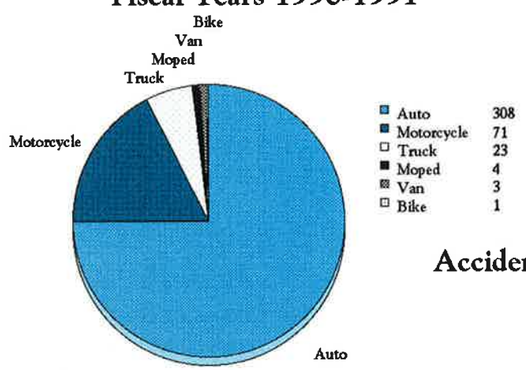
Source: Department of Coroner

Accidental Deaths by Type
Fiscal Years 1990-91, 1991-92



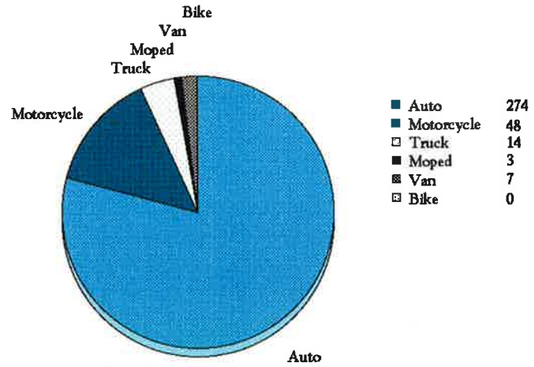
Source: Department of Coroner

Accidental Deaths Vehicle Vs. Fixed Object
Fiscal Years 1990-1991



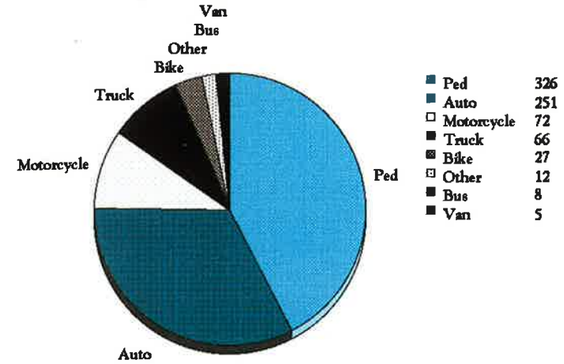
Source: Department of Coroner

Accidental Deaths Vehicle Vs. Fixed Object
Fiscal Years 1991-1992



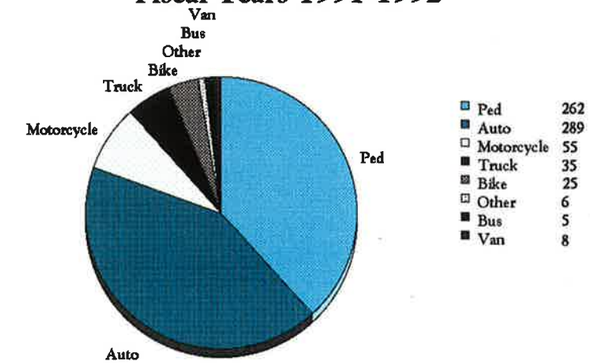
Source: Department of Coroner

Accidental Deaths Auto Vs.
Fiscal Years 1990-1991



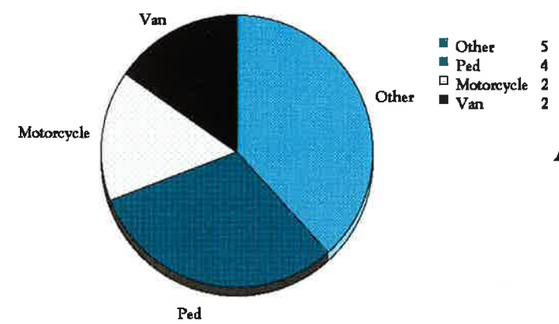
Source: Department of Coroner

Accidental Deaths Auto Vs.
Fiscal Years 1991-1992



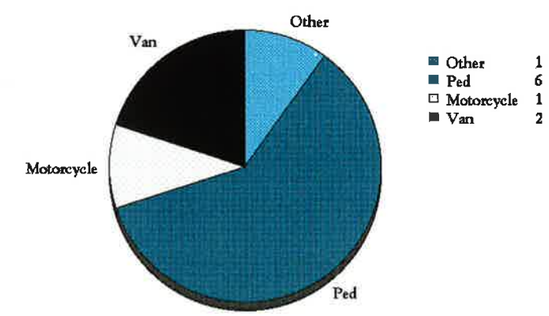
Source: Department of Coroner

Accidental Deaths Motorcycle Vs.
Fiscal Years 1990-1991



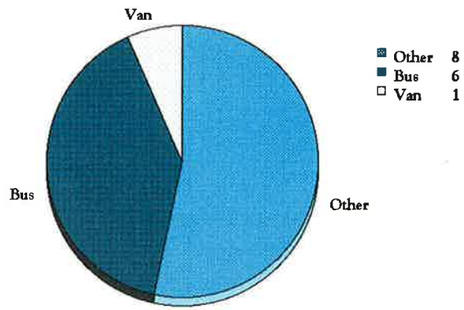
Source: Department of Coroner

Accidental Deaths Motorcycle Vs.
Fiscal Years 1991-1992



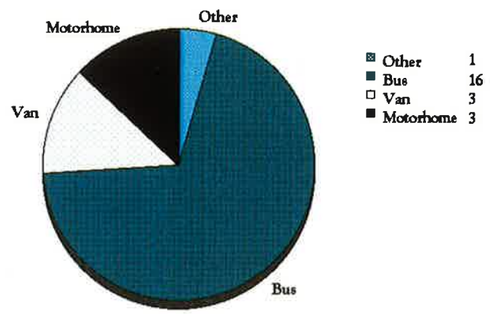
Source: Department of Coroner

Accidental Deaths Pedestrian Vs. Fiscal Years 1990-1991



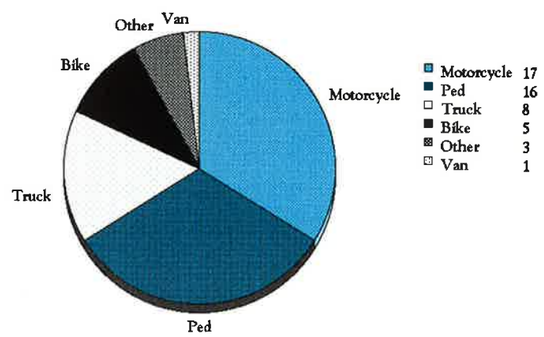
Source: Department of Coroner

Accidental Deaths Pedestrian Vs. Fiscal Years 1991-1992



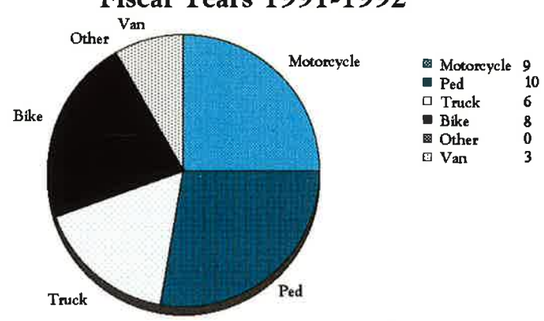
Source: Department of Coroner

Accidental Deaths Truck Vs. Fiscal Years 1990-1991



Source: Department of Coroner

Accidental Deaths Truck Vs. Fiscal Years 1991-1992



Source: Department of Coroner

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This document was created in-house by **Rob Garrott**, with the assistance of **Felicia Carreker**. The Project Coordinator was **Sarah Sledge**, Chief, Administrative Bureau.

Additional support was provided by the following:

SPECIAL PROJECTS

Rick Cavataio
Mark Cooper

PHOTOGRAPHERS

George McDowell
Richard Vick

This Biennial Report is dedicated to Ilona Lewis, Director, for her outstanding leadership skills in bringing the Department of Coroner into the dawn of the 21st century.

BOARD OF SUPERVISORS

Deane Dana
Chairman, Fourth District

Gloria Molina
First District

Kenneth Hahn
Second District

Edmund D. Edelman
Third District

Michael D. Antonovich
Fifth District

Richard B. Dixon
Chief Administrative Officer