



Department of Justice



Office of Justice Programs

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BUREAU OF JUSTICE STATISTICS
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ALMOST 2,000 MEDICAL EXAMINERS' AND CORONERS' OFFICES INVESTIGATED ABOUT ONE MILLION DEATHS IN 2004

Almost 13,500 Unidentified Human Remains on Record

WASHINGTON – About 2,000 medical examiners' and coroners' offices investigated almost 1 million human deaths in the U.S. during 2004, the latest year for which such data was available, the Justice Department's Bureau of Justice Statistics (BJS) announced today. The data were compiled from the first national census of those offices, which are responsible for medical-legal death investigations.

Approximately 40 percent of all deaths in the United States were referred to medical examiners' and coroners' offices during 2004. About half (487,000) merited further investigation, the survey noted.

As of 2004, there were almost 13,500 unidentified human remains on record in medical examiner and coroners' offices across the country, but record-keeping practices varied. Aside from the remains on record, an estimated 4,400 unidentified human bodies are received in medical examiners' and coroners' offices in an average year. Of those an average of about 1,000 remain unidentified after one year, and about 600 undergo final disposition, such as burial, cremation or other means. Only half of medical examiners and coroners' offices in 2004 had policies for retaining records on unidentified human remains.

About 80 percent of the examining facilities in 2004 were county coroner's offices, most of which served small jurisdictions. Sixteen states had a centralized statewide medical examiner system, seven had a county medical examiner system, and 13 had a mixed county medical examiner and coroner system.

These offices employed an estimated 7,320 full-time equivalent personnel in 2004, most of whom were employed in offices serving larger jurisdictions. While only 6 percent of all offices served populations of 500,000 or more persons, these offices employed more than half of all personnel.

(MORE)

The examining facilities had estimated overall annual budgets of nearly \$718.5 million, an average of \$387,000 per office. County medical examiner budgets averaged about \$715,000 per office, ranging from about \$2.5 million in large jurisdictions to \$18,000 in those serving small jurisdictions. County coroner budgets averaged \$225,000, ranging from about \$1.4 million in large jurisdictions to \$41,000 among those serving small jurisdictions.

The report, *Medical Examiners and Coroners' Offices, 2004*, (NCJ-216756), was written by BJS statisticians Matthew J. Hickman and Kristen A. Hughes as well as Kevin J. Strom and Jeri D. Roper-Miller, of RTI International. Following publication, it can be found at <http://www.ojp.usdoj.gov/bjs/abstract/meco04.htm>.

For additional information about the Bureau of Justice Statistics please visit the BJS Web site at <http://www.ojp.usdoj.gov/bjs>.

The Office of Justice Programs (OJP), headed by Assistant Attorney General Regina B. Schofield, provides federal leadership in developing the nation's capacity to prevent and control crime, administer justice and assist victims. OJP has five component bureaus: the Bureau of Justice Assistance; the Bureau of Justice Statistics; the National Institute of Justice; the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention; and the Office for Victims of Crime. Additionally, OJP has two program offices: the Community Capacity Development Office, which incorporates the Weed and Seed strategy and OJP's American Indian and Alaska Native Affairs Desk and the Sex Offender Sentencing, Monitoring, Apprehending, Registering and Tracking (SMART) Office. More information can be found at <http://www.ojp.usdoj.gov>.