



**Dorchester County
Coroner's Office
2022 Annual Report**



Coroner Paul J. Brouthers



Dorchester County
South Carolina

Dorchester County Coroner's Office – 2022 Annual Report

Paul J. Brouthers
Coroner

Linda F. Walsh
Chief Deputy Coroner



OFFICE OF THE CORONER

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To The Citizens of Dorchester County,

Our Office is happy to share the 2022 Annual Report for the Dorchester County Coroner's Office. One of our many goals is to provide information to the public to increase public awareness of the Role of the Coroner's Office. Our office investigates all deaths in Dorchester county which includes any death occurring less than 24 hours after a patient is admitted to a hospital, all hospital emergency room deaths, nursing homes, Hospice Care, accidents, MVA's, drownings, suicides, homicides, or deemed otherwise suspicious. Our focus is to determine the cause and manner of death, through a thorough investigation by our Deputy Coroners and to maintain the integrity of our office.

The information contained in the annual report derives from sources reviewed by the Dorchester County Coroner's Office to include case notes, autopsy reports, toxicology reports, police reports, EMS reports, death certificates, motor vehicle reports, medical records, and cremation permits, among others.

I hope the information provided will help you better understand the many facets of the Dorchester County Coroner's office and the role we play in our community.

If you have any questions or would like any additional information, please feel free to contact the Dorchester County Coroner's Office.

Thank you for your support,
Respectfully,

Paul J. Brouthers, LFD, D-ABMDI
Coroner of Dorchester County, SC

DEDICATION

Dedicated to the decedents, their families, and the citizens of
Dorchester County and beyond, who grieve the loss of loved ones.

It is Our Honor and Privilege to serve you during the time of
your greatest need.

Dorchester County Coroner’s Office – 2022 Annual Report

Table of Contents

Mission Statement	5
Our Core Values	5
2022 Profile	6-7
The Coroner	8-9
Organizational Chart	10
Investigation and Disposition of Cases	11-12
“Cause” and “Manner” of Death	13
Statistics	14
Homicides	15
Suicides	15
Accidents	15-16
Natural Deaths	16
Undetermined Deaths	16

MISSION STATEMENT

The mission of the Dorchester County Coroner and staff is to determine the cause and manner of deaths occurring within Dorchester County through fair, impartial, and thorough death investigation techniques. Every death investigation will be tempered with compassion and professionalism while serving as the advocate for the decedents, and to provide information and affirmative assistance to the families throughout the investigative process.

OUR CORE VALUES

- INTEGRITY:** Honesty in everything we do; knowing it is critical to do the best we can for all decedents and their families to arrive at the most accurate conclusion of each death, we investigate.
- COMPASSION:** Strive to empathize and understand the pain families are experiencing during the immediate loss of a loved one, and to behave in such a way as to provide comfort to them in this difficult time.
- SERVICE:** To be available anytime we are needed, and to respond to provide our services quickly and with an emphasis on thoroughness. Assist other agencies, both public and private, in gathering and sharing information with them relative to their participation in the cases we investigate.

2022 PROFILE OF THE DORCHESTER COUNTY CORONER'S OFFICE

The Coroner's Office investigates the circumstances surrounding a person's death independently of any law enforcement agency that may also be investigating the death. The role of the coroner's office is to determine the "Cause" and "Manner" of a person's death.

The South Carolina Code of Laws (17-5-530(B)) mandates "The coroner or medical examiner shall make an immediate inquiry into the cause and manner of death and shall reduce the findings to writing on forms provided for this purpose.", upon notification of deaths that are unexpected, unexplained, suspicious, violent or in which case and/or manner of death is unknown.

The Coroner is also responsible for identifying decedents and making notification to Next-Of-Kin. The Coroner's office provides information to the decedent's family, involved law enforcement, the judicial system, insurance companies, the Consumer Product Safety Commission, the South Carolina Department of Health and Environmental Control (DHEC), Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) and many others.

The Coroner's Office advocates for the families by notifying and advising them of the circumstances surrounding the death known at the time. The office provides updates to the families after autopsy and/or further investigation reveals new information. Additionally, we refer families to resource agencies when necessary to assist them through the grieving process. Our office works with organizations such as Sharing Hope to facilitate the family or decedent's wishes regarding organ and tissue donation whenever possible.

Medicolegal death investigation provided by the Dorchester County Coroner's Office may involve many things, to include but not limited to, scene response, scene and decedent photography, ordering of forensic autopsies (authorized by SC Code 17-5-520), anthropologic and odontology examinations, fingerprint collection and ordering of fingerprint comparisons. Collection of toxicology samples and/or DNA samples are also a part of the investigation.

Scene investigations include, child and infant death investigation and re-enactments, homicides, suicides, industrial and residential accidents, motor vehicle accidents, deaths due to abuse/neglect/negligence, terrorist acts, death due to malpractice, mass fatalities, arson, drowning, drug related and fire deaths. The Coroner may hold a formal inquest to determine the "Manner of Death".

Dorchester County Coroner's Office – 2022 Annual Report

The Coroner of Dorchester County is an elected official and the Coroner's Office is funded by tax revenue provided by the citizens of Dorchester County. Coroner Brouters submitted an annual budget to Dorchester County Council for approval. The Finance Department of Dorchester County Government administers the approved funds.

The Fiscal Year 2022 approved budget for the Dorchester County Coroner's office was \$589,884.

Dorchester County Coroner's Office – 2022 Annual Report

Paul Brouthers, Coroner

Paul Brouthers was born in Charleston S.C. He grew up in Charleston and Mount Pleasant, attended public schools and graduated from Wando High School in June 1979. He lived in Mount Pleasant until he was appointed to the SC Highway Patrol on February 20, 1983.

Upon graduation from the Highway Patrol Training Academy on May 13, 1983, he was assigned to work as an enforcement Trooper in Dorchester County, making his home in Summerville. Paul enforced the SC Laws, investigated collisions, many of them fatal. In February 2001, Paul transferred to Patrol Headquarters, joining the Community Relations Unit. There, Paul was a media spokesperson and conducted safety presentations to audiences large and small to schools, civic clubs, military bases, and businesses.



Upon retirement from the SC Highway Patrol on May 30, 2011, He began a second career as a funeral director and embalmer. He attended Piedmont Technical College – School of Mortuary Sciences. Upon graduating, he became Nationally Board Certified as a funeral director and embalmer. He completed his apprenticeship at a local funeral home and became a licensed funeral director, and embalmer.

Paul has two daughters, Caroline and Sarah, and five grandchildren. In addition to spending time with his family, Paul enjoys volunteering, motorcycling, and golf. He is a member of the SC Troopers Association, and the Summerville Oakbrook Rotary Club.

Education

2011-2013 Piedmont Technical College – Associates of Applied Science in funeral service –
Summa Cum Laude

Volunteer Affiliations

National Funeral Directors Association
SC Funeral Directors Association
Fraternal Order of Police
SC Law Enforcement Officer's Association
SC Trooper's Association
Masonic Lodge 237 (Master Mason)

Dorchester County Coroner's Office – 2022 Annual Report

Certifications

Member of and Certified by the American Board of Medicolegal Death Investigators with Diplomate Status (D-ABMDI)
National Board-Certified Funeral Director
National Board-Certified Embalmer
SC Licensed Funeral Director and Embalmer
Basic Public Information Officer's Course
National Incident Management Systems (NIMS) IS 100, 200, 300, 400, 700, 701, 702
Advanced Public Information Officer Course
Incident Command System
Specific skills instructor from S.C. Criminal Justice Academy (SCCJA)
Driving instructor from SCCJA
Data master operator and radar operator from SCCJA
Background Investigator from SCCJA
DUI Detection and Enforcement from SCCJA
Accident Reconstruction from SCCJA
Aggressive Criminal Enforcement from SCCJA
Child Passenger Safety Seat Technician

Awards

Fraternal Order of Police Award of Lifetime Achievement in Law Enforcement
2006 South Carolina Highway Patrol Headquarters Trooper of the Year

Dorchester County Coroner's Office – 2022 Annual Report

2022 Organizational Chart **Citizens of Dorchester County**

Coroner

Paul J. Brouthers, LFD, D-ABMDI

Chief Deputy Coroner

Linda Walsh

Investigators

Jerome G. Farris – Deputy Coroner

Shakur H. Tucker – Deputy Coroner

Pamela J. White – Deputy Coroner

Shakella McDonald – Deputy Coroner

Administrative Services

Olivia Knight - Administrative Assistant

Contracted Consultants

Forensic Anthropologist

Suzanne Abel, PhD

Forensic Odontologist

Dr. Wolf D. Bueschgen, DMD

Forensic Pathologists

Dr. Janice Pat Ross

Dr. J. C. U. Downs

Dr. Eric Eason

MUSC of South Carolina – Department of Pathology and Autopsy Services

Dr. Erin Presnell – Lead Pathologist

Dorchester County Coroner's Office – 2022 Annual Report

INVESTIGATION and DISPOSITION of CASES

The following description is a general overview of the processes during a “jurisdiction assumed”, Full investigation and the follow-up processes.

Upon arrival at a death scene, the Coroner, or deputy coroner, will speak with first responders, law enforcement officers and any witnesses to become familiar with the circumstances surrounding the incident and any safety considerations prior to entering the immediate scene. The Coroner, or the deputy, will take notes and utilize photographs and / or video to further document the scene. They also collect and preserve evidence and personal property on or around the body / remains. In some crime scene situations, the Coroner or deputy will coordinate with law enforcement officers regarding the collection of evidence.

The Coroner or deputy makes every effort to identify the decedent utilizing at least two of the following methods: government issued photo ID of the decedent that matches the decedent's physical characteristics/features; fingerprint analysis; comparison of significant scars, marks and tattoos; birth defects and presence of prosthetics; coordination of odontology examination (dental X-rays); coordination of forensic anthropology analysis (skeleton/bones); DNA analysis and other methods.

If the Coroner or deputy deem it necessary to conduct a postmortem examination (autopsy), the contracted transport vendor transports the decedent to the Department of Pathology and Laboratory of Medicine at the Medical University of South Carolina (MUSC). This office also notifies the interested law enforcement agency of the scheduled autopsy. The collection and preservation of all evidence rendered from an autopsy is of the utmost importance to the investigation.

The Coroner or deputy makes every effort to identify, locate and notify the legal next of kin of the Decedent's death in a timely manner and in person, if possible. The office also facilitates the release of the remains to the funeral home selected by the next of kin or facilitates the cremation and burial for unclaimed decedents.

The Coroner's office is responsible for obtaining and reviewing medical records related to both the present event, and the past medical records, as they might have relevance to the death. This office summarizes the information gathered through the investigation in a written report and stores related documents in a records management system. Upon request, the Coroner's Office provides copies of their investigative case records to the Solicitor's Office, the Public Defender's Office and invested law enforcement agencies.

The Coroner's Office contacts the services of Dr.'s Suzanne Abel (Forensic Anthropologist) and Wolf Bueschgen (Forensic Odontologist) for analysis and processing of evidence in the form of Skeletal or badly decomposed remains. The anthropologist and odontologist work together to

Dorchester County Coroner's Office – 2022 Annual Report

to provide the Dorchester County Coroner's Office with biological profiles that assist the Coroner's office with identifying individuals, as well as documenting findings that may assist with determining cause and manner of death. They also provide timely, precise, and detailed reports that assist in furthering the investigation.

In approximately 11.5% percent of the deaths that were given a full investigation, which is 95 out of the 1,109 deaths reported, a full forensic autopsy was performed to aid in the determination of the cause and manner of death, to document disease, to identify injury patterns, and to recover items of evidentiary/investigative value. The cases not autopsied were those in which the scene investigation, circumstances of death, medical documentation, interviews, social history, and / or external examination of the body provided sufficient information for certifying the cause of death.

Specimens for toxicology testing, which may be helpful in determining the cause and manner of death, are collected and submitted to a nationally accredited laboratory or the State Law Enforcement Division (SLED) crime lab for testing. Toxicology tests provide quantitative measures of blood levels for: alcohol, illicit drugs, commonly abused prescription, and nonprescription drugs, and other substances as needed.

“CAUSE” and “MANNER” of DEATH

The **Cause of Death** is the official determination of the specific disease or injury and the sequence of events that leads to an individual's death.

The **Manner of Death** is determined largely by means of the investigation and relates to circumstances at the time of or surrounding the death. In South Carolina, as is common in the United States, there are five manners of death as listed below.

NATURAL: Death caused by Disease.

SUICIDE: Death because of a purposeful action to end one's own life.

ACCIDENT: Death, other than Natural, where there is no evidence of intent.

HOMICIDE: Death resulting from injuries inflicted by another person.

UNDETERMINED: Manner assigned when after a thorough investigation there is insufficient evidence, or conflicting/equivocal information (especially about intent), to assign a specific manner.

NOTIFICATIONS:

Notifications are made as a courtesy between counties or states (different jurisdictions), whatever the case may be. We are given the address and brief information about the decedent and go to the home of the Next Of Kin in person with an officer. We notify them and give them all the information to contact the appropriate county or state. Notifications to families (NOK) are not done over the phone.

Dorchester County Coroner's Office – 2022 Annual Report

2022 STATISTICS

There were 1109 deaths reported to Dorchester County Coroner's Office in 2022.

Regarding those deaths, 904 were classified as "Natural" deaths; 63 were classified as "Accident"; 32 were classified as "Suicide"; 11 were classified as "Homicide"; and 4 were classified with an "Undetermined" manner. Our office also made 41 Notifications of death to next-of-kin for other jurisdictions.

While a great deal of effort has gone into compiling accurate statistics for this report, they are subject to change as "Causes" and "Manners" of death, dates, etc., may change should new or additional information becomes available.

The total of all requests from services plus death investigations was 1099.

Other/details of statistics include:

Full autopsy: 95 cases

 Contracted to MUSC: 95

Toxicology test ordered: 169

Unidentified decedents: 0

Exhumations: 0

Unclaimed: 0

Dorchester County Coroner's Office – 2022 Annual Report

2022 “HOMICIDE” STATISTICS

The manner of death classified as a “Homicide” is when it results from injuries inflicted by another person or inflicted on another by one’s grossly reckless behavior. The Coroner’s Office is not responsible for determining if a homicide was justified or not and classifies those deaths as “Homicides” in these statistics.

In addition, a death is classified as a “Homicide” regardless of the length of time between an incident causing injuries that results in death which can be attributed to those injuries.

South Carolina Code of Law section 16-3-5 states “A person who causes bodily injury which results in the death of the victim is not criminally responsible for the victim’s death and must not be prosecuted for a homicide offense if at least three years intervene between the injury and the death of the victim.” This three-year window does not apply to the classification of the manner of death as long as the death is attributed to the injuries inflicted by another person or inflicted on another by one’s grossly reckless behavior.

Vehicular collisions, occurring in circumstances of reckless driving or driving under the influence, are NOT included in this category but are counted in the traffic collision statistics under the manner-Accident.

In 2022, there were 11 deaths classified as “Homicide” in Dorchester County.

2022 “SUICIDE” STATISTICS

Suicide is death caused by intentional, self-inflicted injuries. In Dorchester County during 2022, there were 32 deaths by suicide.

2022 “ACCIDENT” STATISTICS

Accidental deaths are those deaths that are other than natural where there is no evidence of intent. i.e. an unintentional event or chain of events. This category includes most motor vehicle collisions, falls, drownings, accidental drug overdoses, and fire related deaths, etc.

In Dorchester County during 2022, there were 63 deaths certified as “accident”.

Of the 63 deaths accidental deaths a majority belongs to drug related deaths or overdoses with either a finding of acute intoxication or mixed drug toxicity. Mixed drug toxicity means that more than one drug was found to have contributed to the death.

Dorchester County Coroner's Office – 2022 Annual Report

Toxicology testing revealed that the following drugs and drug types were present and significant enough to either cause the death acutely or in combination with another significant drug or drug type.

Drug Types such as OPIOIDS, COCAINE, METHAMPHETAMINE, ALCOHOL, XYLAZINE, and BENZOS have contributed to many accidental deaths in 2022

OPIOIDS consist of Heroin, Prescription Opioids and Fentanyl.

2022 “Natural Death” STATISTICS

In 2022, there were 904 deaths reported to our office that were determined to be “Natural” deaths. The deputies receiving these notifications either investigate in person and assume jurisdiction for determining cause and manner of death or determined that no further action is warranted. If no detailed, in-person investigation was required, the deputy contacted the physician on record and after discussing the circumstances of the death, the physician agreed to certify the decedent's cause and manner of death on the Death Certificate.

Natural deaths reported by law to the office include decedents who were in hospice care and fetal demise cases from the hospital. Generally, the deputy coroner's conduct a preliminary investigation to determine if further action is required.

2022 “Undetermined Death” STATISTICS

In 2022, the Dorchester County Coroner's Office deemed 4 deaths were of an “Undetermined” manner.