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PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

I hope the New Year has found everyone well and enthusiastic about our Wisconsin Coroners and Medical Examiners Association. In the first half of the year, we have made steady progress towards completing our goals for the year and improving our organization.

If you were able to attend the January Conference, I'm sure you were impressed with the quality and quantity of education provided by the program. The forensic scientists from the DOJ provided another excellent round of training for our members. Among the other excellent topics was an extremely useful presentation and discussion regarding religious sensitivities to autopsies, specifically with regards to orthodox Judaism. I, personally, learned a great deal in a short time. And, of course, Dr. Stier was, as always, as interesting as he was entertaining. If you were unable to attend, I urge you to strongly consider joining us at the Summer conference. I'm sure it will be as informative and collegial as the Winter conference.

Among our goals for the year, we have endeavored to improve communication among the membership, Board of Directors and committee members. I think I can report without reservation that our expanded use of Email groups and the website has improved our efficiency and the dispersal of information to the membership. Our two Board meetings, as well as our committee meetings, have been very productive as a result of our communications in between.

And, since I mentioned it: if you haven't been to our website recently, by all means, do so. The new design and the expanded content is both impressive and useful. Our site has a "Members Only" side, which allows members to set up a password to access more confidential member-related information. The registration process is quick and simple, and the offerings of the site are quite valuable.

Our endeavors to establish training and education standards for WI death investigators are progressing with the continued efforts of

supporters on the WI SS.979 revisions. We plan to hold meetings with the legislators in the upcoming weeks to discuss the timetable for submission of this bill in 2009.

We continue to make progress with the revision and updating of the WCMEA Constitution, Bylaws and Operational Guidelines, and hope to have a copy of these revisions available for your consideration before the Summer business meeting. I hope to hold discussions about these revisions and ask for a vote to accept the new Constitution at that time. As part of the revisions, I am including a proposal for new voting rules. Under the proposed rules, I am hoping we can make all of our members more active in the organization, by providing an opportunity to all members to have their voice heard on organizational matters, regardless of whether they are physically able to attend the business meetings. We are currently preparing a proposal for an absentee balloting procedure which would allow this process to occur.

In addition, the new Constitution will endeavor to clarify any confusing language currently written into the Bylaws, will better define the officers' responsibilities, and will define the organization, purpose and function of the standing committees.

I highly recommend that everyone remain proactive about the activities of the Association this year, as well as, in upcoming years. All of the issues the Board of Directors and committees are currently working on affect your function and future as a WI death investigator, Coroner and /or Medical Examiner. Our hope is to keep everyone as well-informed as possible through the website, Newsletters and mailings (as well as the Board and business meetings); however, it is up to you to stay active and keep yourself informed.

DEATH BY COLD EXPOSURE

In a season reportedly influenced by hope, change, and "global warming" is death by cold exposure even a possibility? Given Wisconsin and winter, the three seasons between autumn and spring, possibility becomes certainty. But just how common is this phenomenon, how does environmental exposure kill, and how can we diagnose and document this particular cause of death by investigation and autopsy?

Given the population at risk, the number of annual deaths purely attributable to is relatively low – about 600 per year throughout the United States. Who is at risk? One major group is the elderly, via wandering outdoors while confused or cooling indoors due to increased heat need (physiologic) or decreased heat availability (economic). Another group would include travelers, particularly given winter road conditions in Wisconsin. Most drivers and passengers are "dressed to arrive, not to survive roadside emergencies." Those outdoors by choice (sportsmen) or vocation would constitute an additional group. Finally, any individual under the influence of ethyl alcohol is at particular risk. Alcohol is a potent vasodilator, efficiently and effectively promoting cutaneous heat loss even at low levels.

How does cold exposure kill? As with heat exposure, much has to do with both the "amount" of cold and the rate of change to which the body is exposed. Body heat is lost in a variety of ways. Radiation – discharge of heat via infrared energy – requires both exposure to the environment and large blood supply to the skin. Although any body surface can be involved, the head is the most important, accounting for up to 50% loss of the body's total heat production. Conduction is direct transfer of heat from one object to another; the greatest danger here is from immersion in cold water, which can produce 20 times greater heat loss than exposure to the same temperature air. Convection brings wind chill to mind, surely a major factor in Wisconsin. The National Weather Service offers a useful chart at <http://www.nws.noaa.gov/om/windchill/index.shtml>.

The intersection of a person at risk, the various modes of heat loss, and a hostile environment will inevitably lead to death in some cases. Profound hypothermia will lead to pulmonary edema and eventually ventricular fibrillation. Of course, the first is non-specific and the second non-detectable at autopsy. Depending on survival time, additional internal findings may include hemorrhagic pancreatitis and gastrointestinal mucosal hemorrhage, particularly in the stomach. Externally, death via cold exposure is one of the three "Cs" leading to cherry red lividity, the other two being carbon monoxide and cyanide. Altogether, though, these findings are non-specific, and death may be attributable to cold exposure much like drowning, via exclusion of other possibilities. This becomes challenging particularly in the case of the elderly, who generally bring a substantial natural disease burden to the table. In such cases, the safe (and accurate) approach is often to attribute death to natural disease factors with environmental exposure listed as a contributing "other significant condition." In most cases the manner of death will be accident.

As is usually the case, thorough investigation is the critical factor in correctly interpreting exposure deaths. An individual dying of natural disease, suicidal or accidental ingestion, or homicidal smothering can surely freeze solid in an unheated apartment after the fact. By the same token, a confused elderly person wandering outside in apparently mild cool, rainy weather may die of exposure without any of the sentinel autopsy findings noted above. We may safely conclude that caution and a high index of suspicion are the best protectors against potentially "chilling" errors!

1. Forgey, WW. *Hypothermia: Death by Exposure*. Merrillville, ICS Books, Inc. 1985

Submitted by Dr. Brian Peterson, Associate Medical Examiner, Milwaukee County Medical Examiner's Office



Detroit, Michigan

A man, seen in photo at left, was found frozen at the bottom of an elevator shaft in an empty warehouse in Detroit, MI. His death was classified as a cocaine overdose.

Children - sometimes they are the picture of innocence, other times . . . well, not so much. All in all, to parents, a child is their greatest joy. Making Sense of SIDS

For me, the latter especially rings true when dealing with SIDS. Though it is a diagnosis of exclusion, it seems to provide very little comfort and even less closure to the family. In 1994, the national *Back to Sleep* campaign was launched. An influx of educational/promotional literature, media coverage, radio spots and print ads followed. Since that time SIDS rates have dropped significantly. Research continues, and though the recommendations have changed slightly since 1994, the concept remains the same- provide a safe, optimal sleep environment. We know that an infant should be placed to sleep on his/her back. We have been told that an infant should be placed on a firm sleep surface away from soft blankets, toys, etc. Of course we know that an infant should not be placed on an adult bed, nor should the infant share a bed with adults or other children. All of this information is considered common knowledge today as a result of the campaign.

On January 26, 2009, an article was posted on MSNBC.com reporting alarming statistics. Though SIDS cases may be on a decline, there is apparently a rise in infant deaths related to bed-sharing. Government researchers had reviewed national death statistics and determined that over the course of two decades, the rates of infant death as a result of suffocation or strangulation have **quadrupled!**

It is no wonder that the First Candle/ SIDS Alliance group, a non-profit organization, is outraged over a recent publication which has since been brought to my attention. In the January-February 2009 issue of *Mothering Magazine*, an article entitled *The Science of Sharing Sleep* was published. This article all but encourages parents to share their beds with their infants. Cross-cultural comparisons and personal anecdotes litter the pages, painting a romantic picture; one which goes against the research, education, and statistics as previously stated. Numerous photographs are shown throughout the article, all of which depict unsafe sleeping environments (see images below).

These articles are proof that educational efforts are crucial, not only nationally but on a local level as well. Here is where a Child Fatality Review Team (CFRT) proves to be invaluable. Having a CFRT in your county allows representatives from multiple agencies to come together to identify and discuss the factors contributing to the child's death. In turn the team can assess the needs of the community in regards to education, safety and/or protection.

In the state of Wisconsin, we have 72 counties. Of these, only 15 have an established CFRT, according to the Children's Health Alliance of Wisconsin. As of October 23, 2008, there were 3 counties resurrecting their CFRT and 7 counties with a team in the planning stages. Only 9 other counties statewide have shown an interest in starting a review team. This accounts for 34 counties. What about the other 38, or 53 percent?

In these tough economic times, county budgets are tight. It is difficult to imagine starting a new program when sustaining the existing programs is challenge enough. For the sake of protecting our children; however, I encourage you to consider the benefits of a CFRT. The Children's Health Alliance of Wisconsin is a great resource for new and prospective teams. Please visit the informative website, www.chawisconsin.org, for more details.

Submitted by Jennifer T. Schroeter, Deputy Medical Examiner
Waukesha County Medical Examiner's Office



WISCONSIN UPDATES....*interesting death investigation cases around the Badger State.....*

- In Douglas County, two UW-Stout students died when their snowmobile hit a lake bank and then an aluminum dock on Lyman Lake, south of Superior. Excessive speed was cited as a factor in the accident, which happened on New Year's Day.
- In Marathon County, a 25-year-old man died while snowboarding at Granite Peak Ski Area, near Wausau. Authorities state the man was crossing some moguls, lost control, became airborne and landed awkwardly. He was wearing a helmet.
- In Milwaukee, authorities are investigating the validity of a deathbed confession made by a 62-year-old man, claiming that he was a child killer. He also indicated he may have been responsible for the abduction of a male child from Minnesota two decades ago.
- In Grant County, three men accused of trying to dig up a woman's body in a Cassville cemetery so one of them could have sex with the corpse contend they were illegally arrested by police, who found them while checking on an unoccupied vehicle near the St. Charles Cemetery in September, 2006.
- In Langlade County, a 54-year-old man was found dead after taking a walk on a snowmobile trail but apparently he became disoriented while in the woods.
- In Dodge County, a 7-year-old boy died after being ejected when the SUV he was riding in lost control and rolled over on icy roads. The boy was a quadruplet; his three siblings and parents were injured.
- In Vilas County, three people died when two snowmobiles collided near Arbor Vitae.
- In Marathon County, a man was charged with first-degree intentional homicide after shooting his estranged girlfriend twice outside a senior housing facility where she worked. Her coworkers said the man had tried to put the woman in the trunk of his car, and when that failed, he shot her with a shotgun.
- 2008 traffic deaths in Wisconsin totaled 589 (in 544 crashes) as of December 29. This is the lowest total for motorists killed in the state since 1944, when 526 people died during a time when the fastest posted speed limit was 35 mph and gasoline was rationed. The most recent low year was 1992, with 645 deaths. In 2007, there were 735 people killed in 653 crashes. Wisconsin had averaged 771 fatalities from 2003 - 2007. Nationally, fatal crashes were less than the previous year in 45 of 50 states.
- In Sheboygan County, a woman allegedly fatally stabbed her husband of 10 years in the neck after a daylong argument.
- In Fond du Lac, two fatal fires occurred on New Year's Eve Day. A 21-year-old man died in an apartment fire, and a 56-year-old man died in a house fire later that night.
- In Winnebago County, a 28-year-old Neenah woman was found not guilty by reason of mental disease or defect in the case involving the death of her son last May. She reportedly suffocated her 2-year-old son at the "prompting of a voice in her head," according to the Appleton Post-Crescent.
- In Langlade County, a 59-year-old man was convicted of driving drunk after a July accident where he crashed his SUV through a motel room wall and killing a man, age 26, who was sleeping at the Good Night Inn in Antigo.
- In Kenosha County, a 46-year-old man after being pinned between two castings at a Kenosha factory. At least one of the castings weighed almost two tons.
- In Sawyer County, a 51-year-old man died of exposure in subzero temperatures after he apparently wandered from his home while sleepwalking. The man was found about 200 yards from his home.
- In Winnebago County, an 18-year-old woman who a passenger said was "wearing in and out of traffic" at speeds up to 80 mph on U.S. 41 was charged with homicide by negligent operation of a motor vehicle after a August, 2008 crash that killed two teenagers. A third passenger was injured.
- In Winnebago County, a drunken driver who was traveling in the wrong lane of U.S. 45 struck an oncoming vehicle, killing a 14-year-old girl. She was in a car driven by her mother, returning from an ice skating competition. The driver who caused the accident has been charged with homicide by intoxicated use of a motor vehicle.
- In Juneau County, prosecutors say a religious leader won't go to trial on charges of helping a follower hide a 90-year-old woman's body on a toilet for two months while the pair continued to collect her Social Security checks.
- The NTSB reported that fog might have contributed to the fatal crash of a University of Wisconsin Med Flight helicopter last May, near LaCrosse. Three crew members died in the crash as the aircraft was returning to its base after transporting a patient from Prairie du Chien to a LaCrosse hospital. The patient died shortly after arriving at the hospital.
- In Marinette County, a two-vehicle crash killed five family members, who were all in a vehicle that pulled out from a stop sign and was broadsided by a pickup truck. The driver of the pickup was arrested on suspicion of drunken driving. **Continued on next page...**

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE CONTINUED

It's a busy year for the WCMEA, and we have a lot of goals to meet. My hope is meet them all or, at very least, to advance the work to a point where the next administration can easily complete the remaining tasks. Either way, the success of our Association is entirely up to its members.

Please stay active and please do not hesitate to contact your Board of Directors with any questions, concerns or ideas you have.

All the Best,
Doug Kelley, MD
President, WCMEA



WISCONSIN UPDATES CONTINUED...

- In Juneau County, an adult male pedestrian died after being struck by an Amtrak train.
- In Milwaukee County, a mother of five, who police say spends hundreds of dollars a month gambling, was charged with allowing her 7-month-old daughter to starve to death in 2006. Police also said that the parents spent the day after the child's death at a Milwaukee-area casino.
- The Wisconsin Supreme Court ruled that a hunting club where two young girls drowned in 2002 cannot be sued in the deaths, as the club claimed a nonprofit status. The girls, ages 11 and 12, drowned in a pond during a company picnic held at the club.
- In Waukesha County, Wisconsin's oldest resident, a female, died at the age of 112 years and 161 days, at a healthcare center. According to the Gerontology Research Group, she died 54 days short of the state record for oldest surviving person. The woman's granddaughter said the death was "unexpected." The woman had been Wisconsin's oldest resident for three years. Last year, the second-oldest person in the state, also a woman, died at age 110. The research group said they are unaware of any living Wisconsinite who is 110 or older, since they don't track people younger than that.
- In Dodge County, an inmate hung himself with a sheet from his bunk bed. The man had killed a Madison man, pled guilty and was serving a life sentence. He had been taken off suicide watch a month earlier. He had been diagnosed with schizophrenia and psychosis.
- A Milwaukee man convicted of homicide in 1985 was released from prison based in part by DNA evidence uncovered by the Wisconsin Innocence Project. Four forensic odontologists found that the bite marks on the decedent were not from the man convicted of the crime, and DNA evidence found on the victim's clothing also did not match the man.
- In Dane County, a 41-year-old man was killed at the Monster Truck Nationals show at the Coliseum. He was run over by one of the vehicles. The man was the show's promoter and announcer.
- In Lincoln County, a paper mill was fined \$22,500 following an explosion that killed three workers and injured a fourth last year.
- In Waupaca County, three men were accused of torturing and killing several deer after hitting and running over them with snowmobiles. One of the men was the driver of a pickup truck that struck and killed a pedestrian in 2004, also in Waupaca County. The dead man's family claims that their son and the driver had been involved in an altercation a short time earlier at a party not far from where he was found dead after the hit-and-run accident.
- In Marinette County, the mummified remains found in a tent near a medical center last fall have been identified by DNA as a 47-year-old transient who traveled by railroad car. He was a native of the Chicago area.
- In Milwaukee County, a 19-year-old man who strangled his girlfriend last summer got what he asked the judge for; the maximum allowable sentence of 40 years in prison to be followed by 20 years of supervision. At one time, the man claimed the movie "Natural Born Killers" was responsible for some of the blame.
- In Dunn County, a single-engine airplane crashed, killing all three on board..
- In Dunn County, the body of a 25-year-old woman was exhumed as investigators searched for DNA evidence from a 1974 case in which the woman was stabbed to death and dumped along a county road. A witness reported seeing a man take a body from the trunk of a car and drag it to the side of the road near Eau Claire.
- In Brown County, a man shot himself to death in the parking lot of a Green Bay hospital.

National Updates

- In Bay City, Michigan, a 93 year old man died of hypothermia in his own home after an electricity limiter was installed on the outside of his home. He owed \$1,100 to the electric company but had over \$600,000 in his bank account.
- In Melbourne, Florida, a firefighter who also trains cadaver dogs, took an amputated foot from an accident scene. She was charged with petit theft.
- A 6 year old boy was killed at a monster truck show in Tacoma , Washington. During the free-style competition a part flew from the truck and hit the boy in the head. He was transported to the hospital where he died.
- In Centralia, Washington, a father under the influence of alcohol, took his four children off-roading. When he lost control of the vehicle, his 2 year old son was ejected into a river. He was located by rescue crews, transported to the hospital, and died a short time later.
- A Virginia Tech graduate student, attacked another graduate student on campus with a knife and then decapitated her.
- In Los Angeles, California, a man shot and killed his wife and five children, after he and his wife both lost their jobs.
- A recent National Highway Traffic Safety Administration study reported that in 2007, 221 people were killed when a car backed up over them. 99 of those deaths were children under the age of 14.
- In Allentown, Pennsylvania, a 12 year old boy was killed when he was crushed by a passing bus. It appears that the boy was horsing around with friends when the incident occurred. His death was ruled a homicide.
- In Sumpter Township, Michigan, a 67 year old male was found frozen to death in his truck with the door open. It appears that the man was living in his truck. There were no signs of foul play.
- In Grand Rapids, Michigan, a homeless man was found dead in the street. He was a register sex offender and was turned down at several shelters due to the proximity of the shelters to nearby schools.
- In Raleigh, North Carolina, a man attempted to rob a bank. His attempt was thwarted and he ran to a nearby home to hide. A 79 year old Grandma who resided in the home was so frightened that she died of a heart attack. The would-be robber was charged with murder.
- In Whitehall, Ohio, a man killed his wife and two children before turning the gun on himself.
- In San Jose, California, a 15 year old girl lost control of her go-cart and crashed into a parked car. She later died from her injuries.
- In South Carolina, a skydiver performing a tandem jump with his instructor, landed safely when his instructor had a heart attack and died during the descent.
- In Mission Viejo, California, a 4 year old girl death was ruled accidental, after she entered a washing machine and her toddler sibling accidentally turned the machine on.

Training Opportunities

WCMEA 2009 June Conference, Chippewa County hosting
June 8 - 10, 2009

Sleep Inn Suites and Conference Center
Eau Claire, WI

*A BOD meeting will be held at the hotel on June 7 at
6:00 pm.

Abusive Head Trauma Conference: Evidence-Based
Diagnosis and Prosecution will be held April 23 & 24,
2009 at the American Family Insurance National
Headquarters in
Madison, Wisconsin. Course fees range from \$125–
\$250. Contact the conference CME Specialist at 608-263-
8542 or cme@pediatrics.wisc.edu

Approved for 13.5 AMA credit hours and 13.5 ABMDI
credit hours

Wayne State University is offering a seminar titled “Medicolegal
Investigation of Death” on April 22–24, 2009, at The Dearborn
Inn, in Dearborn, Michigan. The conference is \$475.
<http://www.med.wayne.edu/cme>

The St. Louis University School of Medicine, has announced the
following dates for their Medicolegal Death Investigator Training:

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|---------------------|----------------------|
| April 20 – 24, 2009 | August 17 – 21, 2009 |
| January 4–8, 2010 | April 26–30, 2010 |

The course fee is \$825.

The St. Louis University School of Medicine has announced that
the Master’s 13 Conference will be held July 27–30, 2009. The
course fee is \$775. For more information on either course
contact Julie Howe or Vickie Goelzhauser at 314-977-5970

Influenza-Associated Pediatric Deaths

The Wisconsin Division of Public Health (DPH) is issuing this reminder to all coroners and medical examiners of the requirement to report cases of influenza-associated pediatric deaths

Case Reporting:

Since 2004, Influenza-Associated Pediatric Deaths have been a nationally reportable condition. The Department of Health Services made Influenza-Associated Pediatric Deaths a mandatory reportable condition in Wisconsin, beginning March 1, 2008.

Case Definition:

- An influenza-associated death is defined for surveillance purposes as a death resulting from a clinically compatible illness that was confirmed to be influenza by an appropriate laboratory or rapid diagnostic test.
- There should be no period of complete recovery between the illness and death.
- Influenza-associated deaths in all persons aged <18 years should be reported to DPH or local public health agencies.

Laboratory Criteria for Diagnosis:

Laboratory testing for influenza infection may be done on pre or post-mortem clinical specimens, and include identification of a positive influenza A or B virus infections by at least one of the following:

- Influenza virus isolation in tissue cell culture from respiratory specimens
- Reverse-transcriptase polymerase chain reaction (RT-PCR) testing of respiratory specimens
- Immunofluorescent antibody staining (direct or indirect) of respiratory specimens
- Rapid influenza diagnostic testing of respiratory specimens
- Immunohistochemical (IHC) staining for influenza viral antigens in respiratory tract tissue from autopsy specimens
- Four-fold rise in influenza hemagglutination inhibition (HI) antibody titer in paired acute and convalescent sera. Serologic testing for influenza is available in a limited number of laboratories, and should only be considered as evidence of recent infection if a four-fold rise in influenza antibody titer is demonstrated in paired sera. Single serum samples are not interpretable.

DPH is also available for consultation on suspect cases and can assist with the collection and testing of specimens either at the Wisconsin State Laboratory of Hygiene or at the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. DPH will be responsible for sending data to the CDC, and for assuring notification of local public health officials regarding data received from local healthcare providers, coroners and medical examiners. The influenza-associated pediatric death report form can be found online at <http://dhs.wisconsin.gov/communicable/resources/HlthProvider.htm>

Questions and clarification of reporting mechanisms and case consultation should be referred to:

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IMPORTANT NOTICE

It is the intent of the WCMEA to regularly publish an informational Newsletter to provide important educational and organizational information to its members. It is the desire of the 2008-2009 Board of Directors to be financially frugal with the Association's funds, as well as to be progressive in our actions and considerate of our environment.

As such, this will be the last regular printing of the WCMEA Newsletter. While the Newsletter will continue to be regularly published and distributed, it will no longer be printed and mailed without an expressed written request from a member. Upon receipt of such a request to the Newsletter editor, the member's name will be added to the regular mailing list and will, from that point on, receive a paper copy in the mail. All other members will receive their Newsletters by Email, using the most current Email address provided to the Membership Chairperson.

*****It is the recommendation of the Board of Directors that, those members who have an Email address agree to receive their copy of the Newsletter by that means.**

To make your formal request, or inquiries, please contact:

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