



D57 Drug Abuse and Misuse Contributing to Death in North Central Indiana

Matthew C. Wietbrock, BS, 629 N 6th Street, Lafayette, IN 47909*

After attending this presentation, attendees will learn of the contributions prescription drugs, illegal drugs, and alcohol have played in the deaths of residents of Tippecanoe County, Indiana, over the previous 20 years.

This presentation will impact the forensic science community by focusing upon the current state of prescription drug abuse and by displaying the frequency such drugs are encountered in deaths investigated by the Tippecanoe County Coroner's Office.

The prevalence of mind-altering substances compared to all cases investigated by the Tippecanoe County Coroner's Office will also be discussed. This data will also be compared to national trends.

Tippecanoe County is located 68 miles northwest of Indianapolis, and 124 miles southeast of Chicago, and is home to a population of 174,724. Tippecanoe County has a large manufacturing base including Caterpillar® Inc., Subaru®, Fairfield Manufacturing®, and Wabash National®, which are all represented in the county. Tippecanoe County is also home to Purdue University, a major research institution and the county's largest employer.

Like alcohol, drugs may lower inhibitions and, in some cases, induce high-risk behavior. This has long been recognized as prevalent in drug-involved cases, where the manner of death is found to be accidental, suicide, or even homicide. Minimally, the presence of drugs, including alcohol, are investigated for regularly. Alcohol, being readily available and easily abused, is often encountered in death investigations. Similarly, hard street drugs, such as cocaine, heroin, or synthetic drugs have also long been known to play significant roles in death investigations. Use and availability of these drugs, especially heroin, have continued to rise in the North Central Indiana Region.

Nationally, the number of prescription medication overdose deaths has continued to rise, and Indiana is no exception. Several high-profile celebrity deaths on the national stage have added to the public awareness. Tippecanoe County has experienced a rise in the use of opioids such as methadone and oxycodone for pain management. The potential for chronic abuse of these prescriptions has raised the concern of public health officials as has the potential for Opioids to be combined with benzodiazepines and/or alcohol, which often leads to harmful results. The Centers for Disease Control reported that overdose deaths related to the misuse of methadone have increased to account for one in three pain killer overdose deaths since 2009.

An examination of 20 years of death statistics from Tippecanoe County, Indiana, will yield the frequency in which illegal prescription drugs and/or alcohol have been detected in decedents' toxicological examinations, postmortem. This data will also display the frequency in which drugs and/or alcohol were detected as related to final determination of manner of death since 1993. This presentation will discuss the previous two decades and compare 1993-2003 to the previous decade. Trends will be displayed to educate attendees of current abuse patterns in north-central Indiana.

Death, Overdose, Prescription Drugs