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## E55 Analysis of Suicide Locations in Harris County, Texas

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After attending this presentation, attendees will be aware of the significance of the location chosen by some individuals when they commit suicide through careful examination of the scene and investigation of factors leading up to their death.

This presentation will impact the forensic science community by highlighting the importance of understanding the context and circumstances under which someone takes their own life. By appreciating the significance of the location, forensic practitioners will develop an awareness of how statements and behavior immediately prior to death may relate to the location chosen by the deceased.

While individuals who commit suicide do not always leave notes or other written communication stating their intent, the locations chosen for their suicidal act can often be just as significant. Factors such as religion, financial status, relationship conflicts, and mental illness are common reasons for individuals to commit suicide. Although these factors are often the driving force behind the decision to kill themselves, the location chosen often reflects the significance of those factors.

The jurisdiction of the Harris County Institute of Forensic Sciences (HCIFS) includes the city of Houston and 31 additional law enforcement agencies. According to the 2010 United States Census, the population of Harris County is 4,092,459. Each year, the HCIFS assumes jurisdiction of approximately 4,000 deaths, of which 11%-12% are classified as suicides. The demographic breakdown of individuals who kill themselves has remained constant over the past eight years. The male-to-female ratio is 3-3.5:1 and individuals of White ethnicity are encountered 2.5-3 times more than all other ethnicities combined. The most prevalent method of suicide remains the use of a firearm, followed by hanging and intentional drug toxicities. The largest age demographic is 18-39 years old. These individuals have reached a point in their lives where they are unable to use their present coping skills to address a variety of problems. In cases of spontaneous suicide, the location of their demise typically is opportunistic. In planned suicides, the location of their deaths is specifically chosen, providing clues not only to their thought processes immediately prior to death, but also to the perceived magnitude of their problems.

This presentation will review several suicides in unusual locations in Harris County, TX. An analysis of the location, previous statements made by the individual, and investigative findings will shed light on the significance of the chosen suicide location.

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### Suicide, Context, Location