

ALCOHOL: THREE CASE STUDIES ^{MAS}

Scott Schlueter, Melanie Shaw, Dr. Gary Dale, James Hutchison,
and Lynn Kurtz
Montana Dept. Of Justice, Div. Of Forensic Science
554 West Broadway, 69 Floor, Missoula, MT 59801

A discussion of three recent cases analyzed at the State Crime Lab is presented with relevant scene descriptions, results of the autopsies, and analyses of the samples:

Case 1. The victim is described as an alcoholic 41 year old male who was found with his trousers and underwear around his ankles and dead in a closet of his trailer house. There was no evidence of trauma noted on the body and there was an absence of pornographic materials ruling out an autoerotic episode. Cause of death was not determined at the scene or during the autopsy. Analysis of submitted samples at the laboratory indicated high levels of methanol (0.27 gm/dL; Lethal Levels = 0.02-0.04 gm/dL). Investigating officers returned to the scene and found a gallon bottle of windshield washer fluid that contains 35% methanol under the kitchen sink. Cause of death in this case was due to methanol poisoning and manner of death was suicide.

Case 2. The victim is described as a 75 year old female who was found dead lying in the snow between her residence and her car. Small patches of fresh blood were noted in the snow around her, but there was no evidence of trauma. A cause of death was not determined at the scene or during the autopsy. Analysis of submitted samples indicated the presence of ethanol in both the blood (0.12 gm/dL, Legal Intoxication = 0.10 gm/dL) and urine along with significant glucosuria. Cause of death was attributed to hypothermia and manner of death was accidental with alcohol (ethanol) as a contributing factor.

Case 3. The victim is described as a 36 year old non-drinking female who was found dead lying on the front porch of her home with her coat for a pillow. A small amount of fresh blood was noted oozing from one ear during the autopsy, but no visible signs of trauma were noted. Again in this case no cause of death was apparent at autopsy. However, at autopsy a large fatty liver and brain atrophy were noted. Analysis of submitted samples in this case indicated a very high blood alcohol concentration (0.43 gm/dL; Legal Intoxication = 0.10 gm/dL) and the presence of caffeine in the blood. High levels of glucose were also detected in the urine even though the patient was not diabetic. Cause of death was attributed to hypothermia and manner of death was accidental with acute alcoholism as a contributing factor.