

***WEBB COUNTY MEDICAL  
EXAMINER***

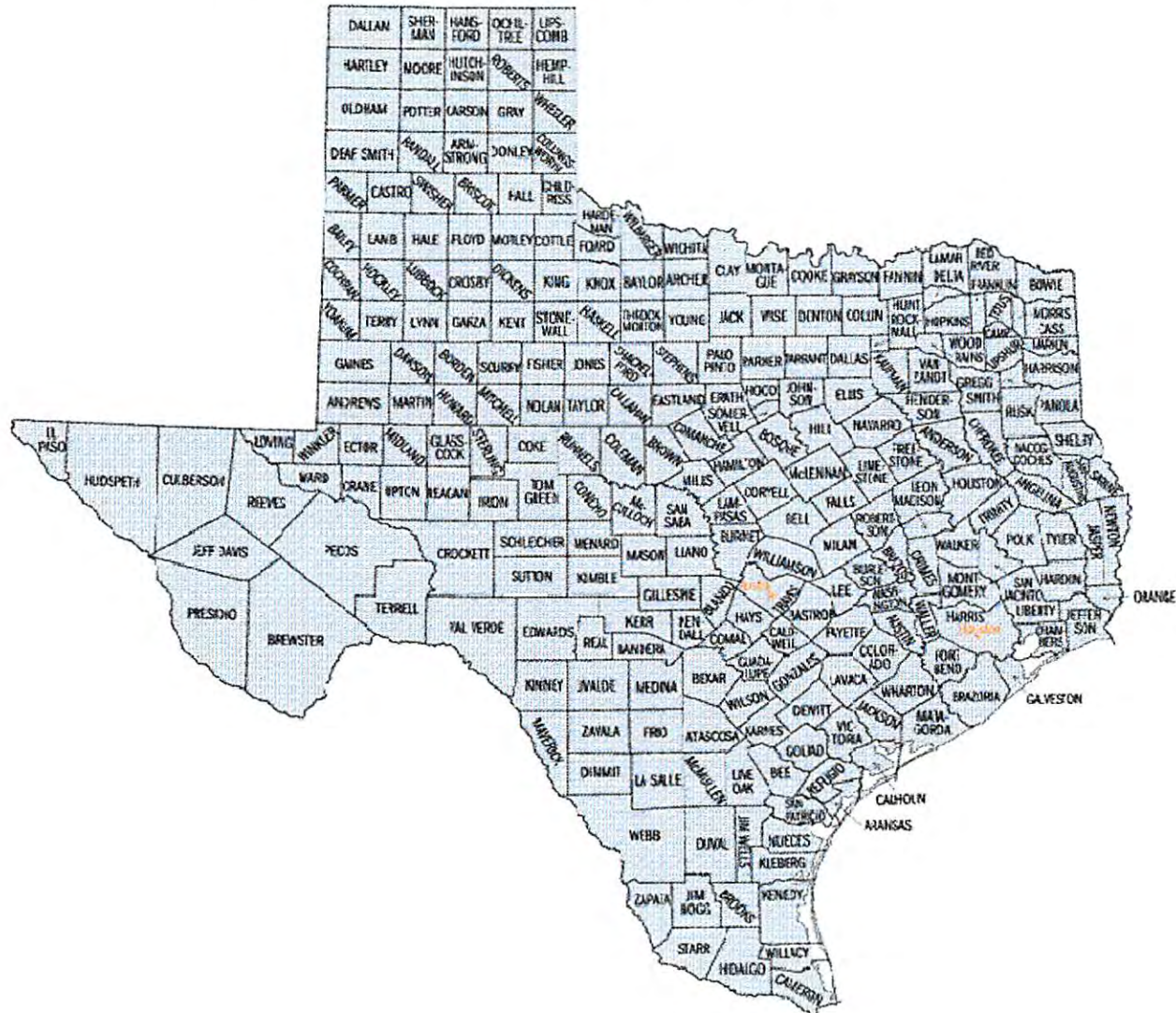
*Border Crossing Fatalities  
2013-2015*

# BORDER CROSSING FATALITIES

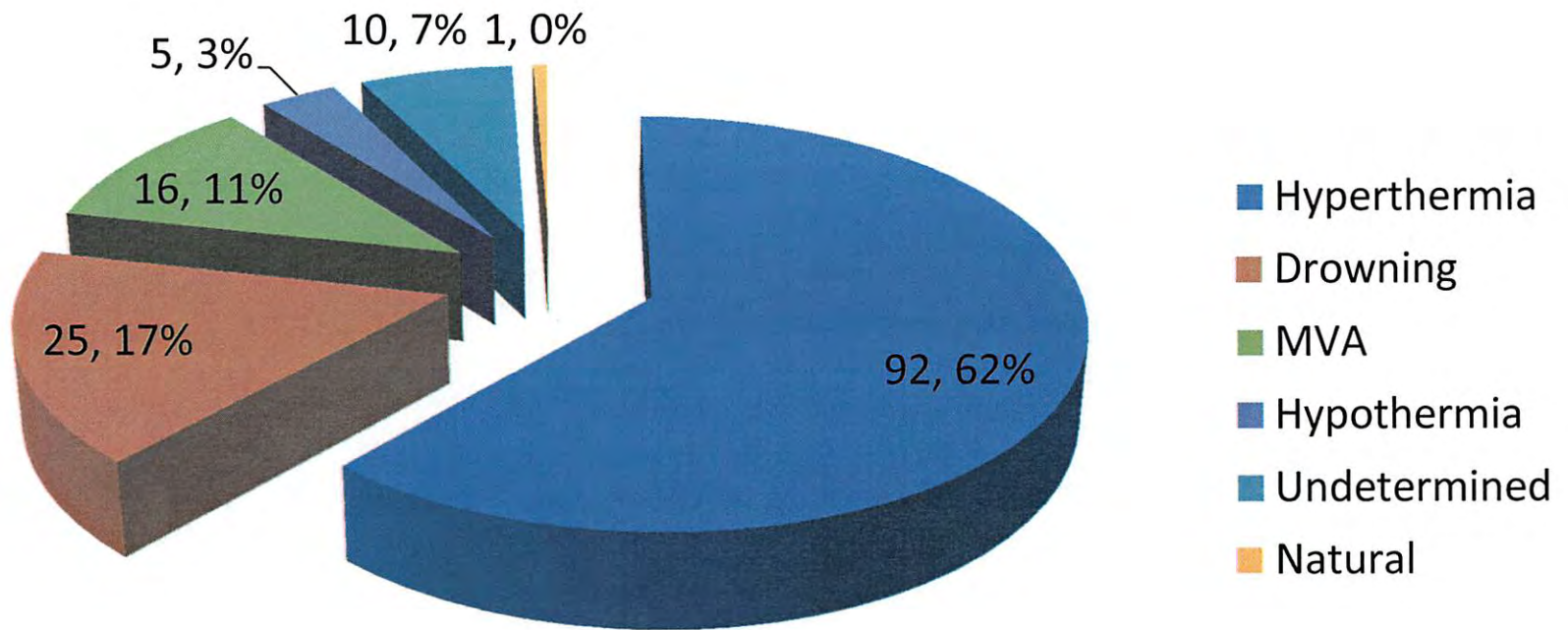
## 8-2013 through 8-2015

- Total cases            247
  - Intact                149
  - Skeletal             98
- Identification
  - Intact                79%
  - Total                 58%
- DNA processed
  - 45 cases (2013-2015)

# DISTRIBUTION

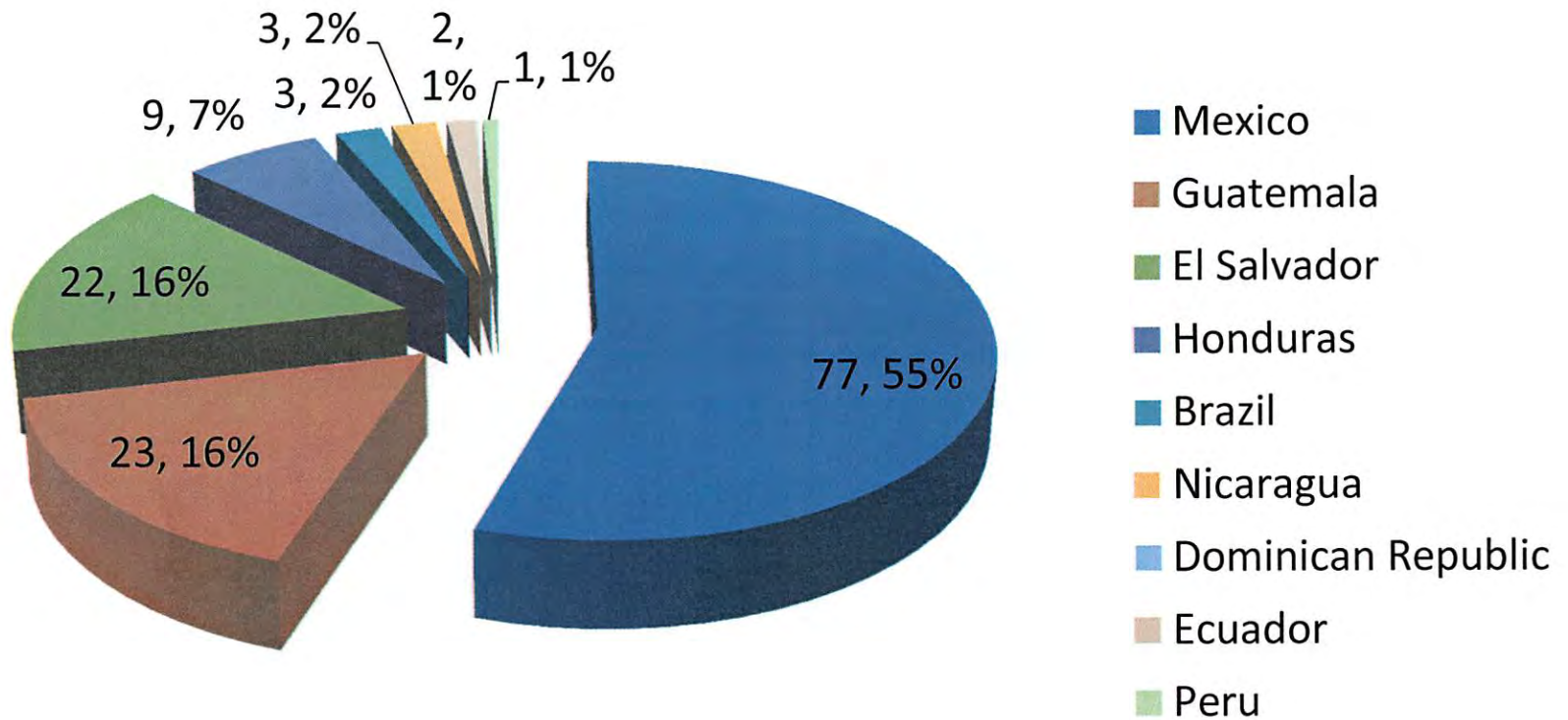


# CAUSE OF DEATH Intact



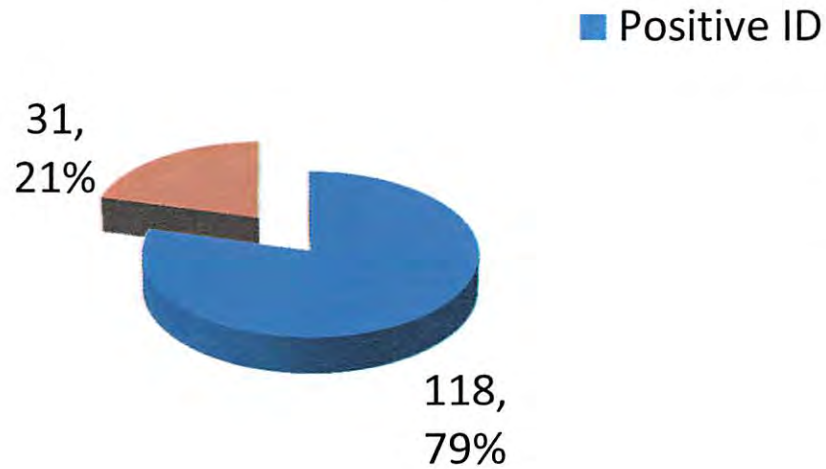
# NATIONALITY

## 8-2013 through 8-2015

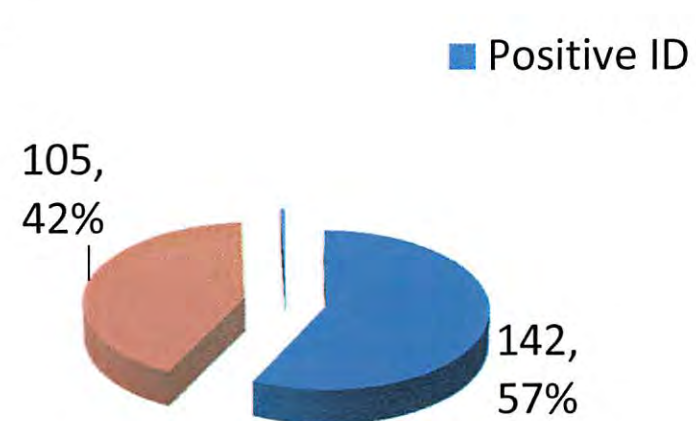


# IDENTIFICATION RATE 8-2013 through 8-2015

**INTACT**



**TOTAL**



# *2007-2011*

- 194 crossing fatalities
- 42% hyperthermia
  - 38% drowning
- 67 % Mexican nationals
- 60% identification rate (includes skeletal)
- 25% indigent burials

## PROCEDURES FOR CROSSERS

### SCENE

1. Document GPS coordinates if outdoors (i.e. ranch or river)
2. Document ranch name (if applicable) and location to include mile marker and zip code
3. Obtain ambient temperature
4. If decedent is fresh, obtain a rectal temperature
5. Photograph a wide view of area to accurately document terrain
6. Photograph decedent as is
7. If skeletal remains, map area with location points of individual remains and measure the furthest points of scatter
8. Thoroughly search area for clothing and other personal effects, but bag separately. DO NOT put non-associated effects in the body bag with the deceased
9. Transport decedent in a body bag if decomposed. If not, he/she can be wrapped in a sheet for transfer
10. Ensure that law enforcement has not removed anything from the pockets of the deceased. If so, it must be taken into Medical Examiner custody with a properly signed chain of custody form. Identification cards found with the deceased should be documented and the information shared with law enforcement. However, the decedent will remain a John or Jane Doe until positive identification has been made.
11. Skeletal remains are NOT to be collected past dark. Have law enforcement mark the area and instruct them that we will return in the morning.

(If there is an individual or individuals that have remained with the deceased and can verify the identity, then the decedent can be transported with that name. The individuals must be interviewed to determine where the decedent is from, next-of-kin, any addresses or telephone numbers that they may have and information regarding the crossing. This includes where they crossed from, how long they have been out, if they were taken to a "safe house" and what provisions they were given.)



## INTAKE

1. Intake procedures are to be followed as per office policies and procedures.
2. All property (i.e. backpacks) removed from the scene must be tagged with the case number and placed on the gurney with the decedent. The location as to where the property was found must be documented in the investigator report.
3. If contents of pockets are wet, these should be laid out to dry on a towel in the autopsy suite. Do not attempt to unfold wet documents. If the documents cannot be removed from the pockets without damaging them, then the pockets will be cut at the time the decedent is examined at autopsy.

## AUTOPSY (non skeletal remains)

1. Radiographs of the head, chest and extremities (if scars are present) are to be taken
2. Full autopsy as per policies and procedures to include photographs
3. Additional photographs of all tattoos, scars, unusual markings, personal property, clothing and identification cards are to be taken
4. All clothing is to be documented as to brand, size and color
5. Fingerprints should be obtained if at all possible. This is done by the investigator at the conclusion of the autopsy. Techniques such as using tissue builder or softening the skin with fabric softener should be utilized in attempts to obtain usable fingerprints
6. If decedent is fresh, a DNA filter paper card is collected as per procedures
7. If the decedent is decomposed, a DNA sample is taken as follows:
  1. Thoroughly clean the right distal shin with soap and water
  2. Disinfect the skin with a 5% bleach solution
  3. Make a four inch incision with a sterile scalpel blade down to the tibia and reflect the skin
  4. Disinfect a clean arbor blade in the 5% bleach solution
  5. Removed a two to three inch section of tibia
  6. Place bone in a clean biohazard bag and seal. Label with decedent's case number and place in refrigerator and document on white board.

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8. If decedent's death is thought to be due to hyperthermia, vitreous electrolytes are sent for analysis

### SKELETAL REMAINS

1. Bones are inventoried and documented on a skeletal diagram
2. Remains are photographed
3. If there is soft tissue, the tissue is carefully removed using warm soap and water
4. A sample of DNA will be taken by the anthropologist
5. Remains are wrapped and boxed in a Styrofoam box which is placed in or wrapped in cardboard
6. If there is a significant odor, dry ice is to be placed in the box prior to shipping. The dry ice MUST be declared prior to shipping and the appropriate labels applied
7. A chain of custody form and an anthropology order form are filled out and signed and placed in the box with the remains. Include a copy of the scene photographs, medical investigator's report and clothing that may have been on the remains
8. Remains are shipped using two day air via UPS after notifying the UNT Anthropology lab at (940) 565-4335.
9. The case number will be logged in on the intake board under the column "skeletal remains".
10. The UNT forensic anthropology staff will submit a DNA sample on behalf of this office.
11. When the report is finalized, and if the remains have not been identified, the remains will remain in custody of the UNT forensic anthropology lab until such time an identification is made. The case number will remain logged in under the "skeletal remains" column of the intake board.
12. Large personal property (i.e. backpacks) will remain in the intake cooler properly tagged.
13. The case will then be submitted to NAMUS.

## INVESTIGATION

1. The Mexican Consulate's Office and/or other consulate offices will be notified via email and/or telephone immediately following the autopsy by the medical examiner. Photographs will be shared to assist in the identification. Pertinent information to include length, possible age, scars, marks, tattoos, clothing etc. should be communicated. If the decedent is found with any identification cards, those photographs should be shared as well. The Consuls are an acceptable conduit for information between this office and the family. Funeral homes are not and should not be used to gather and release information regarding identification. All correspondence should be continuously updated in the decedent's investigator report.
2. The Missing Person File should be thoroughly searched to determine if the decedent may have been reported missing to this office
3. NAMUS should be searched to see if there are any possible matches

## IDENTIFICATION

1. Acceptable means of identification include:
  - A. DNA (match made by a U.S. lab only)
  - B. Dental comparison
  - C. Fingerprint match (these need to be looked at very closely as some crossers will give a false name when they are picked up and printed)
  - D. Antemortem and postmortem radiograph comparison
  - E. Tattoos
  - F. Certain scars if they can be confirmed medically or by antemortem photograph or record
  - G. Personal effects with adequate documentation
2. A VISUAL IDENTIFICATION ONLY IS NOT ACCEPTABLE
3. If DNA is going to be used, a family reference kit will be sent to the Consulate's Office who has people trained in obtaining the swabs. The Consulate's Office will send the kit directly to UNT Center for Human Identification.

4. If identification is accepted through the use of tattoos, scars or personal effects, the Consulate's Office must provide us with a statement signed by a family member that confirms the identification and the means of making it before we will release the remains.
5. Once the identification has been confirmed, the toe tags must be changed to reflect the decedent's name.
6. The name should also be documented in the intake/release book, white board and the changes made to the MEI report.
7. If the remains are skeletal, the case number is to be written on the box and a toe tag with the decedent's name is to be affixed to the outside of the box.

#### RELEASE

1. If the decedent is identified, the remains can be released with a notarized release form signed by the legal next-of-kin or signed by the Consul with a proper stamp or seal. All personal property is to be released with the decedent.
2. If the decedent is unidentified and there is adequate cooler space, we will keep the decedent for up to sixty days during which time we will try to exhaust all means of positive identification. At the end of sixty days (sooner if space dictates), the decedent will be referred for a County burial. Personal effects will remain in the custody of this office.
3. At the time the decedent is referred for burial, the prior obtained DNA sample will be sent to the UNT Center for Human Identification. A notation will be made in the decedent's report and a UNT Center for human Identification sticker will be placed on the inside front cover of the chart indicating the sample has been sent.
4. The case will be entered into NAMUS