

STATE OF THE PRACTICE: Medical Examiners and Toxicology Reporting in Texas



Alcohol and drug driving remains a prevailing issue in the state. Blood alcohol concentration (BAC) toxicology results are important in explaining the current quantitative picture of impaired driving and levels of intoxication in drivers. It also determines the level of federal funding that Texas receive to address impaired driving issues. Medical examiners (MEs), acting as death investigators, are authorized to investigate motor vehicle crash fatalities to determine how alcohol and/or drugs contributed to the crash. If a driver is tested in a crash fatality, the ME reports toxicology results to the Texas Department of Transportation (TxDOT) according to Texas Transportation Code 550.081. MEs' toxicology results provide insight into impaired motor vehicle deaths in Texas.

In 2019, the Texas A&M Transportation Institute (TTI) conducted a survey to understand MEs' experiences in reporting fatal driver BAC toxicology results to TxDOT's Crash Records Section. Eight of the state's 12 ME offices responded. The survey results describe promising BAC toxicology reporting practices.



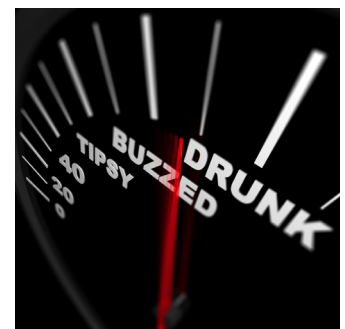
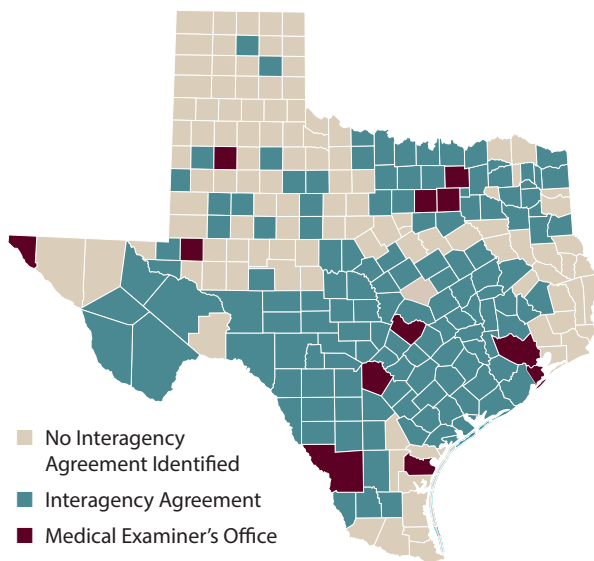
**1 person killed in
vehicle crashes
in Texas every
2 hours,
25 minutes** (2018)



**940 people killed
in crashes involving
driving under the
influence** (2018)



Medical Examiner Counties Served in 2018



More Information

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Survey Results

Cost of Toxicology Tests (According to MEs)

Toxicology testing ranged from \$301 to \$400. Some jurisdictions reported that toxicology tests can only be gathered together with an autopsy, which ranged from \$1,700 to \$3,000.

Of MEs surveyed, 63 percent are responsible for incurring the cost of toxicology testing. In other areas, the county (25 percent) and law enforcement (12 percent) incur that cost.



Time Frame to Receive Results from a Toxicology Test

2–12 weeks

ME-reported time to receive toxicology results



ME Toxicology Result Reporting Practices to TxDOT



75% Report toxicology results directly to TxDOT

50% Complete TxDOT's CR-1001 Death Toxicology Report form

25% Send TxDOT full autopsy reports



25% Rely on law enforcement to submit toxicology results directly to TxDOT



67% Submit toxicology/autopsy results via email

TTI Educational Activity Feedback

Over the past 4 years, TTI's project team has conducted educational and outreach activities that focus on BAC toxicology reporting for MEs. The educational activities consist of webinars for MEs and focus on related laws, duty to report, TxDOT acceptance methods, where to send results, and experiences with the current toxicology reporting system.



50% ME offices participated in TTI's 2018 webinar

100% Reported webinar was beneficial and had no suggestions for improvement

Toxicology Report Submission Best Practices



Toxicology reporting is done before the 11th day of each calendar month



MEs can initially complete the CR-1001 to report that a fatal crash has occurred and the autopsy/toxicology results will be sent to TxDOT



Once results are available, MEs email the full autopsy/toxicology results to TxDOT



TxDOT uses the MEs' toxicology results to supplement crash reporting data



TxDOT sends electronic receipts to the MEs upon receiving the toxicology results through email