



HFSC Adds Blind Test Samples in Two More Disciplines

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

The Houston Forensic Science Center (HFSC) has introduced blind quality control samples, as a form of proficiency testing, into the workflow of its Firearms and Controlled Substances Sections. In September, HFSC introduced such blind controls into the Toxicology Section. Now, analysts in three of the Center's nine disciplines do not know whether they are doing real casework or if they are being tested.

HFSC has also introduced blind verifications in the Firearms Section. This means that when evidence is examined by a second analyst that individual is unaware of the findings of the previous examiner. This will provide valuable information about HFSC's processes and procedures. The data collected both from the blind testing and from the blind verification will also assist in eliminating as much bias as possible from HFSC operations.

"We want the public, the judicial system and clients to have full confidence that we are producing a high-quality product," said Darrell Stein, manager of HFSC's Firearms Section. "These newest steps demonstrate our relentless commitment to doing so."

The blind testing will help HFSC monitor how well its processes and procedures work when conducting routine casework. Accreditation requires that analysts take periodic tests designed to mimic real casework. However, in nearly every forensic laboratory in the country, analysts know when they are being tested. Now, in three of HFSC's disciplines, the tests have become part of the workflow and arrive at the laboratory in the same manner as all other evidence and casework. Staff in the Firearms, Controlled

Substances and Toxicology Sections do not know whether they are analyzing a real case or taking a test.

“HFSC’s goal is to introduce blind proficiency testing in all disciplines,” said Dr. Peter Stout, HFSC’s vice president and chief operations officer. “Our goal is to have blinded control of the processes to be part of all our operations day in and day out.”

The National Commission on Forensic Science has been discussing the need for such blind quality controls in the forensic sciences.

HFSC’s Quality Division is responsible for administering and monitoring proficiency tests at the Center. By the end of the fiscal year in July 2016 the division will introduce blind testing methods into two more disciplines: Biology and Latent Prints.

HFSC is an independent, nonprofit, local government corporation created by the City of Houston to manage and oversee forensic services. HFSC took over management in April 2014 of what had previously been the Houston Police Department’s Crime Laboratory, Crime Scene Unit and parts of its Identification Division. HFSC currently operates in nine disciplines.

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