

WHAT'S NEWS @ HFSC

HOUSTON FORENSIC SCIENCE CENTER • DECEMBER 2018

HFSC moved to voluntarily adopt standards approved by national forensic organization

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The Houston Forensic Science Center's board of directors has authorized the adoption of internal protocols that

align with national industry-leading standards.

HFSC is voluntarily moving in this direction because there is no requirement for laboratories to adopt the standards despite years of work by the National Institute of Standards and Technology (NIST), the National Institute of Justice (NIJ) and forensic practitioners.

The standards have been approved by the Organization of Scientific Area Committees (OSAC.) OSAC oversees 25 subcommittees, each specializing in a different discipline. More than 5500 practitioners from across the country have collaborated on defining standards that will improve the science in each discipline.

Adopting the standards will help the forensic community move in the direction of more uniform, reproducible science, increasing the quality of work nationwide.

"This is something worth

making noise about," said Dr. Peter Stout, HFSC's CEO and president.

Kentucky State Police and the Georgia Bureau of Investigation have already self-selected to meet OSAC standards.

The Texas Forensic Science Commission has also been paying close attention to the standards OSAC adopts and there is a likelihood the Texas oversight board will instruct laboratories to more closely align themselves with the national guidelines.

The changes will likely have minimal daily impact as most OSAC standards already exist in the lab's manuals.

Seized drugs and forensic biology will likely have to make the most changes to align with the OSAC standards.

"OSAC's goal has long been to create standards that would ensure quality, reproducible science is introduced into courtrooms," Dr. Stout said. "HFSC has shared that goal as well, so voluntarily adopting the standards and becoming more of a model for other crime labs nationwide is another step toward fulfilling our mission."



A Few Words From Our PRESIDENT

HOUSTON FORENSIC SCIENCE CENTER

Peter Stout, PH.D.
CEO/President

Dr. Peter Stout, HFSC's CEO and president, initially joined the agency in 2015 as its chief operating officer and vice president. He has more than 15 years of experience in forensic science and forensic toxicology. Prior to joining HFSC, Dr. Stout worked as a senior research forensic scientist and director of operations in the Center for Forensic Sciences at RTI International. Dr. Stout also has served as president of the Society of Forensic Toxicologists (SOFT). He represented SOFT in the Consortium of Forensic Science Organizations and has participated in national policy debates on the future of forensic sciences in the United States. Dr. Stout has a doctorate in toxicology from the University of Colorado Health Sciences Center in Denver. Dr. Stout also served as an officer in the U.S. Navy Medical Service Corps.

Time flies when you're having fun, the saying goes. Based on that, 2018 must have been a blast! It's definitely been busy, and HFSC has accomplished quite a bit. To name a few:

- _ International accreditation for all sections, including the Crime Scene Unit
- _ Creation of a team devoted to process improvement that has already halved turnaround time of DNA database notifications and saved HFSC tens of thousands of dollars in procurement
- _ Launch of a cloud-based Laboratory Information Management System (LIMS) that will provide users a more secure, cost-effective network

And that is only a short, partial list of the many achievements and accomplishments of 2018.

But probably the most significant project of the past year, and one that will continue to be our main focus in 2019, is the signing of a 30-year lease on a facility that will provide HFSC with a new, specially-designed laboratory and enough office space to house all employees in the same building.

A signature achievement that has been a long time coming.

Moving into that facility at 500 Jefferson in downtown Houston by Dec. 31, 2019 and within budget _ while still providing stakeholders with quality results _ will be the priority for 2019.

It will take hard work, creativity, collaboration, understanding and patience. A lot of patience.

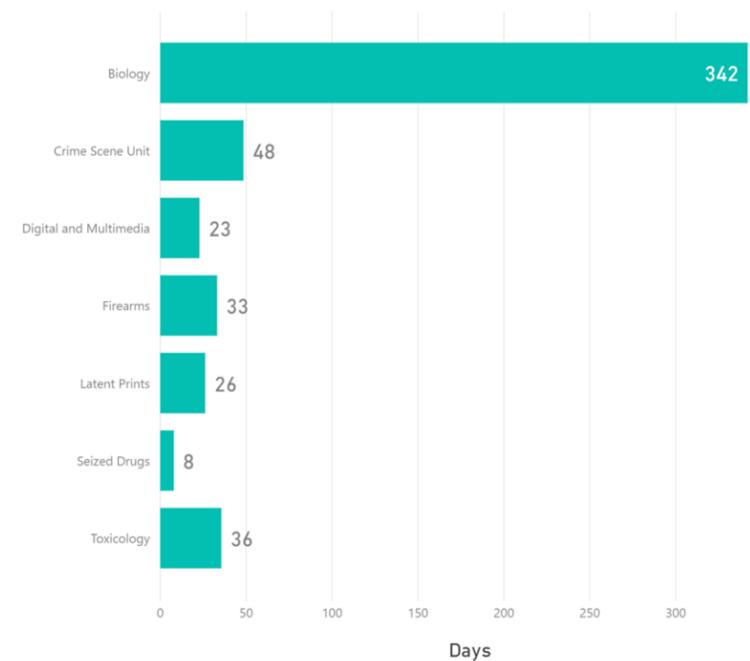
Moving is no easy task in the best of circumstances. Moving a complex organization and lab of 200-plus people is even more difficult.

So please be patient with us this year. In the end, it will pay off.

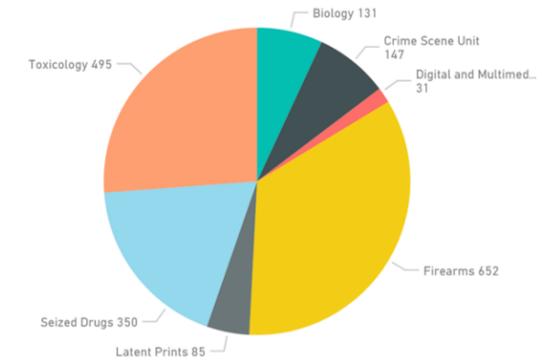
Peter Stout, PH.D.
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HFSC At A Glance

Average Turnaround Time for November 2018



Requests Completed by Section



Turnaround Time - Days	51
Completed Requests	1891

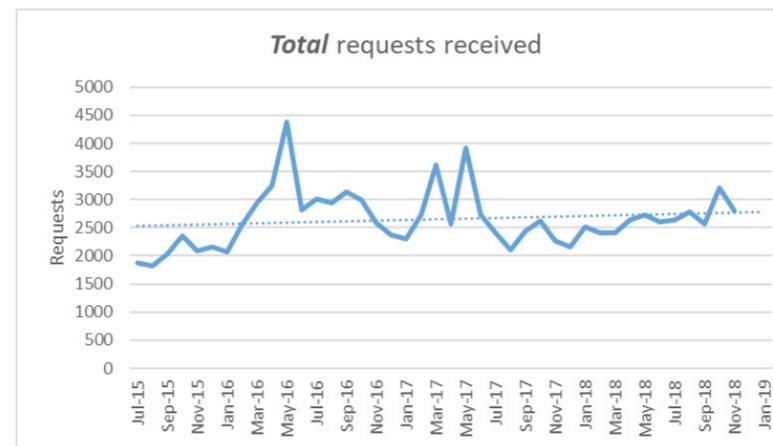
Month Completed

- 01-January
- 02-February
- 03-March
- 04-April
- 05-May
- 06-June
- 07-July
- 08-August
- 09-September
- 10-October
- 11-November

Year Completed

- 2014
- 2015
- 2016
- 2017
- 2018

This data is current as of 11/30/2018.



Requests stabilized in November following a significant spike in October. The holiday season, however, is not the best time to track trends so HFSC will continue to monitor these numbers in 2019.

The average overall turnaround time was 50 days, and HFSC will also monitor this as it contends with large-scale changes in the coming months, including the launch of a new Laboratory Information Management System (LIMS) and a facility move.

For more information, visit the website at www.houstonforensicscience.org

NEW LAB

HFSC IS ON THE MOVE

Ready, set, takeoff

LIMS

BY DARRELL STEIN

The Houston Forensic Science Center has successfully moved its Laboratory Information Management System (LIMS) from a local server to a cloud-based environment, making it the first crime lab in the nation to operate JusticeTrax LIMS software in the cloud.

LIMS now lives in Azure, a secure, cloud environment. The transition also eases the burden for HFSC's IT division as it focuses next year on ensuring a smooth move to HFSC's new facility.

HFSC's LIMS team has also been preparing to bring additional disciplines into the new LIMS. All HFSC disciplines, except for forensic biology/DNA, should be fully operational in the new LIMS on January 22.

In addition, selected HPD officers have been trained to use a new request submission portal that will also go live January 22. The feedback, so far, has been overwhelmingly positive, and include comments such as "this is awesome."

HFSC staff are also being trained to use the new portal.

What's next?

HFSC is working closely with its new LIMS vendor, JusticeTrax, to finalize reports needed to complete the transition to the new software. HFSC's transition to the new LIMS will coincide with the launch of the new request portal. Once the new portal is online, stakeholders will receive lab reports via email.

HFSC's current portal will be available to download older reports, but will no longer be used for making requests or conducting daily operations.

The long-term impact of these software transitions will be positive, but glitches, surprises and last-minute roadblocks can be expected during launch and in the weeks immediately following. Please be patient as we work to improve systems that are crucial to the overall mission of providing quality, timely results to stakeholders.



Moving parts.

That is what the Houston Forensic Science Center is contending with as it prepares for a complex move next year to a new facility.

HFSC's 200-plus employees are currently spread out in two downtown buildings. Wet laboratories, digital laboratories, network and IT infrastructure all need to be moved into a new facility at 500 Jefferson by Dec. 31, 2019.

To do this on time and within _ or better yet, below _ budget is no easy task.

Progress has been made, but there are legal and contractual arrangements with the City of Houston and the Houston Police Department that need to be ironed out.

HFSC must have a move schedule and plan that allows it to remain partially operational throughout.

Stakeholders

must be notified of the new facility plans and the potential challenges and roadblocks they might encounter as HFSC embarks on this journey.

And through all this, the laboratories must remain at least partially operational with the expectation that turnaround times will increase.

So how do we best do this?

First, HFSC has a detailed, phased move schedule that includes plans for several sections to transition to the new facility in parts, allowing them to remain somewhat operational throughout.

Second, critical pain points _ mechanical systems, instrument moves, IT and security _ have been isolated for special treatment with the awareness that these items can often be the make or break points for complex facility

moves.

Third, HFSC's project team is in constant, daily contact with the landlords, architects, engineers and consultants ensuring any issues are quickly identified and resolved.

And of course, HFSC will communicate with stakeholders and the community as the move progresses, informing those impacted of potential challenges, delays and obstacles.

Still, even the best laid plans can go awry and unexpected challenges and delays can pop up at inopportune moments. These can impact not only a move schedule and budget, it can also harm operations.

Patience is key, not only from within our organization, but from stakeholders.

In the end, it will pay off. HFSC will have a facility specifically designed with forensics in mind, allowing for a more reliable, efficient operation and even higher quality science.



FIREARMS RIGHT ANSWER, RIGHT TIME

HFSC HAS WORKED CLOSELY WITH ATF AND HPD TO GET THE BEST DATABASE RESULTS

The Houston Forensic Science Center's Crime Scene Unit (CSU) has changed its handling of firearms to try to provide information from the database to stakeholders when they most need it: early in the investigation.

NIBIN, or the National Integrated Ballistic Information Network, is a database of images of cartridge cases collected from crime scenes and firearms.

When items "hit" against each other, law enforcement can use the information to link between crimes they may not have known were related. It is especially useful because research has shown that guns, while they change hands often and rapidly, do not move

far. This means there is a high likelihood a gun will be used in several different crimes by various people all within the same few-mile geographic location. By pinpointing this information, investigators can often remove guns from a neighborhood and track down criminal perpetrators.



But the key to success is to get the information quickly, preferably within 48 hours of an event.

After weeks of meetings, research and discussion, the pilot project launched removes a five-day hold on firearms collected by HFSC's CSU. Those firearms will no longer be delivered to the HPD property room, but instead will come straight to the firearms section, saving crucial time in the overall

process.

The HPD-imposed five-day hold on firearms evidence is designed to give investigators time to request DNA and latent print analysis. Crime scene investigators will swab the guns they collect, preserving contact DNA for future analysis, and



also preserve visible bloodstains.

The CSIs will also preserve the magazines _ where the richest latent print evidence can potentially be found _ for that examination. The CSIs will eject the magazine and package the evidence to preserve it for future analysis. The firearm will be rendered safe and HFSC NIBIN technicians will use magazines in the in-house collection to



test fire the weapon.

Fired cartridge casings collected by HFSC's CSU will be delivered to the property room where an HPD NIBIN unit will image them into the database. But fired casings suspected of having being contaminated with biohazards will come directly to HFSC for NIBIN entry.

"We believe this new process will provide investigators with the firearm-related information they need more quickly while also better preserving other evidence for future analysis," said Dr. Peter Stout, HFSC's president and CEO. "HFSC will monitor the new process over the coming weeks and make tweaks and changes where necessary."

Firearms collected by HPD will continue to be handled as usual. Those firearms will be delivered first to the property room and the five-day hold will remain in place.

CRIME SCENE UNIT ACCREDITED

What it means for Houston to have an accredited CSU

The Houston Forensic Science Center's Crime Scene Unit has been awarded international accreditation, an achievement that has been four years in the making and changes the way investigators operate in the field.

All HFSC disciplines, including now CSU, are accredited to the ISO/IEC 17025 standard, which sets minimum requirements for testing and calibration labs and ensures certain protocols are in place and followed.

The goal of having CSU accredited to this standard is to ensure crime scene investigations and the collection and packaging of evidence are done as objectively as possible and with scientific protocol in mind. Standard operating procedures (SOP) followed by crime scene investigators include protocols for approaching crime scenes in a manner that preserves evidence for all future analysis, including DNA and latent prints. For example, the procedures outline what protective gear crime scene investigators should wear, not only to protect themselves from biological evidence, such as blood, but also to ensure they do



not contaminate such items with their own DNA, compromising subsequent testing.

This may be frustrating at times for stakeholders or others at a scene because it means some steps may take longer or be less flexible.

But HFSC's CSU has been following SOPs for several years as it prepared for accreditation and moved to increase the quality and credibility of their work. The accreditation simply means the SOPs must be adhered to and

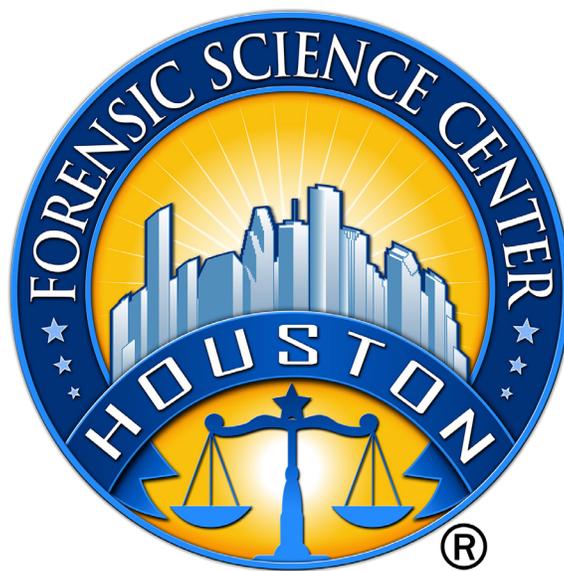
proper documentation must be in place if there is a reason to bypass a protocol. Accreditation, however, is only a minimal standard. "As with all our disciplines and science, the expectation of the Crime Scene Unit is to exceed accreditation requirements," Dr. Peter Stout, HFSC's CEO and president, said. "Accreditation does, though, give Houstonians the confidence that CSIs on the scene of a homicide or an officer-involved shooting will treat the case and the evidence in a manner that will stand up in court and ensure better results throughout the justice system."



HFSC crime scene investigators head to a scene using masks and gloves as required by the standard operating procedures

HFSC's Crime Scene Unit is now accredited to ISO/IEC 17025, meaning the investigators on the scene must have and follow standard operating procedures. "As with all our disciplines and science, the expectation of the Crime Scene Unit is to exceed accreditation requirements," Dr. Peter Stout, HFSC's CEO and president, said. "Accreditation does, though, give Houstonians the confidence that CSIs on the scene of a homicide or an officer-involved shooting will treat the case and the evidence in a manner that will stand up in court and ensure better results throughout the justice system."





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