



# HFSC to Work With TFSC to Create Best Practices for Crime Scene Investigations

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

The state's forensic oversight commission created a panel on Friday that will work with the Houston Forensic Science Center to outline best practices for crime scene investigation in Texas following HFSC's self-disclosure of errors made in its crime scene unit.

The Texas Forensic Science Commission (TFSC) panel will use as a basis for its study HFSC's disclosure regarding mistakes in one investigator's work as well as the technical review process that missed those issues.

"HFSC welcomes this opportunity to work with the commissioners to investigate the problems in our Crime Scene Unit and implement changes that will prevent similar errors going forward not only in HFSC but in other units across the state," said Nicole Casarez, chairwoman of HFSC's Board of Directors.

HFSC found the mistakes during an audit of 88 cases worked by the investigator. HFSC launched the audit after a new civilian supervisor found a few errors during routine technical review of the investigator's work.

The audit involved cases dating back to October 2015. HFSC identified problems in 65 different cases. All 65 had incomplete documentation. Thirty-two had additional administrative errors and in eight instances evidence had been misplaced. The impacted cases include 26 homicides and five officer-involved shootings. The district attorney has been notified of all the incidents.

Due to these issues, HFSC amended 65 case reports. State statute requires forensic agencies to disclose to the TFSC errors that require a report to be amended.

“Our goal in working with TFSC is not only to make our division better, but to also find solutions that will help others in the state and the nation improve their own work,” said Dr. Peter Stout, HFSC’s CEO and president.

The two investigators responsible for the errors are no longer on HFSC’s staff. HFSC has already taken steps to prevent mistakes going forward, including hiring more than six qualified, experienced investigators in the past year, among them two supervisors.

HFSC continues to recruit personnel for this unit and all of its crime scene investigators will be civilian by years end.

HFSC is also in the midst of a second audit of 25 percent of each person’s work that had been technically reviewed by the supervisor. This will provide a better sense of the extent of the problem and allow HFSC to take any additional needed action.

HFSC is a local government corporation that provides forensic services to the City of Houston and other local agencies. HFSC is overseen by a Board of Directors appointed by the Mayor of Houston and confirmed by the Houston City Council. Its management structure is designed to be responsive to a 2009 recommendation by the National Academy of Sciences that called for crime laboratories to be independent of law enforcement and prosecutorial branches of government.

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