

WHAT'S NEWS @ HFSC

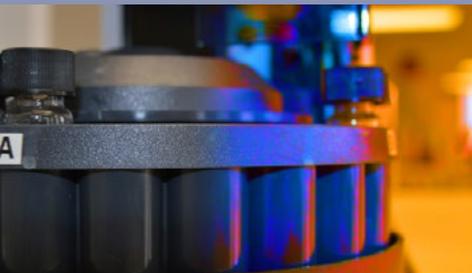
HOUSTON FORENSIC SCIENCE CENTER • JUNE 2017

DNA: A Plan to Better Manage Resources

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The Houston Forensic Science Center's Forensic Biology Section implemented a new case management policy on June 1 designed to better optimize our systems and use resources more wisely, which ultimately results in better service to clients.

The policy sets a limit on the type and number of samples initially submitted for analysis based on offense type. If sufficient information is not obtained from the items tested in an initial submission, additional items may be considered for analysis. But HFSC will not test additional items simply to disprove all possible scenarios. In cases where informative results have already been obtained, HFSC now requires a written request from a prosecutor along with sufficient justification before approving additional testing.

In addition, while HFSC understands the sometimes rapidly evolving nature of criminal investigations and court schedules, we cannot fulfill requests for extremely short turnaround times. Under the new policy, HFSC requires a 30-day notice to do analysis for court.

Submission guidelines are now based on offense type. For burglaries and other property crimes, HFSC will initially accept two samples, though may accept additional items if the circumstances _ such

as multiple perpetrators _ dictate the need for more analysis.

In sexual assaults, the initial submission will be limited to the evidence collection kit or rape kit. If the kit is positive, and a profile is obtained, no additional items will be accepted for analysis unless the circumstances of the crime, again such as multiple perpetrators, dictate the need for more testing.

If the kit is negative and no profile is obtained, HFSC will test other items, such as clothing or bedding. In cases where no kit has been collected, the initial submission will be limited to five items.

In homicides, the initial submission is limited to 10 items.

In other crimes against person, HFSC is limiting the initial submission to five items.

To increase the likelihood of obtaining useful results, the investigating agency, the prosecutor and HFSC staff should discuss prior to submission which evidence items could yield the most useful information.

HFSC staff will do serology screening or testing on the first five to 10 items. Only samples which indicate a high chance of yielding useful information will continue on for DNA testing. If this first round yields no informative results, a second submission of five to 10 items will be permitted.

Ultimately, this policy will help HFSC decrease turnaround times and backlogs, allowing us to provide clients with the right answer at the right time.



A Few Words From Our PRESIDENT

HOUSTON FORENSIC SCIENCE CENTER

Peter Stout, PH.D.
CEO/President

Here we are just two weeks away from the end of Fiscal Year '17, and it has been quite a year at HFSC. If I could use one word to describe it, it would be CHANGE.

Here are just a few changes we've seen: our analysis process in some sections; how we collect evidence at scenes; accreditation expanding into additional disciplines; and significant leadership changes. Change can be scary and tumultuous, but we believe HFSC is better for what we've done this past year, and we look forward to another year of improvements.

So what do we have planned this year?

We are focusing on our Crime Scene Unit and making some long-needed improvements in how our investigators are trained, the manner in which they collect evidence and their commitment to the notion that quality forensic science begins in the field _ at the crime scene. Our goal is to have a fully civilian Crime Scene Unit by the end of 2017, and to follow through with our plans for accreditation. Accreditation will ensure the crime scene investigators follow standard protocols and evidence collection is consistent.

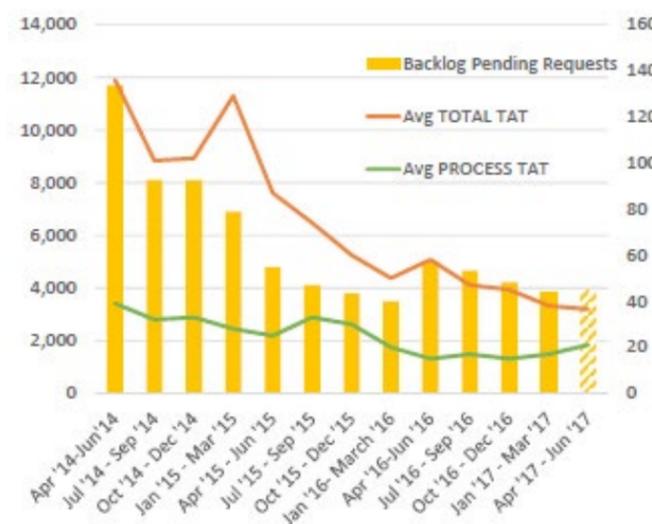
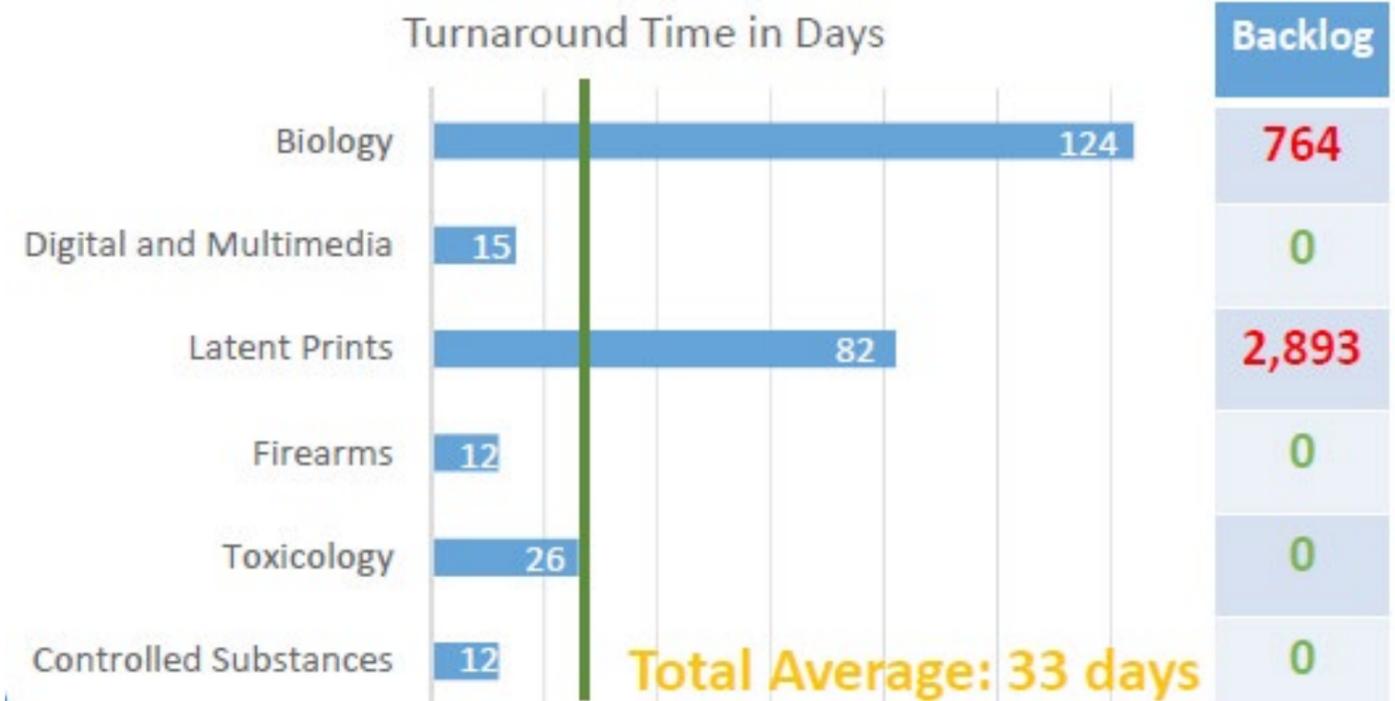
Our Forensic Biology Section will eliminate its backlog and complete a Lean Six Sigma process change that will allow us to increase quality and production. We hope to mimic what we have learned in the DNA section in some of our other disciplines.

And you will start to see us think more long-term and strategically about budget and facility. We will keep you posted.

Peter Stout, PH.D.
CEO/President

HFSC At A Glance

Current turnaround times and backlogs



The Houston Forensic Science Center strives to provide clients with reliable scientific results when the information is most relevant to their work. To do so, HFSC closely monitors its turnaround times and backlogs. Currently, HFSC has backlogs in only two disciplines: Forensic Biology/DNA and Latent Prints. All other disciplines provide results on average in less than 30 days. In May, HFSC hit its lowest average turnaround time across disciplines at 33 days. The ultimate goal is to have a turnaround time of under 30 days in all areas as we strive to provide clients with the right answer at the right time.

TFSC DISCUSSES CSU

CSU TO BE CIVILIAN BY YEAR'S END

The Texas Forensic Science Commission has created a panel to delve into crime scene investigation and create guidelines and best practices for agencies statewide.

The TFSC initiative, decided at the commission's May meeting, is prompted by an HFSC disclosure regarding extensive problems in its Crime Scene Unit. HFSC will work with the TFSC to review the problems and the solutions so others in the state, and possibly the nation, will be able to learn and improve based on Houston's experience.

"HFSC welcomes this opportunity to work with the TFSC on such an important issue," said Dr. Peter Stout, HFSC's CEO and president.

"Quality forensic science begins with proper evidence collection at the scene, and we believe if we can all improve that step in the process the entire justice system and the community will benefit," Dr. Stout added.

The three commissioners on the panel are Dr. Jeffrey Barnard, presiding officer and director of the Southwestern Institute of Forensic Science, Dr. Jasmine Drake of Texas Southern University, and Dennis "Pat" Johnson, former assistant director of the Department of Public

Safety.

The decision to form the panel came from HFSC's disclosure outlining 65 errors found in one staff member's work during an audit of 88 cases. All 65 cases 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 CSI responsible for the mistakes is no longer on HFSC's staff and neither is the technical reviewer who failed to identify the errors during the review process. The audit was conducted after a new supervisor found a few mistakes when she started doing technical reviews.

HFSC has taken steps to avoid similar problems going forward, and its Crime Scene Unit will be all civilian by year's end. HFSC has created a training academy for newly graduated CSIs, and will have 15 enter the program at the end of June. At the end of the six-month course, HFSC hopes to hire about 13 investigators from the program.

The TFSC also closed HFSC's disclosures regarding an incident in the Controlled Substances Section and one from the Forensic Biology

Section after receiving information about actions taken by the Center to rectify the problems and prevent similar issues going forward. The TFSC said it would take no further action.

A citizen complaint regarding how contamination in the Forensic Biology Section is recorded will be discussed further at the August meeting. The commission decided to put off any decision on this complaint because one of the members, a DNA expert, did not attend the May meeting. The commission members said they wanted input from Dr. Bruce Budowle before deciding what, if any, action is needed. HFSC has provided the commission with extensive information and data regarding contamination incidents in the DNA lab, as well as how we track the incidents and changes we have made to ensure systemic issues are identified.

HFSC's CSU will be civilian by year's end



48-Hour Answers

NIBIN

The Houston Forensic Science Center's Firearms Section has been processing and completing NIBIN requests in 48 hours or less since April 19, a move designed to provide investigators with crucial investigative information quickly.

Since then, HFSC has had 25 hits impacting 50 investigations.

The move to a 48-hour turnaround time began in February when Darrell Stein, the Firearms Section manager, wrote a paper describing the investigative benefits of having quick results from the National Integrated Ballistic Information Network (NIBIN.) A Houston Police Department directive requiring a five-day delay on examinations of fired evidence to allow for possible DNA or latent print analysis prevented this from occurring immediately.

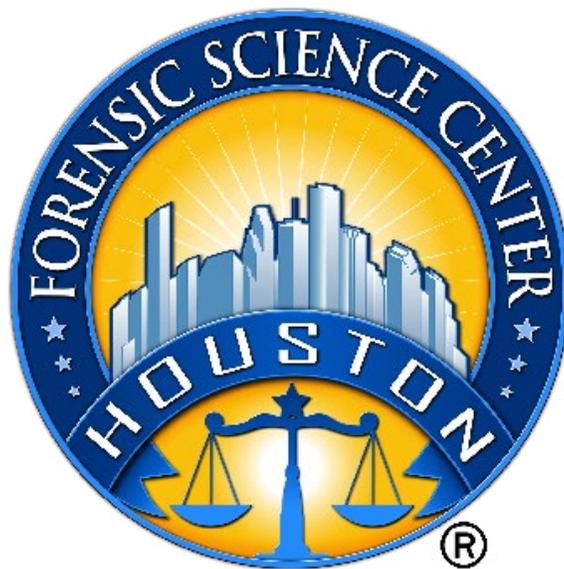
"We believed quick NIBIN results would be more beneficial to investigators, and our research showed a small probability _ less than one percent _ of retrieving DNA or latent print evidence from firearms," Mr. Stein said.

HPD eliminated the five-day delay on April 12.

The ATF, which oversees the NIBIN database, has been pushing law enforcement to make better use of the system, which allows examiners to link firearms between crimes.

In the past few months, the ATF has praised HFSC for three different instances in which NIBIN helped link fired evidence between crimes. Without the NIBIN comparisons, law enforcement would not have known the same firearm had been used in the different crimes.

"We hope HFSC's 48-hour turnaround time on NIBIN examinations will provide useful information in the first crucial hours of an investigation," Mr. Stein said.



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