



HFSC Discloses Controlled Substances Error to State Forensic Oversight Board

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

The Houston Forensic Science Center disclosed on Wednesday an administrative error in its Controlled Substances Section to the state's forensic oversight board.

The error did not, and could not, have changed the judicial outcome in the two impacted cases. However, because the final reports had to be amended, HFSC submitted a disclosure to the Texas Forensic Science Commission (TFSC).

The error occurred after an analyst completed testing on two separate marijuana cases. One case involved a cigar. The other case involved suspected drugs in a bag. The analyst mistakenly reported the weight of each exhibit under the incident number of the other case. The analyst followed standard operating procedures and had only one case open at a time. The evidence was not switched between the cases, but the analyst referred to the incorrect case folder while performing the evidence inventory, leading to the administrative mistake.

Although weight helps determine the penalty in drug cases, both items were in the weight range for the same penalty so the error did not affect the judicial outcome.

However, since the final report had already been issued to the submitting agency and been made accessible to the Harris County District Attorney's Office it needed to be amended. The analyst reanalyzed the evidence and issued corrected reports.

HFSC has done a complete root-cause analysis of the incident, which found no indication of professional negligence or misconduct.

HFSC has disclosed the incident to the TFSC as part of the standard reporting procedures to the oversight agency. HFSC will release information on whether the TFSC chooses to further investigate the incident. Should the TFSC decide to investigate, the commission's report will also be made public.

The TFSC's next meetings are scheduled on February 9 and February 10.

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.

HFSC currently has eight forensic sections.

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