



HFSC Terminates Multimedia Analyst Following Destruction of Case Notes

January 31, 2018

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

The Houston Forensic Science Center has terminated a member of its digital multimedia evidence section who shredded original case notes from a homicide scene, a violation of HFSC policy and procedure.

The problem was uncovered by another member of the section who then brought it to the attention of a supervisor, indicating HFSC's quality systems are working as intended.

The analyst's actions will be disclosed to the Texas Forensic Science Commission, the state oversight board, as suspected professional misconduct. HFSC has notified the Houston Police Department and the Harris County District Attorney's Office.

HFSC will redo the forensic analysis in the homicide case to ensure law enforcement and prosecutors have accurate, reliable information that will assist in their investigation. This issue pertains to one case, but HFSC will also audit all the work, more than 100 cases, the analyst completed during her nearly two years of employment with the Center.

"HFSC will not tolerate the potential of professional misconduct and takes seriously any mishaps that may impact a criminal investigation," said Dr. Peter Stout, HFSC's CEO and president.

"For this reason, we have strong quality systems in place and we are satisfied they worked as intended in this incident," Dr. Stout said. "Should the audit findings indicate

we need to further strengthen those systems we will do so to ensure similar mistakes are not made going forward.”

Several administrative errors had been found during a standard technical review of the former analyst’s case notes from the homicide scene.

To correct the errors, the analyst returned to the scene a few days after the incident. The analyst was instructed to correct the errors and retain the original case notes taken on the day of the homicide.

The analyst failed to follow the instructions and instead shredded the original case notes, a violation of HFSC policy and procedure.

The analyst was terminated on Wednesday January 24 following an internal investigation by HFSC.

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 operates in seven forensic disciplines.

CONTACT INFORMATION:

Ramit Plushnick-Masti

Director of Communications/PIO

media@houstonforensicscience.org

<http://www.houstonforensicscience.org/>

713-703-4898 (cell)

Follow us on Facebook <http://on.fb.me/1x1zap2>

Follow us on Twitter <https://twitter.com/HoustonForensic>