



HFSC Builds Website to Help Attorneys Easily Access Documents for Trial

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

July 6, 2016

The Houston Forensic Science Center has provided on its website access to an online system that includes documents prosecutors and defense attorneys commonly need for trial. Having an electronic system available to all attorneys helps HFSC fulfill its mission of transparency and further removes potential or perceived bias from its work.

This “eDiscovery” system currently includes documents, including corrective action reports and standard operating procedures, for seven of the Center’s eight sections. Attorneys can find documents related to work done in HFSC’s Crime Scene Unit, as well as its Biology, Controlled Substances, Latent Prints, Trace, Toxicology and Firearms Sections. A team of people is working to compile documents for the Center’s Digital Multimedia Evidence Section and to make the Electronic Records Warehouse more comprehensive.

“This online system is meant to make it easier for prosecutors and defense attorneys to independently find and download documents they need for court,” said Dr. Peter Stout, HFSC’s vice president and chief operations officer. “Ultimately, this electronic warehouse will hold documents related to work done in all of HFSC’s eight sections.”

HFSC receives hundreds of discovery orders and subpoenas each month. Currently, to comply with such court orders, HFSC staff save hundreds, and even thousands, of pages of documents onto a DVD. This can be time consuming for staff, and it means attorneys need to wait to receive information required to prepare for trial.

The link to the electronic warehouse is available on HFSC's website www.houstonforensicscience.org. Prosecutors and defense attorneys can independently find most documentation without a court order.

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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