



HFSC Responds to FBI Assessment of CODIS

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

The FBI has conducted a routine assessment of the Houston Forensic Science Center's use of the national DNA database, and listed four action items for HFSC, all of which have since been resolved.

The three-day assessment in April was part of the FBI's program that ensures crime laboratories comply with regulations for use of the Combined DNA Index System (CODIS).

Dr. Peter Stout, HFSC's CEO and president, presented the audit findings and the Center's response to the Board of Directors at its meeting Friday.

"HFSC welcomes opportunities to audit our work as it allows us to find any weaknesses in our processes and consistently improve the quality of our science," Dr. Stout said.

The assessment found HFSC had 10 overdue matches, had not properly updated Microsoft security software on the CODIS server, had not fully reviewed profiles prior to upload in five of 54 cases and had not thoroughly documented CODIS eligibility prior to entry. The assessors made suggestions on how HFSC could improve the review process but did not find HFSC had uploaded any ineligible profiles.

HFSC changed its standard operating procedures and provided staff with additional CODIS training. In addition, HFSC is tracking CODIS hits in its laboratory data management software, giving more visibility to CODIS so HFSC is better able to follow

up with other labs to ensure timely notification. HFSC has also provided information to its Forensic Biology Section staff regarding the assessment and the changes made to ensure compliance.

HFSC has also independently audited CODIS hits made between January 2014 and February 2017 after discovering a delay in notifications. HFSC's audit found it had not made notifications within 30 days for hits from the local database in more than 470 instances. HFSC has since made all the necessary notifications, and added to its written procedures a 30-day turnaround time requirement for local database hits. This makes the turnaround time on local hits consistent with those required for the state and federal database.

HFSC now has an average turnaround time of eight days on CODIS notifications.

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.

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