



HFSC Finds Evidence From 2005 in Former Employee's Office

August 16, 2017

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

The Houston Forensic Science Center has disclosed to the state's forensic oversight commission that it found DNA evidence related to a 1998 sexual assault case in the office of a former staff member.

The evidence had been analyzed by an external, private laboratory and been received by the employee in 2005 when it was still the Houston Police Department's Crime Laboratory. The package included bloodstain cards, a slide with biological material and DNA extracts, a byproduct of the DNA analysis that should be preserved frozen for future analysis.

Staff found the evidence while filing away paperwork and other work-related items left in the former staff member's office. That position had been eliminated. Staff also found numerous case files in the office.

HFSC has informed the Harris County District Attorney's Office of the incident. It has also disclosed the incident to the Texas Forensic Science Commission.

The DNA evidence found at HFSC was obtained during the investigation of an alleged sexual assault of a nursing home resident. Although improperly stored, the evidence had been previously analyzed by another laboratory, according to the Harris County District Attorney's Office.

Warren Brown, an employee at the nursing home, pled guilty to the offense of sexually assaulting the nursing home resident, and the court sentenced him to 17 years,

according to prosecutors. Brown was released from custody after serving his time, and he is no longer on parole. The Harris County District Attorney's Office has notified Brown's attorney of the HFSC disclosure.

HFSC requires all evidence to be properly handled, packaged and returned to a recognized location following analysis. It also requires DNA extracts to be preserved in a manner that prevents "loss, contamination or deleterious change."

Case files should only be in the possession of an analyst or other staff member when analysis is underway, a case is being reviewed or while preparing for trial.

No other evidence items have been found in the former staff member's office.

"It is difficult to know why this evidence would have been left in an employee's office as this violates procedures," said Dr. Peter Stout, HFSC's CEO and president. "HFSC views this incident seriously, and has reviewed its processes and procedures to ensure something similar could not occur today."

In 2005, the crime laboratory still did not have a Laboratory Information Management System (LIMS), which is a computer database that houses case-related data. The LIMS came online in 2009, making it easier for staff to see when evidence is not in the right location.

In addition, all case records are electronically scanned into LIMS, making their whereabouts more visible to staff.

"HFSC has significantly improved quality systems and tightened procedures since 2014 when it took over management of HPD's crime lab. We believe we now have the systems in place to prevent a similar occurrence," Dr. Stout said.

"We continue to look for and implement new, proactive engineering controls to improve evidence and record handling, and will soon have tracking mechanism installed in some disciplines which further helps prevent the loss of evidence and documents," he added.

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/>

713-929-6768 (office)

713-703-4898 (cell)

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

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