

WHAT'S NEWS @ HFSC

HOUSTON FORENSIC SCIENCE CENTER • OCTOBER 2019

Expect delays: HFSC enters final move stage, some labs shutdown, others packing

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The Houston Forensic Science Center has entered the final stage of its 18-month-long facility project: the

labs are moving and stakeholders should expect delays.

The forensic biology/DNA and latent print sections have already moved to the new laboratory at 500 Jefferson St., and both are shutdown as they run the necessary checks and tests to ensure instruments and equipment are operating as expected.

The forensic biology/DNA section will remain shutdown until November 29. For urgent matters or "rush" cases, please call 713-929-6760. HFSC can and will send some cases _ including all sexual assault kits _ to a commercial laboratory during this time. The lab will be fully operational again on December 2.

The latent print processing lab is up and running ahead of schedule.

The last three laboratories to move will be firearms, seized drugs and toxicology. The staff are already in the midst of packing and setting up parts of the new laboratory. The toxicology section reduced its capacity in August when the section's fume hoods were

moved to the new lab. It has been sending all drug confirmation cases to a commercial laboratory and will continue to do so through the middle of next year as staff validate new instruments that better meet the needs of current demand.

The toxicology section's blood alcohol analysis will reduce capacity between October 28 and November 1, at which time all alcohol testing will shutdown. The lab will remain shutdown through the end of the year and will resume alcohol testing on January 1. For urgent matters or "rush" cases please call 713-929-6760.

The firearms section will also reduce its capacity on October 28 as it prepares for its move in early November. The lab will shutdown on November 1 and remain that way for two weeks. All services will come back online on November 18.

And, finally, the seized drugs section will also reduce its analytical capacity on October 28. The lab will shutdown completely on November 1 and resume all testing on November 25.

All sections will spend several weeks, and in some cases a couple of months, playing "catch up" and eliminating backlogs that would have developed during the shutdowns. All sections expect to be caught up by the middle of 2020.



A Few Words From Our PRESIDENT

HOUSTON FORENSIC SCIENCE CENTER

Peter Stout, PH.D.
CEO/President

As head of the crime lab I believe our obligation extends beyond improving public safety by providing the justice system with quality, objective, credible science. We are also obligated to educate the public about the dangers we see as we do our analysis.

And so I believe we are obligated to raise the alarm over some of the drugs that are being marketed as having medicinal benefits and packaged in ways to entice teenagers. Substances that in fact, when tested in the crime lab, often do not contain what they say they do, but rather have dangerous _ sometimes deadly _ chemicals and drugs instead.

What am I talking about?
CBD and vapes.

Both are being touted as good for you. CBD, if you ask those selling it, can cure everything from skin ailments to headaches, while vaping is the magical cure for far-more-harmful smoking.

CBD may have many beneficial properties, lots of anecdotes suggest this. But currently, there is limited research to back up any claims marketed about the medicinal qualities of this less psychoactive chemical found in the Cannabis Sativa L. plant, which is commonly known as marijuana or hemp (a whole other complication). The industry is completely unregulated at this time and the FDA has only approved one CBD drug for human consumption (Epidiolex).

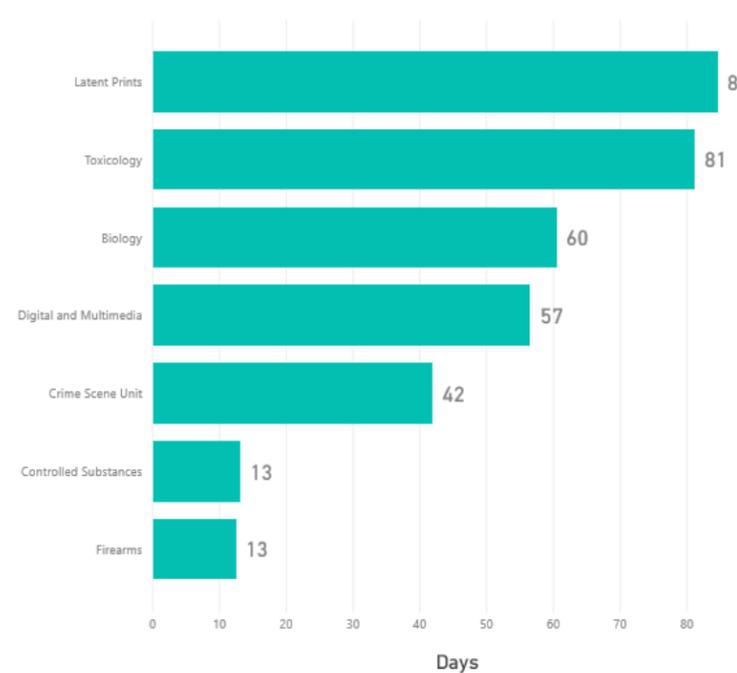
And vaping? That may very well be just as dangerous as smoking based on what is currently coming to light.

At the moment, when you buy CBD or vape products, you are acting as the industry's research rat. Even more, currently you have no means of reliably knowing what is in that product. Is that what you want?

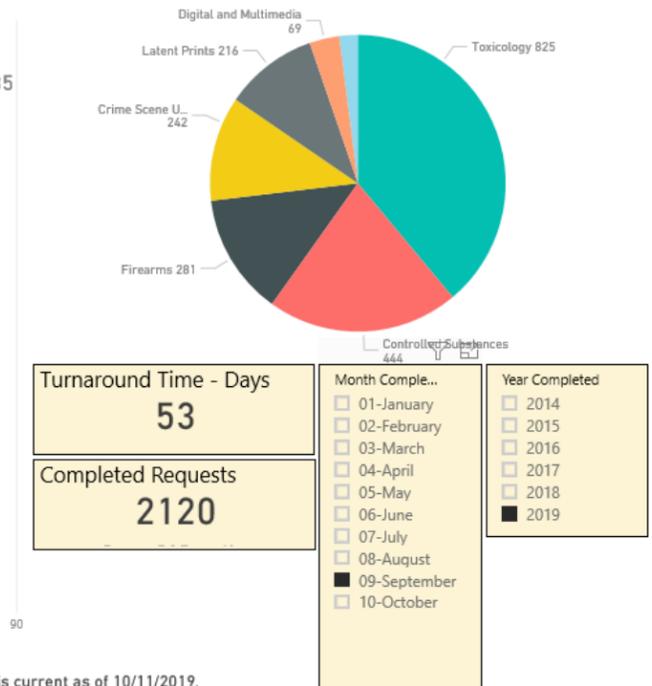
Peter Stout, PH.D.
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HFSC At A Glance

Average Turnaround Time for September 2019



Requests Completed by Section



Turnaround Time - Days	53
Completed Requests	2120

This data is current as of 10/11/2019.

September doesn't look bad. Despite significant upheaval caused by HFSC's move to a new facility, lab slowdowns and shutdowns, the average turnaround time across disciplines was 53 days. This is higher than HFSC's goal of an average 30-day turnaround time, but all things considered, better than what might be expected during a complex move.

The key takeaway here is that turnaround times are going to increase as the labs continue moving through the middle of November and operations shutdown. In addition, as cases buildup during those shutdowns, backlogs will grow and it will take a few months for sections to catch up with all the work. We ask for your patience during this time and assure you that despite some short-term pain, this move will benefit all Houstonians in the long term.

For more information, please visit www.houstonforensicscience.org

HFSC The Big Move

By Jordan Benton

The Houston Forensic Science Center is one month away from having all staff and laboratory functions housed under one roof for the first time in its history. Finding a suitable facility solution within the budget and time constraints has been a challenge, but after a whirlwind 18 months during which officials negotiated, signed, designed, built, packed, planned, unpacked and more, the crime laboratory celebrated its grand opening on October 22. Now, before the move is completed, is a good time to take a walk down memory lane:

June 2018

HFSC unofficially viewed the 500 Jefferson space after receiving a tip that the space could work. Seeing the potential, HFSC contacted its brokers so it could be more seriously considered as an option.

July 2018

HFSC meets with the building owner, John Quinlan, and his architects to discuss the possibility of housing HFSC's laboratory operations in 500

Jefferson.

August 2018

On August 10, some HFSC staff and a few HFSC board members tour 500 Jefferson. It passed the test, and on August 29 the deal was sealed, and 500 Jefferson became the lab's official choice for a new home.

September 2018

HFSC's board approves relocating the lab to 500 Jefferson and delegates authority to Dr. Peter Stout, HFSC CEO and president, and his team to negotiate an occupancy agreement between HFSC

and the City of Houston for 83,080 sq. ft. of office, lab and basement space at 500 Jefferson

October 2018

Houston City Council approved the lease at its October 2 meeting. Later that month, HFSC's board delegates authority to Dr. Stout to sign an occupancy agreement with the City of Houston for the space at 500 Jefferson. HFSC's board also gives Dr. Stout authority to negotiate a sublease and an amended interlocal agreement with the City of Houston.

November 2018

Dr. Stout, Mayor Sylvester Turner, other City of Houston officials and John Quinlan sign the occupancy agreement.

January 2019

Planning, planning, planning and a flurry of behind-the-scenes activity as HFSC nails down details on parking, printers and a move schedule.

February 2019

The latent print section, part of IT and part of the client services/case management division are the first to move to Jefferson, partly emptying HFSC's leased space at 1301 Fannin. The HFSC board and City Council approve an amended interlocal agreement and sublease.

March 2019

HFSC's corporate address officially changes from 1301 Fannin to 500 Jefferson as the rest of the Fannin inhabitants _ finance, multimedia and legal _ move to Jefferson.

April 2019

HFSC hands back the keys to Fannin and its lease ends. At this point, 20 percent of HFSC staff are housed in Jefferson. The fence in the Jefferson garage where CSU will put its fleet is being completed and focus shifts to the two large May moves.

May 2019

All staff from the 10, 20, 24 and 25th floors of Travis _ including parts of CS/CM, research and development, lean six sigma development group, forensic biology/DNA analysts and database team and CSU _ move to Jefferson.

June 2019

The board gives Dr. Stout the authority to enter into an agreement to move all lab instruments from Travis to Jefferson. A rigging company completes the complex lowering of a new shooting

tank into the basement of 500 Jefferson.

July 2019

HFSC is a little over two months away from being handed the keys to the lab and basement. Construction is focused on the "heavy lifting," including electricity, air conditioning and mechanical aspects.

August 2019

Lab furniture arrives in about 500 pieces and fume hoods are moved into the Jefferson labs. The generator is placed on the roof along with all the air conditioning equipment in a day-long lift that involves a crane the size of a city block.

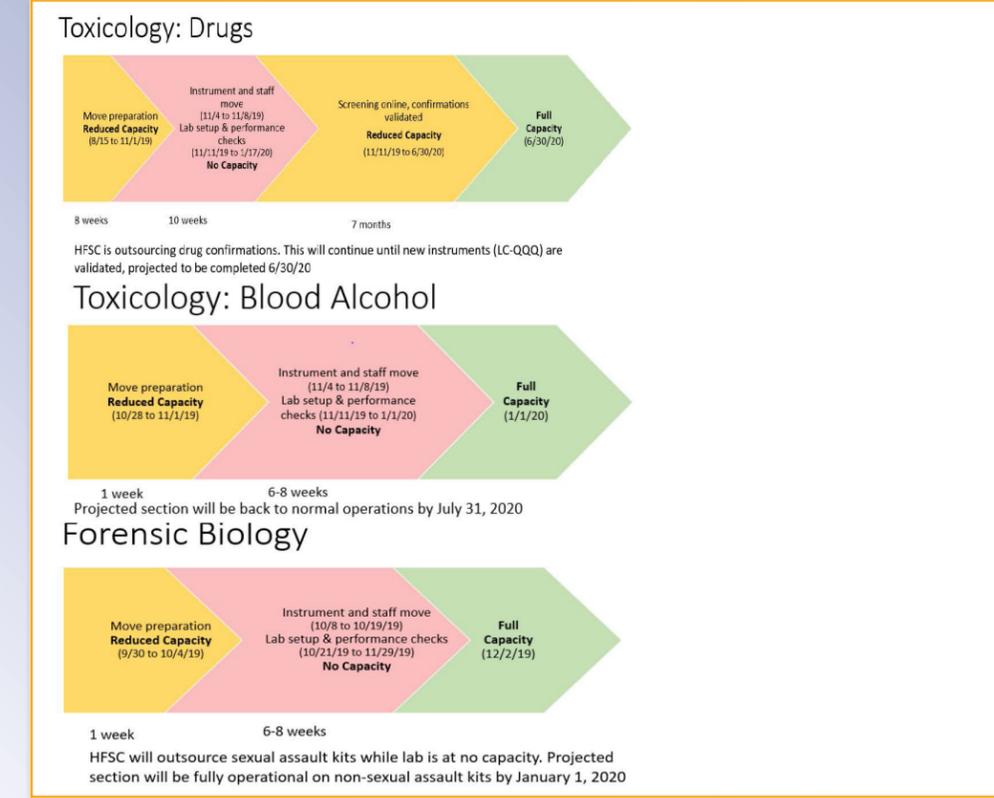
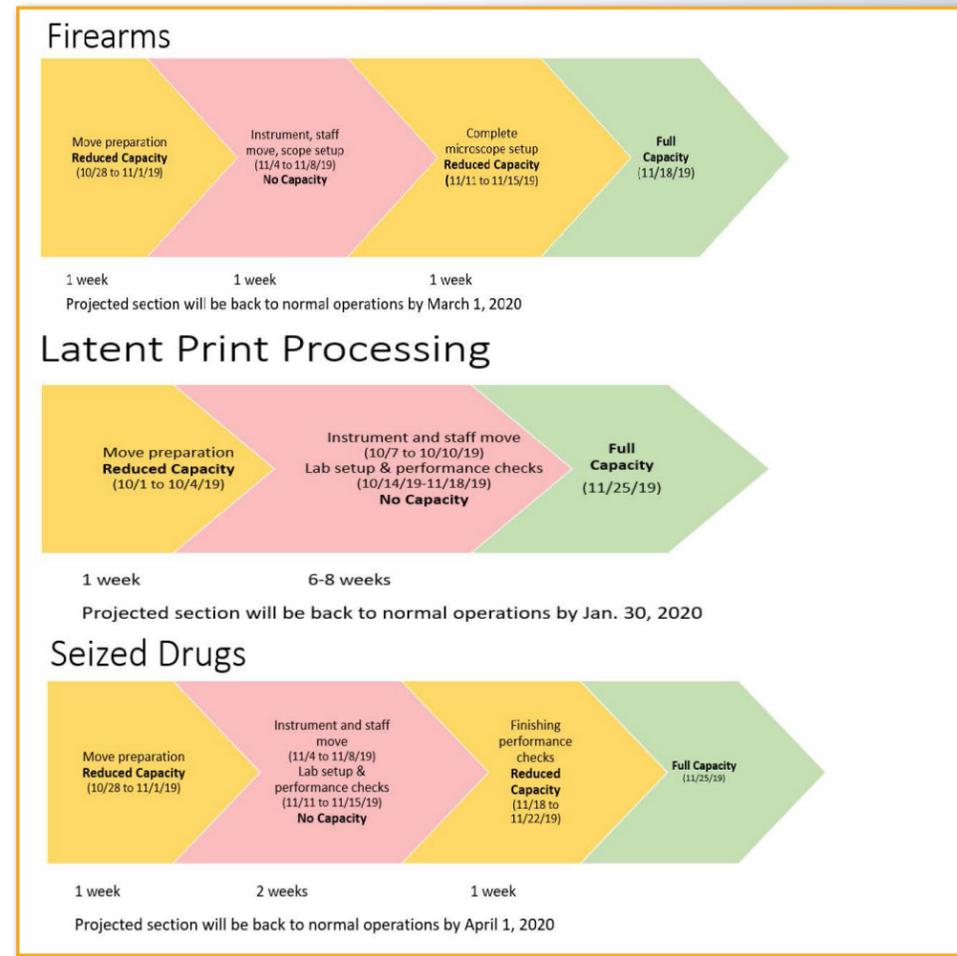
September 2019

New and existing fume hoods and furniture are installed and the epoxy

floors are finished. The security system is installed along with the temperature, venting and power systems. The basement's firing range is built out with steel and bullet-proof padding.

October 2019

The first lab moves are completed and the forensic biology and latent print processing labs unpack and get situated. The 18th floor lab undergoes finishing touches in preparation for additional lab moves. Staff have their own open house on October 8. HFSC celebrates a grand opening with Mayor Sylvester Turner, HPD chief Art Acevedo, Harris County DA Kim Ogg and other officials. By the end of November, HFSC will be fully moved out of 1200 Travis and settling into its new home at 500 Jefferson.



CBD BUYER BEWARE

BY JORDAN BENTON

HFSC lab tests show products contain THC, Kush

The Houston Forensic Science Center found in 2018 that 70 percent of 50 products marketed as CBD had detectable amounts of THC, the psychoactive ingredient in marijuana that causes a high, as well as more dangerous chemicals, such as Kush, reflecting a problem that has swept the country.

“At this time, this market is like the Wild West,” said James Miller, manager of HFSC’s seized drugs section. “In the absence of regulation, manufacturers can, and often do, put anything and everything into these products.”

CBD has made headlines in recent months as a mysterious lung disease attacks people who have been vaping. Initial findings show that many of those that have been sickened with the pulmonary infection vaped THC. Meanwhile, media reports and other investigations point to products marketed as CBD having other, far more dangerous, chemicals and drugs.

CBD, or cannabidiol, is one of dozens of biologically active chemicals that the cannabis, or Cannabis Sativa L., plant produces, Mr. Miller said.

CBD has gained popularity as a possible alternative to medical marijuana without the potential of getting “high.”

CBD products are attractively marketed _ and apparently targeted toward teenagers _ as oils, gummies and vapes. And although these companies are also touting CBD’s supposed medicinal attributes, the FDA has only approved one product, Epidiolex _ that CBD-based drug is designed to treat severe seizures.

Other than that, there is no FDA or other regulation, and consumers have no way of knowing whether what they are buying contains the ingredients listed on the packaging or if there are any side effects.

“The lab rats are researching and endorsing their own stuff,” Mr. Miller said. “There’s no validity or solid research to back up the claims of these CBD products we’re seeing sold. We have people _ some desperate _ seeking pain relief and other cures to ailments who are buying into a bottle that takes no consideration into proper dosage or long-term effects and could even contain other substances like THC or Kush.”



The Houston Forensic Science Center has found troubling chemicals in products marketed as CBD, including the dangerous drug known on the streets as Kush. The CBD market is currently unregulated so consumers cannot have any faith that what they are told is in a package is in fact what they are purchasing. In addition, there is no real research to support some of the statements being made regarding the medicinal benefits of CBD. For now, James Miller, manager of the seized drugs section, and Dr. Peter Stout, HFSC’s CEO and president, warn consumers against purchasing items marketed as CBD. There is no guarantee the product contains CBD or only CBD. Scariest yet, there is a likelihood it contains a chemical far more dangerous than CBD. Buyer beware.

HFSC UPS QUALITY STANDARDS

WHAT IT LOOKS LIKE TO ADOPT QUALITY GUIDELINES CREATED BY THE ORGANIZATION OF SCIENTIFIC AREA COMMITTEES (OSAC)

The Houston Forensic Science Center adopted in 2018 guidelines recommended by the Organization of Scientific Area Committees for Forensic Science (OSAC) in its continuous effort to improve forensic science results for Houston and impact the broader forensic science community.

HFSC's unique independent structure allows it to take risks that can benefit the broader forensic community on its continuous, collaborative journey to

and accreditation requirements make it difficult to convince policy and decision makers of their needs. Labs have for decades been forced to improve quality while doing more work with a static budget and overworked staff. Numerous reports, from the 2009 National Academy of Sciences (NAS) to the Obama Administration's report from the President's Council of Advisors on Science and Technology (PCAST,) have pointed to many of these same issues, calling on the



improve forensic sciences nationwide.

We hope others in the community choose to adopt these standards because the more laboratories go this route, the more exponential the benefits. It will not only standardize quality and standards across the forensic community in the United States, it will expand dialogue and allow us to audit one another and assess broad compliance.

For years, forensic scientists have battled with the knowledge that high quality, objective scientific results are critical but the lack of standards

community to make much-needed, and well-known, improvements.

And through it all, hundreds of dedicated practitioners, under the auspices and guidance of the National Institute of Standards and Technology (NIST,) have worked together to create consensus standards. They have debated and argued, written and edited only to rewrite and reedit for hours and hours to create standards from best practices labs have long appreciated.

“But it is not enough to talk and write. If we don't implement what we have talked about for years, it not only doesn't

progress forensic sciences, I would argue it is a step back to ignore the work that has been done,” said Dr. Peter Stout, HFSC's CEO and president.

To set the stage and the example, Dr. Stout asked HFSC's board of directors to pass a resolution to adopt the OSAC standards into HFSC's quality manual. That resolution passed unanimously in December 2018 and HFSC was on its way.

“It is important to make a public and obvious commitment to implementation. This is part of holding ourselves accountable to quality expectations beyond just the minimum.” Dr. Stout added.

But what does this look like? What are the benefits? And what are the challenges?

For HFSC, the first step was to include this initiative in its quality manual - the overarching set of standard operating procedures that is the foundational document for HFSC's quality management system.

“This was a big deal,” said Erika Ziemak, HFSC's quality division director. “The board resolution set the stage for us to add language into the quality manual stating that sections would have one year to adopt an OSAC standard after it is added to the OSAC Registry. It turned out, though, that this was the easiest step.”

Next, HFSC had to figure out how to effectively implement this change company-wide.

HFSC asked each section to tap at least one member to serve as their “OSAC expert.” That person is responsible for researching OSAC standards that are in the approval process and performing a gap analysis to determine what changes need to occur to comply. One of the pivotal roles of the OSAC point of contact is to ensure their section takes advantage of the public comment period and voices any HFSC concerns about proposed standards. This process ensures familiarity with all potential standards, accesses the

laboratory's ability to comply prior to additions to the registry and gives the lab time between first seeing the standard and compliance.

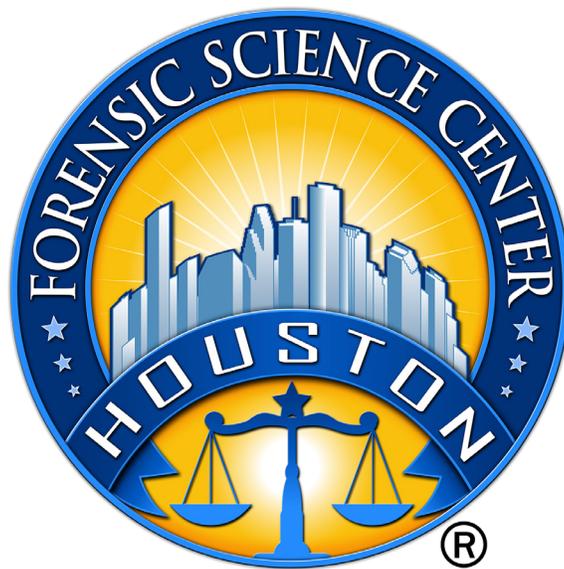
“The biggest challenge, however, will be an inability to ‘prove’ we are doing what we say we're doing,” Ms. Ziemak said. “Because there are not masses of laboratories that have adopted the standards and accrediting bodies are not yet incorporating the standards, we have no real way of doing an independent, external audit to the OSAC standards.”

The more labs adopt the standards, the easier it will be for labs to learn from one another and to audit each other to the OSAC standards.

The first OSAC standards HFSC is adopting are in the seized drugs and toxicology sections. In many ways, HFSC was already compliant with those standards, so it was a relatively seamless transition. However, HFSC expects there will be some areas in which the standards may be more difficult to implement. HFSC has created a way to deviate from an OSAC standard which allows the section manager to provide an explanation - to be approved by the quality division director - for the deviation.

“This is in part an exercise in the forensic science community. We can't just say accreditation is important. Accreditation is just a minimum requirement. We need to continually stress improving performance of the entire system and hold ourselves accountable to that system,” Dr. Stout said.

“There will always be parts of an OSAC standard or an entire standard that we don't like, but that is the reality of consensus standards. The system is designed to allow us all to have a voice and be part of the process,” he added. “Let's all take that opportunity on the front end and then, on the back end, if there are parts of a standard we don't love, we will at least understand why it is there and have had an opportunity to voice our opinions.”



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