



# HFSC Adds Blind Test Samples Into Workflow, Leading the Way Nationally

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

The Houston Forensic Science Center has informed its Board of Directors that blind proficiency test samples have been introduced into the workflow of the Center's Toxicology Section. HFSC's accreditation requires that analysts in that discipline pass a test once a year that is designed to mimic real casework. However, in nearly every forensic laboratory in the country, including HFSC's until now, analysts have known when they were being tested. Now, the tests have become part of the workflow and arrive at the laboratory in the same manner as all other evidence and casework. Staff will not know whether they are analyzing a real case or doing a test.

"There's really not anyone else in the country doing this at the scale we envision as we work to build blind testing into all our work," said Dr. Peter Stout, HFSC's vice president and chief operations officer.

However, laboratories nationwide and agencies, including the National Commission on Forensic Science, are discussing the need for such blind quality controls in the forensic sciences.

"Blind proficiency tests test the whole system and they change people's behavior. It is a tool in addressing cognitive biases," Dr. Stout said. "The goal with this isn't to trip people up. It's to challenge the system in a representative way."

HFSC's Quality Division is responsible for administering and monitoring proficiency tests at the Center. By the end of the fiscal year in July 2016 the division will introduce

blind testing methods into four other disciplines: Controlled Substances, Latent Prints, Firearms and Biology.

“Although our policy clearly states that proficiency tests are handled like routine casework, let’s be honest, when you’re being tested you’re likely to be hypersensitive – more ‘careful,’” said Lori Wilson, HFSC’s Quality Division director. “These samples are truly ‘routine’ and will be handled like the thousands of other items moving through the lab every year.”

HFSC is an independent, nonprofit, local government corporation created by the City of Houston to manage and oversee forensic services. HFSC took over management in April 2014 of what had previously been the Houston Police Department’s Crime Laboratory, Crime Scene Unit and parts of its Identification Division. HFSC currently operates in eight disciplines and is expanding.

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