



Houston Police Department Crime Lab

Presentation to the National Academy of Sciences Committee on Identifying the Needs of the Forensic Sciences Community

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Hanging on through Tough Times



- Day-to-day experiences
- Pressures/challenges
- Resource and Talent needs
- Backlogs

Houston PD Crime Lab



- Forensic Service
 - Approximately 4762 HPD officers (1-24-07)
 - Metro PD
 - Harris County Constables (limited)
 - Houston I.S.D Police
- Testimony provided
 - Harris County District Courts
 - Harris County Courts
 - Federal Courts



Houston PD Crime Lab

- Controlled Substances
- Firearms
- Biology including DNA
- Trace
- Toxicology (Breath Test and Alcohol content)
- Questioned Documents
- Central Evidence Receiving



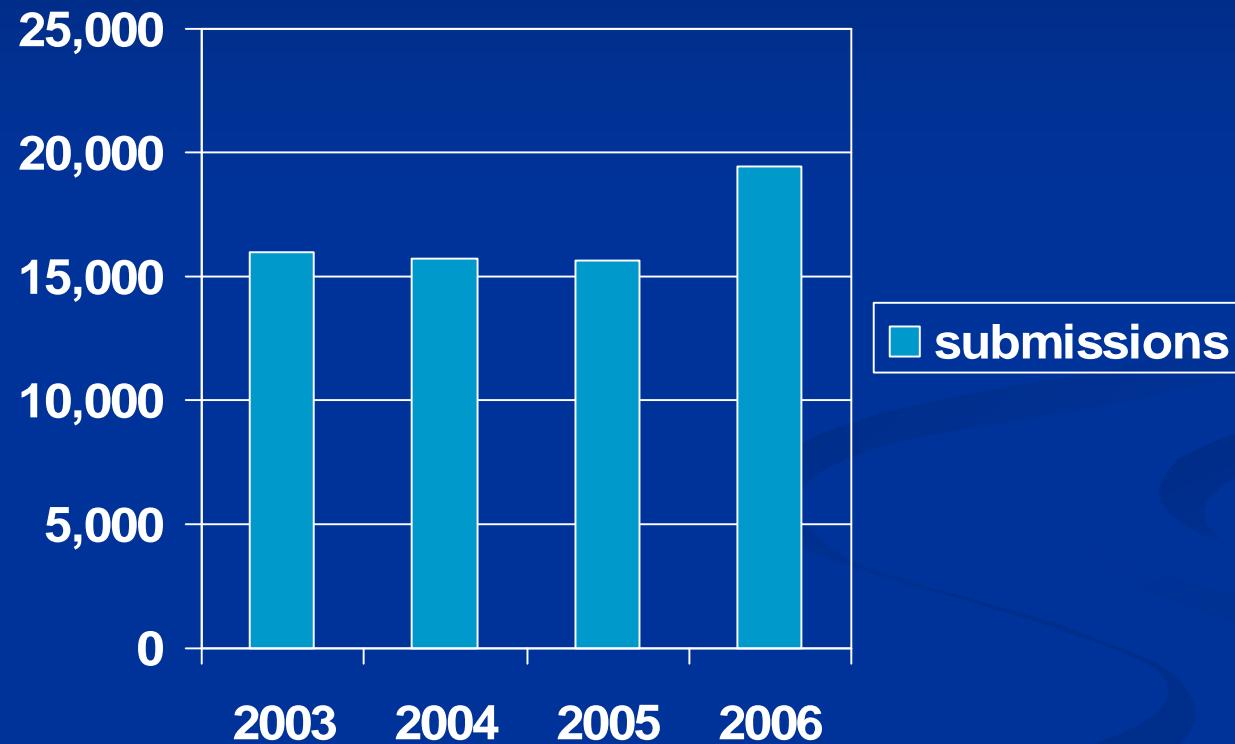
Houston Police Department

Crime Lab



- 1200 Travis
- 23,000 Square Feet
- 26th, 25th, 24th, 10th Floors
- Access is limited & controlled

Controlled Substances Cases



HPD Crime Lab Drug Evidence



Before

26 Tons Narcotics Incinerated



After

7/5/2007



Drugs, Drugs and more Drugs





Storage

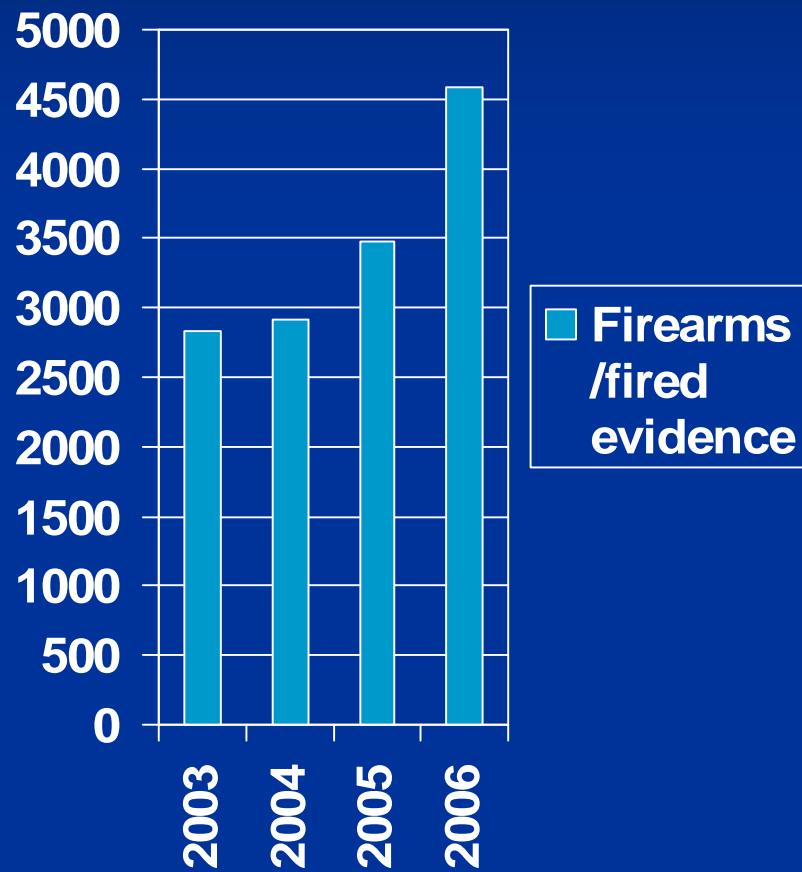


7/5/2007





Firearms Cases



- Active IBIS Program
- Ramping up of firearms related evidence
- PSN Grants

Firearms Database NIBIN (National Integrated Ballistic Information Network)

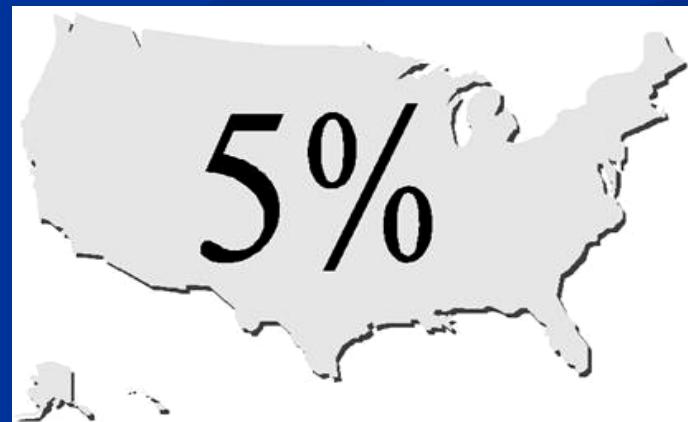
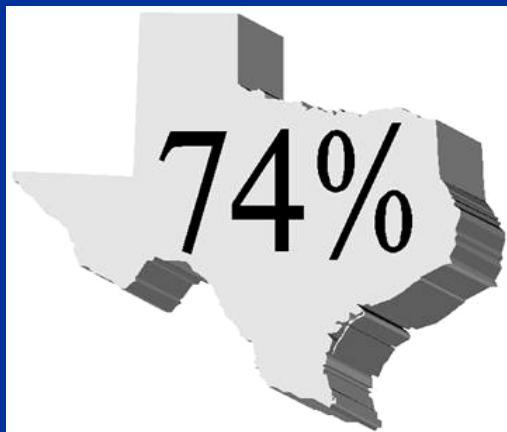


- 1/2 million dollars invested in equipment by ATF in behalf of HPD
- Daily basis confiscated weapons entered





Houston Police Crime Laboratory
accounted for 74% of the NIBIN hits
statewide and 5% nationwide





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For Immediate Release
December 12, 2005

ATF RECOGNIZES HOUSTON POLICE DEPARTMENT'S FIREARMS LAB FOR 500 'HITS' USING BALLISTIC TECHNOLOGY

HOUSTON – The Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives (ATF) presented an award today to Executive Assistant Chief Martha Montalvo for the exemplary performance of the Houston Police Department's Firearms Laboratory, which recently exceeded the 500 "hits" level in its use of ATF's computerized ballistic imaging system.

In presenting the award during a Houston City Council Public Safety Committee meeting, Special Agent in Charge Donnie Carter of ATF in Houston said "the Firearms Laboratory should be commended for this accomplishment because only six other firearms laboratories in the United States have achieved this level of success."

ATF provides the laboratory with the Integrated Ballistic Identification System (IBIS) that allows firearms examiners to acquire, digitize and compare unique markings made by a firearm on bullets and cartridge casings. "Hits" are matches between evidence from different crimes.

This system is linked throughout the United States via the National Integrated Ballistic Information Network (NIBIN). ATF has currently deployed NIBIN at 228 federal, state and local law enforcement agencies and firearms laboratories. Since ATF and its partner agencies have begun utilizing this technology, more than 862,000 pieces of evidence have been entered and over 11,300 "hits" have been logged, many of them yielding investigative information not obtainable by other means.

There is more information on the NIBIN program at www.nibin.gov and on ATF at www.atf.gov.

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Investigative Reporting

- November 2002, the Houston Police Department Crime Lab comes under scrutiny as a result of a series of investigative reports by a local TV station
- Josiah Sutton case is highlighted (October 25, 1998)-DQ alpha testing



Challenges

- In 2004 another case involving the HPD Crime Lab receives widespread media attention which came under review by the Innocence Project for post conviction DNA testing on hair in accordance with post-conviction legislation; George Rodriguez case comes under scrutiny for ABO testing
- 2004 nearly 8000 pieces of evidence in Property Room not inventoried-HPD goes public with information



HPD takes Action

- Independent DNA Audit at the request of HPD –December 2002
- NFSTC Needs Assessment-2003
- 30 Separate internal investigations by Internal Affairs (investigations ongoing)
- Internal Affairs investigations were reviewed by the District Attorney's Office for criminal misconduct.
- Two separate Grand Juries reviewed the evidence in the crime lab investigations and no indictments were returned. .
- As a result of the investigations, various administrative cites were sustained. An Assistant Chief of Police, the Crime Lab Director, and a DNA supervisor all resigned or retired in lieu of termination. Two additional employees were indefinitely suspended, and numerous other employees received discipline that ranged from a written reprimand to 28 days of suspension.
- Comprehensive retesting of DNA cases which are adjudicated

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[HPD crime lab analyst quits amid pressure](#)

By STEVE MCVICKER and ROMA KHANNA : Copyright 2005 Houston Chronicle
On Monday, Hurtt said that, with the exception of the DNA division, the HPD **crime lab** is now accredited.

06/14/2005

[Retesting ordered in crime lab chemist's cases](#)

By STEVE MCVICKER : Copyright 2005 Houston Chronicle

I did not get enough training on (**lab** equipment). Patel continues to work in the **crime lab**, although HPD emphasized **last** week that his work is being monitored closely.

06/06/2005

[HPD admits it failed to review suspect lab work](#)

By STEVE MCVICKER : Copyright 2005 Houston Chronicle

A former Justice Department inspector general, Bromwich was hired earlier this year to investigate the practices and work of the troubled **crime lab**.

06/02/2005

[Probe finds crime lab faked results in 4 cases](#)

By ROMA KHANNA and STEVE MCVICKER : Copyright 2005 Houston Chronicle
Still working at **labOne** analyst resigned in March 2001, but the other still works at the **crime lab**.

06/01/2005

[Crime lab report finds 6-year gap in supervision](#)

Associated Press

Bromwich said more than 1,960 case reviews will take place across the **lab**'s six forensic disciplines.

05/31/2005

[Crime lab watchdog bill sent to Perry](#)

By STEVE MCVICKER : Copyright 2005 Houston Chronicle

John Whitmire, D-Houston, the idea for the **crime lab** watchdog agency stems from the exposure of problems in the forensic division of several **law** enforcement agencies in the state.

05/31/2005

[Lawmakers poised to OK limited crime lab reforms](#)

By ROMA KHANNA : Copyright 2005 Houston Chronicle

Legislation that would expand DPS's ability to investigate **crime labs**, sponsored by Rep.

05/17/2005

[Crime lab accredited in all divisions except DNA](#)

By ROMA KHANNA : Copyright 2005 Houston Chronicle

A longtime critic of the **crime lab** has said, however, that accreditation does not guarantee the quality of its work.

05/12/2005

[HPD lab accredited except for DNA section](#)

By ROMA KHANNA : Copyright 2005 Houston Chronicle

These things were not going on in **Houston** until sometime in the recent past," Keaton said. HPD's accreditation is limited in two areas of the **lab** where testing has been suspended since 2002.

05/11/2005

[Report on HPD crime lab cites lack of cooperation](#)

□ By ROMA KHANNA and STEVE MCVICKER : Copyright 2005 Houston Chronicle

His team of scientists and investigators has met with three former senior **crime lab** employees but has had difficulty meeting with others, he said.

04/30/2005

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Independent Investigation

- March 2005 City of Houston entered agreement Fried, Frank, Harris, Shriver & Jacobsen. Former Inspector General of the Justice Department, Mr. Bromwich leads investigation (recommended by Stakeholder com.)
- June 2005 Phase 1-Review of historical practices and operations completed
- July 2005-ongoing Phase 2-Case reviews approximately 2800 cases in DNA/Serology, Firearms, Questioned Documents, Trace, Controlled Substances, Toxicology



May 11,
2006:

The Office of the Independent Investigator issued the **Fifth Report of the Independent Investigator for the Houston Police Department Crime Laboratory and Property Room**.

Click to read the [Press Release](#) or the [Report](#).

January 4,
2006:

The Office of the Independent Investigator issued the **Fourth Report of the Independent Investigator for the Houston Police Department Crime Laboratory and Property Room**.

Click to read the [Press Release](#) or the [Report](#).

July 6,
2005:

The Office of the Independent Investigator issued the **Phase II Plan of the Independent Investigator for the HPD Crime Lab and Property Room**.

Click to read the [Phase II Plan](#).

June 30 ,
2005:

The Office of the Independent Investigator issued the **Third Report of the Independent Investigator for the Houston Police Department Crime Laboratory and Property Room**.

Click to read the [Press Release](#) or the [Report](#).

May 31,
2005:

The Office of the Independent Investigator issued the **Second Report of the Independent Investigator for the Houston Police Department Crime Laboratory and Property Room**.

Click to read the [Press Release](#) or the [Report](#).



Funding-Independent Investigation

- 3.8 Million spent
- 1.5 Million additional allocation requested and approved-September 2006
- Serology Cases review period 1980 cases forward
- Challenge to address the past without jeopardizing the future
- Review of current operations
- Costly in terms of money and reputation



Moving Forward

- **Quality Assurance improvements**
 - Documented training, sops, proficiency testing, external audits, testimony monitoring
- **Staff improvements**
 - 40% staff turnover 2003-2005 time period
 - Employed strong experienced management team-Dr. Nelson, case manager, Dr. Cotton-consultant in DNA Section
 - Crime Lab Management team responsive, career ladder, collaborate with universities
- **Facility improvements**
 - Repaired roof and windows
 - Equipment purchases-Mass Spec, FTIR, build outs, computers, \$100,000 per year equipment replacement allocation



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HPD Crime Lab Receives National Accreditation



May 18, 2005 -- American Society of Crime Lab Directors (ASCLD) Executive Director Ralph Keaton presented HPD Chief of Police Harold L. Hurtt with Certificate of Accreditation for HPD Crime Lab.



Chief Hurtt, Crime Lab Director Irma Rios, Executive Assistant Chief Martha Montalvo, and HPD Crime Lab employees pose at Houston City Council chambers with Certificate of Accreditation. (Click on photos to enlarge.)

May 11, 2005 -- The Houston Police Department Crime Lab has received national accreditation in its operating areas and has cleared a major hurdle in the ultimate goal of gaining the confidence of our community and the criminal justice system.

In a decision reached Tuesday (May 10), the American Society of Crime Lab Directors-Laboratory Association Board (ASCLD) notified HPD Crime Lab Director Irma Rios that the lab met or exceeded all standards for accreditation in the following areas:

- Biology (exclusive of DNA)
- Toxicology
- Controlled substances
- Firearms
- Questioned documents

Rios said it is hoped that accreditation can be earned in the lab's DNA section by the end of 2005. The DNA section has been closed since December of 2002. "Without question, we still have a lot of work to do in terms of getting this lab back up and running to its capacity," said Rios. "There is no doubt this national accreditation seal of approval means a lot to the people who have been working tirelessly to regain the



Building Confidence

- Yearly ASCLD-LAB accreditation inspection (not a silver bullet)
- ABC certification or approved certification required at top tier of criminalists' career ladder and pay incentive at lower tier
- Training sponsored at facility for scientists, DAs, Defense attorneys, judges
- Expanding capabilities-Crime Lab, Trace analysis
- Best equipped and best trained lab...work remains
- Crime Lab that protects people through science



Presentation

- In informative
- Government made significant investment in forensic science
- Positive impact-DNA capacities, firearms, databases, training, exonerations
- More importantly that this provides a forum to discuss issues of mutual concern

Protecting People Through Science



Forensic Science is exciting!