



# HFSC Discloses Crime Scene Investigator Errors to State Forensic Commission

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

The Houston Forensic Science Center disclosed Wednesday to the state's forensic oversight commission information detailing errors made by a crime scene investigator that required final case reports to be amended.

In auditing the investigator's cases dating back to October 2015, HFSC identified problems in 65 different cases. All 65 had incomplete documentation. Thirty-two had additional administrative errors and in eight instances evidence had been misplaced. The impacted cases include 26 homicides and five officer-involved shootings. The district attorney has been notified of all the incidents.

Due to these issues, HFSC had to amend the 65 case reports. State statute requires forensic agencies to disclose to the Texas Forensic Science Commission errors that require a report to be amended.

The problems were found during a thorough audit (attached) of 88 cases the investigator worked after a few issues were noted in a handful of cases.

The crime scene investigator responsible for these errors is an officer with the Houston Police Department and has been transferred out of HFSC to a position within HPD. The supervisor who conducted the initial technical reviews of the investigator's work and did not identify the quality issues has been temporarily removed from these duties.

“HFSC has taken measures to address the mistakes made in these cases and to prevent similar errors going forward,” said Dr. Peter Stout, HFSC’s CEO and president. “The crime scene unit is a focus of HFSC’s efforts to ensure high-quality science is conducted throughout the organization, and steps are being taken to retrain and increase the technical capabilities of the staff.”

Some of these steps are in response to an audit released last summer that found HFSC should have at least two investigators respond to major crime scenes and should take more precautions to secure the integrity of the area.

In response to the audit and the more recent incidents in the crime scene unit, HFSC has hired more than six qualified, experienced investigators in the past year, including supervisors. HFSC continues to recruit such personnel for this unit.

In addition, in partnership with HPD, measures have been taken to better secure crime scenes. All personnel inside the inner perimeter of the crime scene are required to wear gloves, shoe coverings and particle masks to protect the integrity of the evidence and prevent contamination. The inner perimeter of the scene is sectioned off with red crime scene tape, differing from the larger outer boundary that is marked with yellow tape. The inner crime scene area is restricted to key personnel, primarily crime scene and homicide investigators.

“We will continue to work closely with HPD and other stakeholders to ensure this first step in the forensic process \_ evidence collection \_ is done scientifically and is of the highest quality to help ensure the integrity of all subsequent forensic analysis,” Dr. Stout said.

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 eight forensic disciplines.

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