



HFSC terminates CSI due to significant policy violations

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

The Houston Forensic Science Center has terminated a crime scene investigator (CSI) following an investigation into a quality incident that revealed she had violated policy and protocol while conducting work on evidence.

The issues impacted two sexual assault cases. HFSC has notified the Harris County District Attorney's Office of the incident. HFSC will disclose the incident to the state's forensic oversight board, the Texas Forensic Science Commission.

HFSC terminated the CSI on October 25 after retesting available evidence items from her casework involving the instrument in question, an alternate light source (ALS.)

ALS is used by crime scene investigators and DNA analysts to preliminarily identify biological fluids, such as blood, saliva and semen. The light from the instrument creates a reaction that allows a biological stain to become visible.

The CSI had used her own ALS at crime scenes although it did not meet specifications outlined in HFSC procedures, which state the instrument should operate at a range of wavelengths to help ensure quality work. The CSI's ALS only operates on one wavelength.

The quality manual, a document that guides all the Center's forensic work, also states equipment not supplied by the company will be tested by HFSC staff to ensure it meets accreditation requirements.

An HFSC supervisor discovered the issue during a technical review of the case file, indicating that quality control worked as expected. The supervisor noticed the CSI had not documented testing the instrument's capability prior to doing her testing as HFSC procedure requires. When the supervisor asked the CSI whether she had done this, she told him she had used her own instrument, raising an additional concern.

HFSC's quality division then launched its investigation and asked for the evidence in question to be reexamined using HFSC-issued ALS devices.

The CSI had reported negative results on eight evidence items. Of the eight items retested using HFSC's ALS instruments, three came back positive for biological fluids.

The quality division then reviewed 18 cases the CSI had completed using an ALS. Evidence was only available to be recalled in three of those cases. Upon retesting, additional evidence items the CSI had initially reported as negative came back positive.

"Protocols and procedures are in place at HFSC to help ensure quality scientific results are provided to stakeholders. When protocol is violated incidents like this occur and HFSC cannot tolerate such conduct," said Dr. Peter Stout, HFSC's CEO and president.

"The work done by HFSC has enormous impacts on people's lives, the justice system and the community. We take that responsibility seriously and believe we have an obligation to hold ourselves to the highest standards," Dr. Stout 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.

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