



Odontology Section – 2004

F26 Reliability of a Visual Identification

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After attending this presentation, attendees will understand visual identifications which may be inherently flawed.

This presentation will impact the forensic community and/or humanity by making forensic odontologists aware that the visual identification of a body could be flawed. Take the dental radiographs when given the opportunity.

The Hughes 369D helicopter was operating in the Hawaii Volcanoes National Park, giving a tour of the lava flows. The crash occurred around 10 a.m. on June 15, 2003, Father's Day. A park service firefighting helicopter was dispatched to the downed helicopter and dropped buckets of water onto the burning debris. Four bodies were recovered that day. The autopsies were performed on June 17, 2003. The body of John Doe 2 was visually identified as that of the pilot by a co-worker at the scene of the accident.

After the tissue and fluid samples were taken for the FAA, the chief ranger asked the forensic odontologist if dental radiographs should be taken. The dental radiographs were taken, and they eventually proved that the visual identification was in error.

Can we rely on visual identifications? A visual identification is more subjective and lacks the objective criteria that is present in comparisons based on DNA, fingerprints, and dental radiographs. Whenever possible, take the dental radiographs.

Visual Identification, Reliability, Dental Radiographs