B31 A Series of Bank Robberies Linked by DNA From Handled and Worn Items

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After attending this presentation, attendees will understand the impor- tance of educating the criminal justice community to the potential value of "non-traditional" DNA evidence. This presentation will illustrate how the analysis of DNA recovered from, handled and worn, items was used to link a series of thirteen bank robberies and identify eight individuals to the crimes. Seven of these eight individuals have been linked with DNA evi- dence to at least two cases.

This presentation will impact the forensic community and/or humanity by creating greater awareness of the value of "non-traditional" DNA evidence.

Southern California is often referred to as the bank robbery capital of the world due to the large number of these crimes. Orange County, California, recently experienced a series of take-over bank robberies that exhibited similar modus operandi (MO) in the way the crimes were carried out. The perpetrators wore masks and gloves, preventing visual identification by witnesses and preventing identification by latent finger- prints. Stolen vehicles were used as the get-away vehicle in each of the incidents and were abandoned a short distance from the bank. Black knit caps with excised eyeholes, gloves, screwdrivers, and other miscellaneous items which may have been handled or worn by the perpetrators were left behind in the abandoned vehicles. Swabs of the steering wheels and door handles of the vehicles were also collected. The evidence items were sampled for DNA based upon how they would have been used or handled (history-directed collection). The knit caps, used as masks, were sampled by cutting or swabbing the approximate mouth area of the interior of the mask. The gloves were also sampled by cutting or swabbing the interior surfaces. The screwdrivers, apparently used to start the stolen vehicles, were swabbed along the handles for potential DNA from the individuals who utilized them.

The typing results obtained from these items included single source profiles, mixtures with an easily discernable major contributor, and complex multi-contributor mixtures. As more profiles were developed and entered into a local DNA database, case-to-case matches were made. This demonstrated the value of this type of evidence, which, until then, had infrequently been submitted for DNA analysis. This also prompted investigators to re-examine similar cases that had been set aside as unsolved. As of August 2005, thirteen cases had been linked by DNA between May 2000 and October 2003.

The profiles obtained from the recovered evidence have led to three matches in California's convicted offender database. An additional five profiles were matched to five individuals through traditional investigative means. All of the individuals belong to a street gang from a neighboring county. One unidentified male profile was obtained from evidence in two of the thirteen cases. In order to keep the statute of limitations from expiring on those two cases, a John Doe warrant was filed on this DNA profile. A second John Doe warrant was filed on a profile obtained from additional cases believed to be part of this same series.

The results obtained from the DNA analysis of the evidence in this series of bank robberies demonstrate the importance of informing the criminal justice community (investigators, crime scene personnel, prose- cutors, forensic scientists, etc.) of the value of examining worn and handled items for DNA. As a result of the success of these examinations, evidence recovered from bank robberies is now routinely being accepted for DNA analysis.

DNA, Bank Robbery, Handled/Worn Items

 ** Presenting Author*