



Criminalistics Section – 2006

B64 Trace Evidence: Alive and Well in New Jersey

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After attending this presentation, attendees will learn of the practicality of not only having a trace evidence section but also expanding it to suit the needs of the law enforcement community.

In stark contrast to the current trend of expanding DNA facilities and diminishing trace evidence services, trace evidence is alive and well in the state of New Jersey. Over the course of the past three years, the New Jersey State Police Office of Forensic Sciences has opened a new laboratory, hired numerous personnel and acquired new instrumentation. A large portion of the efforts to accomplish these achievements has been devoted to strengthening and expanding the role of trace evidence in criminal investigations throughout the state of New Jersey. The implementation, progress, and accomplishments of this ambitious plan will impact the forensic community and/or humanity by serving as a template for other laboratories that may pursue similar objectives in the future.

This paper presents an overview of the recent expansion of the New Jersey State Police Office of Forensic Sciences and the services provided at their new Central Laboratory.

In the not so recent past, the advent of DNA analysis in the forensic sciences revolutionized the way forensic laboratories handle evidence. During this forensic revolution, laboratory emphasis shifted away from what has been viewed as subjective forms of analysis, *i.e.* trace evidence, towards this new, relatively objective technology. As this shift occurred, so too did the financial needs of laboratories. As budgets and personnel requirements for DNA laboratories surged, many laboratory systems contracted or cut their trace evidence sections altogether. Such cutbacks failed to consider the value of trace evidentiary examinations. Amongst other things, trace evidence can provide valuable investigative leads, confirm or refute accounts of events that transpired, and, in the absence of biological transfers, establish contact between suspect and scene, victim and scene, and suspect and victim.

In stark contrast to the trend discussed above, not only is trace evidence alive and well in the state of New Jersey, it has played an expanding role in assisting the various state and local law enforcement agencies serviced by its state laboratory system. Over the course of the past three years, the New Jersey State Police Office of Forensic Sciences has opened a new laboratory, hired numerous personnel and acquired new instrumentation. A large portion of the efforts to accomplish these achievements has been devoted to strengthening and expanding the role of trace evidence in criminal investigations throughout the state of New Jersey.

This presentation will provide a brief history of the laboratory system prior to the recent transformation, describe the steps that were taken during the transformation, and discuss the results that were obtained. Emphasis will be placed on the construction of the new facility, the acquisition of new instrumentation, the addition of new personnel, the challenges faced during the training of new scientists, and the administrative system that has been set up to ensure that the laboratory provides service of irrefutable quality in a timely fashion on behalf of the citizens of the state of New Jersey. Additionally, an overview of the trace related services that the system offers, both current and projected, will be provided.

Trace Evidence, Expanding Role, Investigative Leads