



D63 The Need for Training in Forensic Science

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After attending this presentation, attendees will understand that the need for training and continuing education in forensic science is important for professional development.

This presentation will impact the forensic community and/or humanity by providing the forensic community with information about the need for training practitioners in the field of forensic science.

Training was identified as a significant area of need within the forensic science community in National Institute of Justice's (NIJ) *Forensic Sciences: Review of Status and Needs* (1999). Continuing education is important for professional development. It allows the forensic scientist to maintain and update specific knowledge and skills in methods, technology, and equipment.

In forensic science there is no standard for required training once employed. Several scientific and technical working groups recommend minimum mandatory contact hours of training for specific areas of forensics. Some accreditation and certificate programs have certain standards for training that the forensic scientist or laboratory have to maintain. Without mandatory training standards for all forensic scientists, some agencies and laboratories have established their own requirements regarding training. The legal and medical professions require continuing education in order to maintain their licenses to practice law or medicine. Both legal and medical professions must meet certain criteria of continuing education on an annual basis in order to continue working in their field.

Funding for training is at issue with most agencies' diminishing budgets. The recommended budget for training is 1-3% of the total laboratory budget which is on average \$1.3 million for publicly funded crime labs. Some labs have allotted \$1000-\$1500 per year for each person for training or continuing education. According to the Bureau of Justice Statistics (BJS), *Census of Publicly Funded Forensic Crime Laboratories* (2002), the budget for training is less than 1% of the overall laboratory budgets. Even when laboratories do have the funding for training, they lack the personnel to cover the person who is away for training. A few agencies see training as a reward to the scientist and not a need to continue his or her professional development. Worse, some view training as an opportunity for the employee to travel and have fun, not to improve their skills.

Job retention in forensic science is affected by training or the lack of. In some cases, agencies will expend time and resources to train a new employee but when the training is complete, the employee leaves for a position with better pay, benefits, or for personal reasons. Agencies which do not post entry-level positions exacerbate this problem. Conversely, the newly-hired analyst receives little to no training and leaves for a position that provides training.

There has been some assistance with funding for training. With award programs from the NIJ, the Forensic Resource Network (FRN) has provided free continuing education to the forensic science community. Workshops, short courses, symposia are offered to state and local forensic laboratories at little or no cost.

Training, Continuing Education, Standards