



Physical Anthropology Section – 2007

H66 SIRLI (Sistema de Identificación de Restos y Localización de Individuos): A Review of the First Year of Mexico's Database for Missing Persons

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After attending this presentation, attendees will be aware of the formation and progress of a new database established to help identify undocumented immigrants that perish crossing the U.S./Mexico border. Attendees will be provided with instructions for submitting cases to the database for assistance with identification.

This presentation will impact the forensic community and/or humanity by providing details of the establishment of an internationally functional database that will facilitate the identification of deceased undocumented Mexican immigrants to the U.S.

Each year the Secretaría de Relaciones Exteriores (SRE) of Mexico receives roughly 5,500 requests from Mexican citizens soliciting support to locate relatives missing in the U.S. The current Mexican population residing in the U.S. is estimated between 10 and 11 million which makes these inquiries difficult to resolve. To compound this problem, it is estimated that more than one million individuals pass undocumented from Mexico into the U.S. each year. Due to a tightening of border security that began in the 1990s, undocumented entry into the U.S. is confined to areas of desolate, inhospitable terrain. As a result, many illegal entrants die along the 2,000 mile U.S./Mexico border and their remains are often not found for weeks or months if at all. In 2005, the U.S. Border Patrol recorded more than 500 deaths along the southern border with Mexico with more than half of those bodies found in Arizona.

In 2005, the SRE launched an ambitious new database, System for the Identification of Remains and Localization of Individuals or SIRLI, in an attempt to facilitate efforts of locating the missing Mexican citizens both living and deceased. The SIRLI database was created by Image Ware Systems, a U.S. identity management firm. SIRLI incorporates information from missing-persons reports that can be filed by families in SRE offices both in Mexico and the U.S. The next phase of the project will allow individuals to file reports directly to SIRLI using a web-based interface. The information reported includes demographic information such as name, age, sex, known addresses in both Mexico and the United States, exit point from Mexico into the United States. In addition, photographs of the missing person as well as of scars or tattoos can be scanned into the system and viewed by officials at any of the 45 U.S. consulates or SRE offices in Mexico in order to make comparisons. Image Ware also incorporates facial recognition software that compares these images to those taken from deceased individuals. Fingerprint data along with signature information taken from Mexican voting cards, military and consular registries are entered into the database. Lastly, the database includes a section for the storage and comparison genetic data for both mitochondrial DNA (mtDNA) sequence analysis and STR loci.

Currently mtDNA analysis is being performed at Baylor University on a subset of unidentified remains believed to be from undocumented immigrants as well as for individuals that have been tentatively identified using other means. To date, Baylor has received 158 bone samples and one hair sample from deceased immigrant remains and 37 blood samples from living relatives of the missing.

There have been twenty-six mtDNA matches made between bone samples and maternal relatives of the missing. The combined efforts of the U.S. medical examiner's offices, Mexican consular offices, border patrol and local officials have been facilitated by this new depository of information focused primarily on individuals migrating from Mexico to the United States. SIRLI has provided a much needed tool to enhance communication and availability of information to those entrenched in identification efforts. In the future, Mexico's SIRLI database can be used as a template for similar databases that are needed in other countries around the world.

The Mexican government provides these services free to all Mexican citizens and immigrants who begin a search by contacting a Mexican consul office in Mexico or in the U.S. Forensic scientists are encouraged to contact the nearest Mexican consulate office when faced with a potential undocumented immigrant so that the case be included in SIRLI. This paper is dedicated to Dr. Richard L. Jantz who's philosophy "...you can never have too much data" has inspired generations.

Database, Migrant Deaths, mtDNA