



Physical Anthropology Section – 2008

H19 VICTIMS Identification Project: The Nation's Unidentified...Who Are They? And What Can We Do?

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The goal of this presentation is to introduce and promote the utilization and application of forensic anthropology within the Victims Information Catalog, Tracking, and IMage System (VICTIMS) Identification Project. The VICTIM System is a group of research projects and development efforts sponsored by various federal agencies and supported by the FBI Laboratory. The system will, for the first time, bring technology to the forefront of the national effort to identify the thousands of unidentified human remains that lay nameless in medical examiners and coroners' offices.

This presentation will impact the forensic community by demonstrating the critical need for the deployment of useful tools and resources to the law enforcement communities and medical examiners and coroners' offices. Currently the estimated number of unidentified decedents ranges from an approximate 14,000, on record at about 2,000 medical examiners and coroners' offices, to a projected 40,000. VICTIMS is the first national attempt to apply a comprehensive approach to the problem.

Forensic anthropology plays a crucial role in the capability, quality, and success of the VICTIM System. Unlike many of the current unidentified persons data entry files, there will be specific data entry options tailored explicitly towards a forensic anthropologist's skeletal assessment of the remains. The system will accommodate forensic anthropology reports as well as highlight postmortem information that may critically coincide with antemortem information and aid in identification.

The VICTIM System is a multifaceted and comprehensive project that for the first time would merge data from a range of sources and leverage the value of the information through the application of state of the art forensic technologies. The project has three primary components and significant implications for the field of forensic anthropology.

One component is a set of Internet based applications (VICTIMS) for the data gathering and call-in effort being developed by the FBI Laboratory under an external contract to bring the data from local, state, and federal sources together in a single comprehensive file system and allow the presentation of the information over the Internet to interested parties. The system will be capable of handling a variety of data formats including, but not limited to, case information, autopsy information/physical descriptors, Computed Tomography (CT) scans, photographic images, dental and medical radiographs, and DNA data. In addition to providing collection, storage, and search capabilities, this system will also provide access to data from other automated systems within the law enforcement community via the Internet.

A second element is an Evidence Preservation and Processing (EPP) facility for the sole purpose of examination and preservation of physical remains of unidentified decedents. The facility will provide CT scanning capabilities for gathering skeletal information on remains submitted for examination by the custodial agency. The CT scans will not only facilitate insight into the unidentified skeletal remains, but will provide a method to preserve the remains digitally. In addition, the facility will provide anthropological examinations of the submitted remains in an effort to determine a biological profile (containing age, sex, ancestry, and living stature), trauma analysis, and individualizing physical characteristics that would assist in the identification process. After the examination, the submitted remains will be returned to the originated agency of the remains, along with an anthropological report, if one was requested.

A third component, and an extension of the VICTIMS website, is a referral service for law enforcement and medical examiners and coroners' offices. This service would provide information about local or nearby forensic resources including anthropologists, entomologists, odontologists, artists, and facilities offering radiological and other imaging services. The referral service will enable the creation of a list for each discipline with qualified forensic scientists, their location, and their contact information in an effort to enhance the quality of the data about an unidentified person and increase the likelihood of identification.

Unidentified Decedents, VICTIMS Identification Project, Forensic Anthropology