



E24 NAS Solutions: Do They Solve Anything?

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The goal of this presentation is to provide a frank, informed, and honest discussion of what certification, accreditation, and a National Institute of Forensic Science Agency as prescribed by the National Academy of Sciences (NAS) Report would actually accomplish.

This presentation will impact the forensic science community by providing a greater understanding of the issue surrounding National Institute of Forensic Science, certification, and their ability to bring change and reform to the way forensic science is conducted.

One of the problems identified with the field of forensic science is the fact that standards of practice vary widely throughout the country and even sometimes widely within a state. The report recommends correcting this problem through requiring standardization at both a local and at a national level through the creation of the National Institute of Forensic Science, whose job it would be to promulgate forensic science standards.

At first blush, these recommendations seem to be nothing more than long overdue common sense reform. After all, our food, our consumer products, and even the legal profession are regulated by government bodies. Regulation seems like the logical and natural way to protect the public from possible harm due to substandard work.

However, whether or not this is the case is far from clear. Crime laboratories currently have a fairly robust regulatory environment. With ASCLD-LAB standards moving firmly into adopting ISO standards well before the advent of the NAS report, one would think that the NAS report would find very little to criticize within the field of forensic science.

However, it is precisely this accreditation environment that appears to fall short of assuring that the science presented to the court system has been validated and shown to be reliable. Critics assert that accreditation provides a false sense of security for the work conducted by a given lab, and that the process of accreditation is more concerned with assuring that procedures are in place and are followed than with assuring that the procedures are the correct ones for assuring quality work.

This presentation will discuss the pros and cons of accreditation and certifications.

This session also seeks to address the related topic of the establishment of NIFS, the proposed new federal agency that would regulate forensic science. NIFS would set standards for the use of forensic evidence in the courtroom, support training and education, and conduct validation research. Once again, on its face the notion of researching and setting standards for forensic evidence seems uncontroversial, and like a good idea. However, critics assert that NIFS would also have the ability to set standards for evidence to be admitted in courtroom and giving any one agency the power to allow or disallow evidence in courts across the land must be viewed with a healthy skepticism. This session will also discuss the pros and cons of the establishment of NIFS.

NIFS, Accreditation, Certification