



A101 Results From the 2009 BJS Census of Publicly Funded Forensic Crime Laboratories

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After attending this presentation, attendees will learn about the state of U.S. publicly funded forensic crime laboratories in 2009 as captured by a national census, which was designed to collect data on a wide range of public laboratory characteristics. Also, the federal agency that commissioned the collection, the research organization that performed the data collection, and the process that each organization undertook to finalize the survey, collect, and analyze the data will be discussed.

This presentation will impact the forensic science community by presenting national-level estimates of public laboratory workload, budget and operations as reported for the year 2009, a one-of-a-kind data collection effort that may influence state and federal legislation, help shape forensic science policy, and aid those seeking to conduct research on the local, state, and federal forensic science systems.

Publicly funded forensic crime labs are a vital component of the criminal justice system, receiving millions of pieces of evidence from law enforcement investigations each year. Within the criminal justice system, there is an ever-increasing reliance on forensic evidence, as well as increasing concern over the role of the nation's forensic crime labs in processing the evidence, issuing laboratory reports, and their subsequent use in legal proceedings.

The Bureau of Justice Statistics' (BJS) Census of Publicly Funded Forensic Crime Laboratories is a recurring data collection that provides a national picture of the services and resources devoted to forensic laboratory activities across the country. This data has been used to help inform policy making and planning at all levels of government. The 2002 and 2005 censuses documented the backlogs in requests for a wide range of forensic services, including controlled substance identification, firearm/tool mark analysis, and latent fingerprint examination. Previously, public attention had been focused almost exclusively on DNA backlogs. A third census was fielded in 2010 and 2011 to capture detailed data on the workload and operations of the more than 400 federal, state, and local publicly funded forensic crime labs operating in 2009.

This presentation will examine the forensic services provided by publicly funded crime labs during 2009 and identify the evidence areas that account for the largest portion of the national backlog. It will also assess changes since 2002 in the budgets, staffing levels, and quality assurances in forensic crime labs, including lab accreditation, proficiency testing, and the resources devoted to research. The presentation will also examine the uses of advanced technologies to process evidence received from criminal investigations and laboratory information management systems to organize and document laboratory operational and experimental data.

The 2009 census achieved a response rate of ninety-seven percent, the highest in the history of this data collection. Therefore, the statistics produced from these data, and reported in this presentation, provide the most nationally representative information to date.

Census, Public Laboratories, Workload