



Criminalistics Section - 2014

A195 Should Forensic Sciences Only Be Confined to Court Use? The Emergence of Forensic Intelligence-Led Policing

Eric Stauffer, MS, Police cantonale Fribourg, Place Notre-Dame 2, Fribourg, FR CH-1700, SWITZERLAND*

After attending this presentation, attendees will understand how forensic sciences can be used to generate intelligence in order to lead police investigations.

This presentation will impact the forensic science community by reminding everyone that the original purpose of forensic science is to help police investigate and by providing the knowledge necessary to do so.

Nowadays, forensic sciences work is most often court-oriented, meaning that all examinations are conducted with the mindset that they could end up in court on behalf of or against a defendant; however, forensic sciences can also be used to generate intelligence. Some clear practical examples will be provided of how to use forensic sciences to generate intelligence in place of or before going to court.

In the court-oriented mode, forensic sciences are used to identify a perpetrator or a victim or to determine a *modus operandi*. Examinations are almost always conducted with the mindset that the forensic scientist may have to testify about the results in court; therefore, the scientific method and conclusions must be beyond reproach. Protocols are verified, results are double-checked, and the conclusions must be error-free, or at least exhibit a known error-rate. Basically, when a forensic scientist works in court-oriented mode, one should be able to rely on the conclusion of the report without any reservations. These are the forensic sciences everyone knows about and performs.

In intelligence mode, forensic sciences do not have to provide the same level of accuracy or reliability. Because the investigator has no lead in the investigation, any information provided may help to find other clues, identify a lead, and eventually resolve the case. This occurs, for example, when the forensic scientist informs the investigator that the fibers may come from a certain car model, without being sure at all about this conclusion. It helps the investigator to target the search, without any guarantee that this is truly the car model sought. If the investigator follows a wrong lead, no harm is done besides the loss of time. As such, even if the intelligence provided is only 60% or 70% accurate, it is better than no intelligence.

This intelligence mode has undergone tremendous development in Switzerland. The main reason is that Switzerland exhibits a very high volume of burglaries, a serial crime occurring across many different states. Time is of the essence in detecting the series, because these burglaries are committed by foreign nationals who are often illegals merely transiting through the country. When sharing forensic data such as shoe prints or *modus operandi*, investigators can quickly link different burglaries and detect a series. This, in turn, allows for better tactical decisions on police operations. It is called forensic intelligence-led policing.

Efforts have been made in the last few years to redistribute crime scene unit resources in order to increase the production of forensic intelligence, particularly in response to high-volume crimes such as burglaries. Databases of forensic evidence have been developed and are used on a daily basis to provide guidance to the investigator and information to the decision maker.

While the focus of forensic sciences has been solely based on court-oriented practices for the last few decades, one must remember that the spirit of forensic sciences was not originally limited to this purpose. It was first developed not only to prove facts in court but also, maybe even more importantly, to further the criminal investigation by providing leads. It is crucial that modern forensic scientists always keep performing their duties with these two visions in mind. This can only increase the value of a crime laboratory's services to the investigator.

Forensic Sciences, Intelligence, Police Investigation