



B109 We Did It! Houston's Sexual Assault Kit Backlog Elimination Story

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After attending this presentation, attendees will have a better grasp of the gravity of the nationwide Sexual Assault Kit (SAK) backlog. This presentation will share the challenges and successes associated with eliminating a backlog of SAKs in Houston, TX, the fourth-largest city in the United States, and the achievement of a sustainable, 30-day turnaround time on sexual assault cases.

This presentation will impact the forensic science community by introducing workflow and personnel management strategies that helped Houston eliminate its SAK backlog and achieve a sustainable, 30-day turnaround time.

In 2013, the Houston Police Department (HPD) had 6,663 untested SAKs on property room shelves, the oldest dating back to the 1980s. At the time, the HPD Crime Laboratory was tasked with outsourcing the untested kits. Each case would have to be internally reviewed following the outsource testing in order to upload relevant information into the Combined DNA Index System (CODIS), the national DNA database. To complete this task, the laboratory had to quickly develop a plan to locate the evidence, prepare the documentation, and ship the items for testing. Internal training began as the laboratory prepared for the large amount of case reviews that would occur when the completed cases returned. Meanwhile, in April 2014, HPD's Crime Laboratory ceased to exist. The Houston Forensic Science Center, an independent local government organization, took over management and oversight of Houston's forensic operations, including DNA testing. By February 2015, the outsourcing project had been completed and analysts had successfully reviewed close to 10,000 cases. More than 4,200 profiles were uploaded into CODIS, resulting in more than 1,800 hits. The project also helped with the identification of a serial rapist and confirmed that no one had been wrongfully accused.

With efforts focused on reviewing the outsourced cases and their accompanying reports, the laboratory was cognizant that it could end up with a backlog of current cases. It developed a plan to maintain a workflow for SAK processing in order to prevent a backlog from reoccurring. Unfortunately, the outsourcing project ended before the laboratory had a fully functioning workflow for SAK processing. Each month, the number of backlogged SAKs grew. By October 2015, the backlog had risen to 716 kits. The laboratory began operating under the new workflow with the help of 14 people whose job it was to whittle away at the backlog. On April 6, 2016, Sylvester Turner, Houston's newly elected mayor, instructed the laboratory to eliminate the backlog and reach a sustainable 30-day turnaround time by July 1, 2016. On that day, the backlog (counting both those that were untested and those already in progress) was 575 SAKs. The laboratory succeeded by utilizing different resources to achieve the goal. The laboratory's staff had to be reorganized to focus on SAK processing, additional instruments had to be quickly purchased, and 99 kits had to be outsourced. By combining into one report male quantification for screening and the DNA results, the SAK workflow was streamlined to nine days from extraction to report completion. The laboratory completed 702 SAK cases, reviewed data from the 99 outsourced kits, and achieved a 30-day turnaround time in only 90 days.

Sexual Assault Kit, Backlog, Workflow