

GUEST EDITORIAL



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The FBI Laboratory—Setting New Goals and Charting New Directions

Today, the degree to which law enforcement's credibility is being scrutinized is unprecedented. At each step up the judicial ladder—from the preliminary investigation on the street to the final disposition in the courtroom—the performance of law enforcement at all levels is being critically challenged and evaluated as never before. This, along with the drastic social changes and rapid growth of our urban population centers, is creating renewed demands on law enforcement.

How will law enforcement meet these challenges and at the same time render effective public service?

I think the answer is simple enough. Despite the increased scrutiny, growing demands, and despite the often unreasonable heated cries from a few critics, law enforcement must continue responding to its judicial responsibilities with cool reason, proven logic, and above all *professionalism*.

But, as in most other difficult and worthwhile tasks, implementing the obvious "simple answer" has become one more of the great challenges facing law enforcement today.

A large part of these expanded responsibilities has fallen heavily on the scientific criminal investigator and the crime laboratory. Unfortunately, until recently, many police departments in the country would not have been equal to this challenge because too often budgetary limitations made it difficult, if not impossible, for them to develop even rudimentary crime laboratories.

However, in response to these new, enlarged responsibilities, many state and local police agencies have already developed or are now developing new and better laboratories to meet these demands. As a result, we have seen a dramatic proliferation in the number of crime laboratories throughout the country.

This growth resulted from many factors—demands from the judiciary calling for greater use of scientific techniques; increased Federal assistance for local and state crime laboratory development; and, most encouraging, increased cooperation and sharing of scientific facilities between law enforcement agencies.

In order to fulfill these new responsibilities in this vital field, the FBI Laboratory has had to change its traditional role. Since its inception in 1932, the FBI Laboratory has conducted scientific examinations of evidence for FBI field divisions and provided "on the scene" scientific experts to assist in direct technical phases of major case investigations.

For many years the FBI Laboratory has also conducted examinations of evidence in criminal matters for municipal, county, and state law enforcement agencies and provided expert testimony, without charge, at the trials of these cases. Examinations are also conducted for other Federal agencies.

In calendar year 1974, over 556,000 examinations were conducted in the Laboratory, 75 percent in FBI cases and 25 percent for other agencies.

We are proud of the FBI's contributions in this essential area. Certainly this assistance to local and state law enforcement will continue as long as a distinct need exists. But we recognize that the time is now ripe for self-examination, critical evaluation, and change. We must set new goals and chart new directions.

With the addition of numerous crime laboratories within many police agencies throughout the country—some highly qualified and well-established, others new and with limited staffing—the FBI has now placed a high priority on reevaluating its objectives and obligations to law enforcement in the scientific crime detection field.

As a result, in October 1973 the FBI conducted a national survey of crime laboratories. This survey identified approximately 200 state and local crime laboratories in the United States and its territories.

Using the results of this survey, and assisted by the Law Enforcement Assistance Administration, 46 state and local crime laboratory leaders representing more than 120 of these laboratories were invited to participate in the first National Symposium on Crime Laboratory Development at the FBI Academy in December 1973.

This important national meeting fostered an exchange of ideas and the identification of common problems and goals. Strong emphasis was placed on the need for increasing the dissemination of scientific knowledge and on the need for developing greater

scientific capabilities within the forensic science community. In response to the needs expressed by these crime laboratory leaders, a four-part program to assist state and local crime laboratory professional development was undertaken by the FBI. This program consisted of increased specialized training, better communication between crime laboratories, research in crime laboratory topics, and organizational and managerial guidance to crime laboratories throughout the United States.

In its expanded program of scientific training, the FBI is now conducting training sessions at its Training Academy at Quantico, Virginia, covering a wide spectrum from basic courses to advanced methodology. Under this expanded training program initiated in April 1974, over 800 crime laboratory personnel from throughout the United States will have completed courses by July 1975, and returned to their respective agencies to share their specialized knowledge with members of their own organizations.

Originally, it was necessary to begin our training program with basic courses geared to satisfy specific needs. Currently, we are offering 16 forensic training courses designed to satisfy the needs of both the inexperienced and the seasoned professional.

These courses include introduction to criminalistics, principles of laboratory management, crime scene investigation, specialized crime photography and photographic laboratory techniques, gambling technology, gunpowder and primer residues, surveys on examinations of glass and questioned documents, legal aspects of questioned documents, microscopy of hairs, thin-layer chromatography, forensic serology, biochemical methods in bloodstain analysis, instrumental analysis, and a seminar on crime laboratory management.

We hope in the future to add sophisticated instrumentation and equipment at Quantico for training and research purposes as we become involved in more complicated procedures. We are also studying the possibility of offering advanced study courses to university graduate students who are specializing in forensic science.

To increase communication among crime laboratories, the FBI has also established the *Crime Laboratory Digest*, a scientific newsletter circulated to all state and local crime laboratories in the United States, Puerto Rico, and the Virgin Islands. The *Digest* highlights current technical developments, scientific training offered by the FBI, and other news affecting the crime laboratory field.

The FBI is also expanding its research program in crime laboratory topics of value to Federal, state, and local laboratories in the biological, chemical, and physical sciences. We are also currently studying the possibility of establishing research fellowships to be available to personnel working in crime laboratories.

Because of the success achieved at the 1973 symposium and the requests of participants, the FBI hosted the second National Symposium on Crime Laboratory Development in September 1974. Almost all crime laboratory directors from throughout the United States, Puerto Rico, the Virgin Islands, and Canada, along with representatives of Federal investigative agencies, participated.

This meeting was an unprecedented event in the history of crime laboratories in America, as 166 crime laboratory leaders met for five days at the FBI Training Academy at Quantico. Never before had so many crime laboratory representatives met in a spirit of unity and cooperation in order to organize their expertise to improve their supportive scientific services to law enforcement.

Fruitful panel discussions were held concerning ways legislation, management, communication, education, and organization could best serve the future of crime laboratories in America. Perhaps the most important accomplishment was the adoption of a Constitution for, and the establishment of, the American Society of Crime

Laboratory Directors (ASCLD), the first organization of its kind to embrace almost all crime laboratories in the nation.

The ASCLD is an organization which promises to provide a direct channel of communication between representatives of all state and local crime laboratories and the Federal government, to which they look for assistance in funding, training, and coordination. The ASCLD will also enable the FBI and other national organizations to more accurately identify the areas where their assistance may be most effectively directed. We are optimistic that the ASCLD, working in harmony with the American Academy of Forensic Sciences and other professional national organizations, can provide additional leadership toward upgrading the professionalism of the scientific criminal investigator and will be a catalyst for increasing the cooperation and communication between all crime laboratories throughout the nation.

We in the FBI believe that the many accomplishments by the members of the crime laboratory community during the past 18 months have been significant and signal a new era in the history of forensic science in America.

These crime laboratory leaders have opened the way for increased cooperation between local, state, and Federal crime laboratories. The future benefits will be greater professional use of the crime laboratory and, consequently, better law enforcement for the people.