

National DNA Data Bank Success Continues with Innovations

This article originally appeared in the first edition of the National Police Services' Newsletter in 2003. It is reprinted with their permission.

The National DNA Data Bank (NDDDB) is arguably the most significant investigative police tool since the advent of fingerprint technology, revolutionizing the ability of the law enforcement community to solve crimes. In only three years, the NDDDB has accumulated over 48,000 convicted criminal index DNA samples, 11,148 crime scene profiles, and has already assisted in solving 1,138 cases. A crime scene DNA sample match to that of a convicted offender now occurs almost every day, giving police the information they need to fight crime and provide Canadians with safe homes and safe communities.

Critical to the NDDDB's success is the number of samples in the Data Bank. The comparison of DNA collected from crime scenes against convicted offender samples often goes beyond the initial crime scene to suspect match. Once newly convicted offenders are entered in the NDDDB, it is possible to determine if they are linked to other crimes where a suspect has not been identified. Offenders rarely commit only one crime in their lifetime, or limit their crime to a particular type of offense, so the more samples that can be collected, the more that can be matched.

More routine ordering of the collection of DNA samples from those convicted of secondary offences would greatly assist in populating the NDDDB. The NDDDB is working to raise the justice community's awareness of this opportunity to increase NDDDB entries and help police to link unsolved crimes with known offenders. Although police investigators have been diligent in collecting crime scene evidence for DNA analysis, the critical link is a database populated with DNA samples from convicted offenders who may be responsible for other crimes.

Forensic Laboratory Services is always looking for new and better ways to process and report on DNA samples. New robotics processing technology at the Vancouver and Ottawa sites will increase the sampling capacity and decrease processing times for DNA samples. This means that more samples will be processed faster, helping police officers to identify suspects more quickly and lay charges more effectively. Police should begin to see the effects of these enhancements in three to six months.

The NDDDB has accomplished a great deal in the past three years due largely to the cooperation of its law enforcement partners. The marriage of science and policing continues to yield significant results in solving crime.