The 2018 Camp Fire: Integration of Rapid DNA into Disaster Victim Identification

Kimberly D. Gin, Sacramento County Coroner
Richard Selden, Founded and Chief Scientific Office, ANDE Corporation

In November 2018, the Camp Fire raged through Butte County, consuming 800 acres of Northern California per minute. It is the deadliest wildfire in California history. Kim Gin, working with the Butte County Sheriff, was tasked with integrating Rapid DNA into the victim identification work flow being conducted by the Sacramento County Coroner's Office. Kim developed processes and protocols in real-time, and the ANDE Rapid DNA system identified over 85% of the remains, most in less than ten days, and all of which were severely degraded. Rapid DNA was also utilized to generate Family Reference Samples and related software was utilized for kinship analysis.

Beginning with a few square feet of office space, Rapid DNA Identification expanded to take on a central role in victim identification. Faced with burn victims, among the most difficult types of remains to identify, Kim will discuss how she integrated Rapid DNA into a team of forensic anthropologists, odontologists, and pathologists. She will be joined by Dr. Richard Selden, who was responsible for the Rapid DNA work. Together, they will present results of the Camp Fire victim identification efforts and discuss the rationale and benefits of using Rapid DNA in the field. Finally, Kim will review the lessons learned from this experience, including sometimes surprising synergies that emerged.