

DO YOU KNOW WHAT IS HAPPENING WITH YOUR LAB'S CODIS HITS?

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CODIS serves as a valuable tool for aiding investigations. For the North Louisiana Criminalistics Laboratory (NLCL), approximately 21% of the forensic DNA profiles that are entered into CODIS generate a hit. Hits, as defined in this study, include forensic, offender, and arrestee hits. Burglary and sex-related crimes generate the most hits at the NLCL. Our data suggests criminal justice agencies do not further investigate the majority of CODIS hits. The total number of hits pursued by criminal justice agencies does not reflect the total number of CODIS hits for the lab. We have seen two possibilities for this occurrence: 1) the statute of limitations has run out for the specified offense or 2) the victim no longer wants to pursue charges. The majority of hits pursued by the criminal justice agencies that we serve are burglary related offenses and the statute of limitations for the state of Louisiana is six years. To prevent the statute of limitations from expiring on certain offenses, criminal justice agencies can draw up John Doe warrants. If the DNA profile hits in CODIS at a much later date, this allows the CODIS hit to still be useful to the investigation. Unfortunately, it is unavoidable when victims no longer want to pursue charges. For the hits pursued, reference samples may not be submitted. Federal guidelines specify that after an agency is notified of a CODIS hit, they are required to submit a reference sample to their laboratory if they intend to charge that individual with the specified offense. This guideline is in place because in the majority of states, CODIS hits are not admissible in court. The submission of the reference sample fulfills the function of a new investigative lead for the criminal justice agency; and therefore the DNA evidence will be admissible in court. Therefore, it is imperative that labs educate criminal justice agencies regarding CODIS and its ability to help solve crimes. Only then can laboratories make the most out of each CODIS hit.