

Wisconsin State Crime Laboratory Fact Sheet

There are 10 units within the WSCL: Controlled Substances, Crime Scene Response, DNA Analysis, DNA Databank, Firearms/Toolmarks, Forensic Imaging, Latent Print/Footwear Analysis, AFIS, Toxicology, and Trace Evidence. While evidence submissions remain high when compared to submission rates in previous years, output in casework continues to improve in most units at the state's crime lab. In the toxicology unit, case submissions pending analysis have dropped from over 500 case assignments, to just over 300 case assignments. Improvement can be seen in the controlled substances unit, where case submissions pending analysis has dropped from more than 1,400 cases in July 2017, to just 700 cases in September. These improvements are particularly astounding, giving the increasing complexity of the substances now being analyzed, such as synthetic drugs and the fact that the WSCL also must analyze bodily fluid samples and controlled substances for the presence of multiple complex chemicals. Further, due to the limitations of the assays, WSCL toxicologists can only test for one chemical category at a time, so they are required to spend more time and scientific resources on each case.

The NFSTC assessment noted multiple factors impact the DNA Analysis Unit's ability to improve turnaround times.

First, new forensic requirements issued by the FBI in 2017 required that all crime labs conducting forensic DNA analysis expand the number of locations on the DNA strand being analyzed by 40%. As a result, the DNA Analysis Unit at the WSCLB has to spend nearly twice as much time on interpretation of a DNA profile that has been generated. Often times, more than one DNA profile can be generated from a single piece of evidence.

Further, the most difficult and time consuming cases for a DNA analyst to analyze are sexual assault cases; and the number of sexual assault DNA cases has increased in the last four years. Already, more sexual assault DNA evidence has been submitted in 2018 than in previous years, with three months still left in 2018. Sexual assault evidence is the most difficult and time consuming evidence to analyze because unlike in other DNA evidence, they almost always contain a complex mixture of genetic material from multiple individuals due to the nature of those crimes. Separating, interpreting, and analyzing these mixtures is complex scientific work that must be conducted for each mixture. Additionally, each mixture must be technically reviewed.

DNA Analysis Unit Cases

	2015 Cases	2016 Cases	2017 Cases	2018 Cases (As of Sept. 30)
Sexual Assaults	1365	1453	1476	1523
Homicides	579	616	529	387
Violent Crimes/Battery	1005	1050	1084	893
Property Crimes	990	1118	1221	951
Drug/Other	195	274	294	240
Totals	4134	4511	4634	3994

Second, DNA analysts frequently go above and beyond doing laboratory analysis and routinely go into the field to collect evidence with the mobile Crime Scene Response Teams (CSRT), resulting in time away from the lab analyzing evidence. Despite a 232% increase in calls from 2014 to 2016, the WSCL has never declined a request for assistance by local law enforcement by the CSRT. For example, in responding to an active shooter investigation in Middleton, Wis., on Wednesday, September 19, 2018, 14 staff members from the WSCL responded to collect and process evidence, resulting in analysts spending approximately 258 work hours away from the laboratory.

Attorney General Schimel previously authorized additional overtime, tightened evidence submission guidelines, and hired five additional limited term CSRT positions in 2017. However, the NFSTC assessment identified that even with this change more positions were needed for crime scene response. In DOJ's budget request, the agency requests funding and position authority for the recommended full time additional CSRT positions.

Additionally, the NFSTC noted that the Milwaukee crime lab is in need of more physical space, which would help the DNA Analysis Unit in particular and determined that the DNA Analysis Unit needs additional staff and investments in new technology. Activities such as scientific validations, quality control tasks and robotics pull analysts away from doing casework because there is no one else available to undertake these tasks and the assessment demonstrated that additional staff can perform many of these specialized duties instead.

In 2017, Attorney General Schimel also created a dedicated forensic biologist team, made up of six limited term forensic biologists, to assist the unit in documenting evidence, determining the existence of biological fluids, and preparing the sample for analysis. The goal of the forensic biologist team is to allow DNA analysts to spend more time doing scientific evaluation and analysis. However, the independent assessment identified that at least three additional full time biologists are needed, which was included in DOJ's budget request.

Increasing demand has stretched the budget and resources of the WSCL. Forensic analysis requests by prosecutors and defense attorneys have increased every year from 2012 to 2017, with an increase in assignments by approximately 22,000. Between 2015 and 2017, the WSCL saw a 26% increase in case submissions.

Also, below-market compensation has led to turn-over and recruiting challenges at the WSCL, and thus changes were recommended in this area by the NFSTC assessment. High employee turnover puts the burden of training new staff on the WSCL since it takes between 12 and 24 months for a new analyst to be fully trained to authorization. DOJ's budget requests statutory changes to establish a pay progressive pay structure for crime lab analysts so that the Department can retain experienced and efficient analysts through merit based increases in pay.

Turnaround times for each of these units from January 2015 to September 2018 are attached to this press release.

[Read WSCL's Needs Assessment Report from the National Forensic Technology Center at Florida International University.](#)