

Crime Lab

International Forensic Facilities: A Question and Answer Session

Tue, 02/12/2013 - 12:47pm by Ken Mohr

While representing Crime Lab Design (CLD), I have made many international friends that now hold a special place in my heart. Having traveled to their home countries and having had the opportunity to share in the design and planning of both new and renovated forensic facilities with them; I would like to better inform the forensic community just how important international forensic science facility projects are and how they can help grow the international forensic community.

DEEPER INSIGHTS



Implementation of NGS in Operational Forensic Casework Laboratories

Forensic

This has been facilitated by ICITAP and their goals to: 1) Maximize organizational efficiency - We provide solutions that achieve high performance adjacencies designed to improve floor plate organization and building stacking efficiency. 2) Ensure the economical expenditure of resources - We will not take a forensic lab designed previously and place it in a foreign country. We will take the lessons learned from the past projects and blend them with the knowledge of local resources to arrive at the best solution for the agency in their region of the world. 3) Develop a safe, secure, and well-designed facility - We continue to introduce international facilities to modular

planning as this approach ties laboratory bench design to the prevailing structural system to maximize the lab furniture systems, facilitates hazardous zoning in the lab, and creates clear exit paths.

Over the years designing, planning, and programming such facilities, I have come to know Mr. Daniel Garner. Dan is not only a dear friend and collage but recently retired from the International Criminal Investigative Training Assistance Program (ICITAP) as their Chief of the Forensic Services Division. He has graciously accepted to help me tackle this topic by answering some questions about ICITAP and its goals.

Daniel D. Garner, Ph.D. served for 13 years as ICITAP's Chief of the Forensic Services Section under the Criminal Division for the U.S. Department of Justice. Prior to that Dan was the President of Cellmark Diagnostics, Inc. and the Chief for the Forensic Science Laboratory for the U.S. Treasury Department under the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, and Firearms. He has also served as a professor of Forensic Science and has produced over 40 scientific publications and presentations.

Q: What benefits are there to the United States supporting International Forensic Laboratories?

A: Having partner forensic laboratories in other countries is increasingly of major benefit to the U.S. in the investigation of multi-national criminal activity and the subsequent prosecution of the criminals. Historically, international criminal activity occurred on the border of two countries and generally involved smuggling goods and/or people from one country to the other. Now the smuggling activity continues but involves the transportation of goods and people from one continent to another and sometimes beyond. Indeed, news reports have indicated that illicit drugs manufactured in South America have been shipped to Europe through Africa. And it is not just drugs that are being transported clandestinely but anything that can be sold or traded for profit such as stolen vehicles and art, firearms, counterfeit software and currency, exotic animals and plants, and people for slave labor or the sex trade.

These multi-national crimes can be complex and difficult to investigate for a number of reasons including the simple fact that some of the jurisdictions (governments) involved might not work well with others for a variety of political, religious, or racial reason. Assuming two or more national jurisdictions are

willing to work together on a criminal investigation, the sharing of forensic information could be prohibited or severely limited due to incompatible scientific/technical systems such as DNA databases of different genetic markers or automated fingerprint databases from different manufacturers using different algorithms.

Assuming these countries that want to share forensic information have compatible systems, then a remaining question concerns the quality of the data. Are all of the countries working to high quality standards in establishing their databases or did one (or more) of the countries have lower standards resulting in decreased quality of their data? It should be intuitively obvious that corrupted data would have a negative impact on the information that was to be shared from those databases which, in turn, could have an adverse impact on the criminal investigation and subsequent prosecution.

Q: Why design the International Forensic Labs to U.S. standards, guidelines, and accreditation issues?

A: For the past 25 years, the U.S. Department of Justice, working with and funded by the U.S. Department of State, has identified forensic laboratories in specific countries to collaborate with in order to facilitate the exchange of forensic information in joint investigations. Under the concept that two laboratories working to the same quality standards could exchange and rely on each other's data, efforts were focused on assisting foreign labs achieve ISO accreditation. As one would expect, the individual forensic laboratories in various countries are as varied as the countries themselves and therefore the assistance provided to them was customized to their specific needs, but with the common focus of assisting them to attain ISO accreditation. Assistance provided to all foreign laboratories included the management aspect of operating a modern forensic laboratory to international quality standards. Additional assistance was provided based upon the needs of the individual laboratory but could include technical training in any of the forensic disciplines, donation of scientific and technical equipment, renovation of facilities, and the design and construction of new laboratory facilities.

Q: How critical is pulling the right team together?

A: The design of new or renovated forensic facilities has been critical in several international forensic collaborations. While the requisite architecture and engineering skill sets is not generally resident in U.S. forensic laboratories, there are

several firms that have considerable experience designing forensic facilities including Crime Laboratory Design, Inc., who has provided assistance in Morocco, Paraguay, Kenya, and other countries.

Q: What benefits can be realized through ICITAP?

A: The results of forensic examination conducted in an ISO accredited forensic laboratory in any country, by competent, well trained examiners using quality controlled procedures on adequate instrumentation and equipment in a properly designed facility should be reliable and useful in criminal investigations and subsequent prosecutions, regardless of venue. To be able to rely on forensic examinations conducted in a foreign laboratory should result in savings in both time and costs.

In summary ICITAP helps international forensic communities operating modern forensic laboratories to international quality standards and helps develop and upgrade forensic facilities, staff, and resources to better combat crimes, both in their own countries and in working cooperatively on international crimes. I want to thank Dan Garner for answering these questions on ICITAP.

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