



ATF News

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Office of Public Affairs, Washington, D.C.

FY-07-05

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For Immediate Release

March 15, 2007

ATF'S FORENSIC SCIENCE LABORATORY IN SAN FRANCISCO RE-ACCREDITED THROUGH 2011

SAN FRANCISCO-- The Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives (ATF) Forensic Science Laboratory in San Francisco, which has been instrumental in helping to solve 31 arson attacks by the Animal Liberation Front and Earth Liberation Front (ALF/ELF) and played a key role in the 1999 Ahmed Ressam case, has been reaccredited through September 2011 by the American Society of Crime Laboratory Directors Laboratory Accreditation Board (ASCLD/LAB).

In a Feb. 20 letter, the ASCLD/LAB board notified ATF that following a rigorous on-site inspection the laboratory here – one of three ATF maintains in the United States -- had successfully met the standards for re-accreditation. The lab was accredited in the disciplines of trace evidence, firearms/toolmarks and latent prints.

The ASCLD/LAB granted the re-accreditation after a thorough evaluation of the laboratory's management practices, personnel qualifications, technical procedures, quality assurance program and facilities.

“Successful re-accreditation makes a statement to prosecutors, law enforcement and other professionals that our laboratory continues to meet the very highest of standards,” said Michael W. Ethridge, ATF director of laboratory services.

“I am very proud of the exceptional forensic work that is performed by our examiners and the dedicated efforts put forth in support of our ATF Mission,” said Donna J. Read, chief of the Forensic Science Laboratory – San Francisco. “This re-accreditation by ASCLD/LAB is just another example of these efforts, and the commitment by management to a vigorous quality assurance system.”

The ATF laboratory in San Francisco has a proud history, having been the first federal crime laboratory accredited by ASCLD/LAB in 1984. It has been successfully reaccredited every five years since.

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The facility was instrumental in helping to solve 31 arson attacks carried out by the ALF/ELF domestic terrorist groups over the past 14 years and was credited for its forensic work on the Ahmed Ressam case. U.S. Customs agents arrested Ressam, a native of Algeria, in December 1999 as he tried to enter the United States with more than 100 pounds of explosives stashed in the wheel bed of the trunk of his rental car. He is serving a 22-year prison term for attempting to bomb Los Angeles International Airport.

ATF maintains forensic laboratories in Ammendale, Md., at its National Laboratory Center, in Atlanta, and here. The ATF labs were pioneers in the creation of a national program for the accreditation of forensic laboratories having been accredited since 1984.

To maintain their accreditation, the ATF laboratories undergo a rigorous on-site inspection every five years. The inspection team evaluates all aspects of the laboratory, including personnel qualification and standards for evaluation; employee development and proficiency training; space, safety and security; and evidence control, security, handling and preservation. The inspection also evaluates management organization, planning, budget and administrative practices; quality programs for methods and procedures, including an internal audit program; internal and external communications; instrument maintenance, calibration and use of comparison standards; administrative and technical review of work products; and internal and external proficiency testing. In addition, each laboratory is inspected annually by an internal inspection team.

ASCLD/LAB accredits more than 300 forensic laboratories worldwide.

More information on ATF and its programs and resources is at www.atf.gov.

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