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NEARLY 1.2 MILLION FORENSIC REQUESTS TO PUBLICLY FUNDED CRIME LABS WERE BACKLOGGED AT YEAREND 2009, UNCHANGED FROM 2008

WASHINGTON – At the end of 2009, the nation’s publicly funded crime labs had an estimated backlog of 1.2 million requests for forensic services, relatively unchanged from the backlog at yearend 2008, the Bureau of Justice Statistics (BJS) announced today. A request was defined as backlogged if it had not been completed within 30 days.

In 2009, the 411 federal, state, county and municipal labs began the year with more than 1.0 million backlogged requests and received an additional estimated 4.1 million new requests for forensic services from law enforcement and other criminal justice agencies during the year.

Forensic biology accounted for about a third (34 percent) of all requests received in 2009, and about three-quarters of the total backlog at yearend 2008 and 2009. Forensic biology involved the screening or DNA analysis of biological samples (such as blood and saliva) from criminal casework or for DNA database profiles.

In 2009, all 50 states, the District of Columbia and the federal government required offenders convicted of certain crimes to provide DNA samples. Some jurisdictions also collected DNA from certain arrestees. DNA samples collected from convicted offenders and arrestees for a DNA database accounted for more than 1.0 million of the nearly 1.4 million forensic biology requests in 2009.

The analysis of controlled substances (33 percent) and toxicology (15 percent)—which involved examining blood, other body fluids and tissue for alcohol, drugs and poisons—were the most requested services, following forensic biology.

During 2009, publicly funded crime labs provided an average of five different types of forensic services. About three in 10 publicly funded crime labs outsourced some work to private labs or other public facilities to address the demands for forensic services.

The composition of the requests handled by crime labs varied across federal, state, county and municipal jurisdictions. For example, forensic biology comprised 61 percent of requests made to federal labs, 46 percent of requests to state labs, and less than 10 percent of requests to county and municipal labs.

(MORE)

In 2009, 83 percent of publicly funded crime labs were accredited by a professional forensic science organization. Most received accreditation through the American Society of Crime Laboratory Directors/Laboratory Accreditation Board. State labs (92 percent) were the most likely to be accredited, while municipal labs (62 percent) were least likely.

The number of full-time employees in publicly funded crime labs increased from an estimated 11,000 in 2002 to 13,100 in 2009. More than half of crime lab employees were analysts or examiners who prepared and analyzed evidence and reported on their conclusions.

The vast majority (97 percent) of publicly funded crime labs performed proficiency testing, ensuring the accuracy and reliability of forensic examinations. More than a third (36 percent) used random case reanalysis by another examiner and a tenth performed blind tests.

The annual operating budget for all publicly funded crime labs increased from about \$1.0 billion in 2002 to \$1.6 billion in 2009. Personnel costs accounted for about three-quarters of the expenditures of publicly funded crime labs in 2009.

These findings come from the third Census of Publicly Funded Forensic Crime Laboratories, a BJS data collection that provides a comprehensive look at forensic services across the nation and the resources devoted to completing the work. This report provides detailed information on the 411 publicly funded crime labs operating in 2009 and compares those findings to data from the 2002 and 2005 censuses.

The report, *Census of Publicly Funded Forensic Crime Laboratories, 2009* (NCJ 238252), was written by BJS statisticians Matthew Durose and Andrea Burch, and Kelly Walsh of the Urban Institute. The report, related documents and additional information about the Bureau of Justice Statistics' statistical publications and programs can be found on the BJS website at <http://www.bjs.gov/>.

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