

DATE ISSUED: March 21, 2003

REPORT NO. 03-055

ATTENTION: Public Safety and Neighborhood Services Committee  
Docket of March 26, 2003

SUBJECT: Police Department Crime Lab's "Cold Hit" DNA Matching Program

### SUMMARY

THIS IS AN INFORMATION ITEM ONLY. NO ACTION IS REQUIRED ON THE PART OF THE COMMITTEE OR THE CITY COUNCIL.

### BACKGROUND

A "cold hit" is a crime case that is solved by using a database of the deoxyribonucleic acid ("DNA") profiles of convicted felons rather than other investigative information. In general, these cases would not be solved if not for DNA matching.

### DISCUSSION

The Police Department's Crime Lab began using California's felon database in early 2001. At that time, the Crime Lab started using a new type of DNA analysis, a standardized method now used by crime labs across the country. Also, the California Department of Justice ("DOJ") invested sufficient time and money in the statewide DNA felon database to make it useable. The population of felons in the database rose from about 40,000 to more than 200,000 in early 2001, because the DOJ's intense efforts.

The Crime Lab's first "cold hit" occurred in March of 2001, and it was highly publicized. Scott Erskine, a convicted felon, was identified as being the source of semen found on the body of 13-year-old Charlie Keever, who with 9-year-old Jonathan Sellers was found murdered in Imperial Beach in 1993. Erskine is scheduled to go to trial in summer 2003 for these murders.

Since then, the Crime Lab has had 21 additional cold hits. Two of these were murders, the rest sex crimes. Recently the 1986 murder of 14-year-old Rickie Ann Blake was solved through a cold hit against a convicted felon in the state database. This felon had since been released from

the California Department of Corrections, had gone to Indiana, where he re-offended, and was again out on court-supervised release when he was arrested by Indiana State authorities and San Diego Police detectives. He currently awaits extradition.

In addition to cold hits on identified felons, the Crime Lab has tied together ten rape series through DNA profiles. The "Banker's Hill series" was an excellent example. In that series the Crime Lab tied four rape cases together through DNA profiles. Additionally two Arizona rape cases and an Oklahoma case were found to show the same DNA profile for the assailant. The perpetrator has been apprehended.

The above case shows that DNA laboratories are now tied together nationally. San Diego's cases are first searched against felons and other cases in California, and then automatically are searched against other states' felon databases and case evidence samples. More than 1.4 million felons now have DNA profiles in the National DNA Identification System (NDIS).

California is ahead of most of the nation in the use of DNA to solve suspectless sexual assault cases. The governor allocated \$25 million in 2000 to analyze the 15,000 suspectless sex crimes cases that had been sitting in police property rooms across the state. More than 400 of these cases were in the Police Department's property room. The vast majority of these have now been analyzed. The grant to finish this work extends through January 2005. The Department has received \$985,000 under this "Cold Hit" grant.

Respectfully submitted,

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David Bejarano  
Chief of Police  
Police Department

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Approved: P. Lamont Ewell  
Assistant City Manager

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