

# New lab to help Hills police investigate crimes

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Those of you who have spent years watching television police and detective shows probably think you know a lot about evidence at a crime scene. But there's more to it than meets the eye.

In fact, the human eye alone can miss a lot of pertinent evidence that could either acquit the innocent or convict the guilty.

"Evidence will help reinforce or corroborate information we have for someone who is a suspect," said Sgt. Pat Browne of the Farmington Hills Police Department, who is in charge of the department's new crime lab.

Up and running, though not quite finished, the new lab will allow the department's 10 evidence technicians to do some of the basic evidence testing in-house. That means the process will be more timely for the department, which like many other agencies have long relied on the Michigan State Police, now strapped with budget cuts.

"We can see where the state police crime labs are having a difficult time processing evidence due to cutbacks," said Farmington Hills police Chief William Dwyer.

Results of fingerprint tests will be received in a more timely fashion, which means they can be directly put on law enforcement's automatic fingerprinting identification system and get them out to other agencies.

That doesn't mean all types of tests can be conducted in the new lab. Serology or blood tests, and ballistics, for example, will still have to be conducted by the state police.

The lab was built in a storage area with \$35,000 from narcotics forfeiture money. Some equipment still needs to be purchased — when more forfeiture money comes around — such as an alternate light source that will allow more sophisticated tests, said officer Jim Worthington, a 13-year evidence technician.



STAFF PHOTOS BY SHARON LEMIEUX

**Checking for prints:** Officer Jim Worthington soaks the fingerprint riddled envelope with a chemical and then applies heat from an iron.

For example, with the special light source, technicians will be able to find fibers, hair or blood on items, such as walls or a bathtub. "We can shine it on the floor and it would show the footprints," Worthington said.

One of the latest tests Worthington conducted was for fingerprints on a .357-Magnum, which was involved in what appears to be a suicide. A special area has been set to protect officers when they conduct tests with chemicals that could harm them.

Technicians also will conduct initial narcotics tests to determine if a powder is cocaine or heroin, for example. Those substances also will be sent to the state police for further analysis, Browne said.

The new lab also provides technicians with a specific and secure place to bring evidence, where the basic tests can be conducted, and then packaged properly for further analysis by the state police.

"We have had a concern about the security of evidence," Dwyer said. "We didn't feel we had an appropriate area to do the processing. Evidence must be physically transported to the state po-

lice. Anyone who takes or comes in contact with the evidence will be called to testify in court."

Gathering evidence is no simple task. Take a murder for example. In addition to gathering pertinent items of evidence, such as shell casings and blood samples, police photograph the scene, followed by videotaping. Police also sketch the scene to provide dimensions of the body to shells, for example, and to show a sequence of events, Browne said.

"We check the scene thoroughly to see what perhaps fell off a body," Browne said, adding that clothing also is checked thoroughly. "We collect things so there's a minimum amount of handling."

Technicians cover the department's five daily shifts. "We're pretty much covered around the clock," Browne said.

As well as an eye on more necessary purchases, technicians, who are members of the Michigan-Ontario Identification Association, have a station wagon for evidence gathering, and additional training is planned.

"Within the next 10 years we will do more and more," Dwyer said.



A close look: The handgun being examined is part of a police investigation.

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