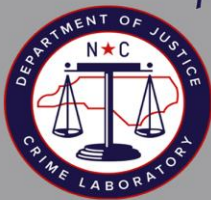




North Carolina State Crime Laboratory Forensic Update



Volume 3, No. 4

May 13, 2019

Dear Criminal Justice Stakeholders,

The State Crime Lab has been continuously accredited as a forensic testing laboratory for over thirty years! This edition of ***The NC State Crime Laboratory Forensic Update*** is part two of the history of the Lab and takes a closer look at forensic laboratory accreditation. I hope you enjoy reading it.

As always, if you have questions, please reach out to us.

John Byrd
Director, North Carolina State Crime Laboratory

"Truth through science."

History of the North Carolina State Crime Laboratory – Part II

Why Accreditation? – In the early 1970s, a national voluntary forensic proficiency testing program was initiated and carried out in the United States. The varied results from the proficiency tests revealed the need to establish voluntary quality and management standards for the operation of forensic laboratories and by doing so, help restore public confidence in the work performed by the nation's crime laboratories. A quality forensic laboratory is essential for the trust and confidence of the public and the criminal justice system and accreditation was a way to do this by "formalizing...technical training programs for all forensic disciplines...and the formalizing of operational policies and procedures."ⁱ

In the fall of 1973, over 30 crime laboratory directors from around the United States were invited to meet with FBI Director Clarence Kelly, FBI Assistant Director Briggs White and other FBI personnel in Quantico, Virginia. The purpose of the meeting was to open channels of communication between crime laboratories around the country and the FBI. In the fall of 1974, a second meeting of laboratory directors was held at Quantico. The participants at this second meeting officially formed the American Society of Crime Laboratory Directors (ASCLD), one of the earliest nonprofit organizations to specifically address quality in crime laboratories.

One of the early committees appointed by ASCLD was the *Committee on Laboratory Evaluation and Standard* and, as a result, the very first laboratory obtained ASCLD accreditation in 1982. A member of that committee included Ralph (Bud) Keaton of the NCSBI. Special Agent Keaton was the Chief of Laboratory Standards for the NCSBI Crime Laboratory.ⁱⁱ In 1985, the NCSBI received approval from the NC Department of Justice to begin the process of obtaining laboratory accreditation, a strictly voluntary program. This early form of accreditation

required that the laboratory demonstrate that its management, operations, personnel, procedures and instruments, physical plant and security, and personnel safety procedures met certain standards.

On May 4, 1988, the NCSBI Crime Laboratory became the seventeenth laboratory system in the nation to be accredited, the seventh state laboratory to become accredited and the first in the southeastern part of the United States. The Raleigh Crime Laboratory received certificate #57 and the Western Regional Laboratory was certificate #58. The Crime Laboratory was re-accredited on a five year cycle in 1993, 1998, 2003, and 2008. In 2003, the NCSBI became the first laboratory in the nation to become accredited in Digital Forensics. The Triangle Regional Laboratory was accredited in 2009 with certificate #401. It was in 2009 that the DOJ and SBI approved Crime Laboratory management to pursue ISO/IEC 17025 accreditation for the next re-accreditation cycle scheduled for 2013. In March of 2011, the N.C. General Assembly passed the Forensic Sciences Act of 2011 requiring, in part, that the NCSBI Crime Laboratory be separated from the SBI, be renamed the North Carolina State Crime Laboratory (SCL) and to be, “...accredited by an accrediting body that requires conformance to forensic specific requirements and which is a signatory to the International Laboratory Accreditation Cooperation (ILAC) Mutual Recognition Arrangement For Testing.”ⁱⁱⁱ

Accredited in ISO/IEC 17025 standards in 2013 by Forensic Quality Services (FQS) and 2014 by American Society of Crime Laboratory Directors/Laboratory Accreditation Board (ASCLD/LAB) making the NC SCL, at the time, the only dual accredited lab in the country. In 2015, the SCL reverted to single accreditation and is currently accredited to ISO/IEC 17025:2015 Standards for Testing Laboratories, the FBI Quality Assurance Standards for DNA Databasing Laboratories, and the FBI Quality Assurance Standards for Forensic DNA Testing Laboratories. The SCL’s accrediting body is with ANSI/ASQ National Accreditation Board (ANAB)^{iv} and its accrediting cycle is four years. The SCL was recently reaccredited in 2018 with the next scheduled onsite assessment in 2022. All SCL policies, administrative and technical procedures are posted online at www.ncdoj.gov.

Why ISO Accreditation? – ISO/IEC^v accreditation establishes clear standards that are accepted and agreed upon by the international community. Accrediting bodies, such as ASCLD/LAB and ANAB, which wish to use ISO/IEC standards and perform accreditation, must agree to become signatories to formalized organizations such as ILAC. Organizations like ILAC ensure accrediting bodies are following and enforcing the international standards.

ⁱ Memorandum from Chief of Laboratory Standards Ralph M. Keaton to SBI Deputy Director Charles Dunn, Subject: Accreditation, On the occasion of receiving accreditation from ASCLD/LAB, May 17, 1988.

ⁱⁱ Due to the growth of laboratory personnel since the 1970s and the increased complexities of laboratory operations, this position has evolved into two: Assistant Director for Technical Operations and Laboratory Quality Manager.

ⁱⁱⁱ The NC General Assembly drafted language initially specifying the accrediting body, in this case ASCLD/LAB. Later, the General Assembly widened the pool of potential accrediting bodies by including any organization that was a signatory to the International Laboratory Accreditation Cooperation (See *Why ISO Accreditation?*, above).

^{iv} American National Standards Institute (ANSI) and American Society for Quality (ASQ) are co-owners of ANAB.

^v *International Organization for Standardization (ISO)* ISO is an independent, non-governmental international organization with a membership of 162 national standards bodies. Through its members, it brings together experts to share knowledge and develop voluntary, consensus-based, market relevant International Standards that support innovation and provide solutions to global challenges. The *International Electrotechnical Commission (IEC)* is the world’s leading organization that prepares and publishes International Standards for all electrical, electronic and related technologies.