DNA "Hits" Record Numbers in 2010 for State Patrol

Local News

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In June of 2009 an unknown male robbed a grocery store in Spokane. A wig and fake beard matching that worn by the suspect were discovered along the escape route and submitted to the crime lab. DNA recovered from both items was linked to a convicted offender in the CODIS database. Due to a previous drug conviction in 2006, he had been required to provide a DNA sample for the database. Faced with the evidence, the suspect pled guilty to robbery in May 2010.

DNA testing completed by the Washington State Patrol Crime Laboratory Division resulted in a record 379 hits in 2010 using the Combined DNA Index System (CODIS). Since it was implemented over a decade ago, this crime-fighting tool has provided investigators with over 1,500 leads.

“This is about arresting and convicting the guilty, and clearing the innocent,” said WSP Chief John R. Batiste. “DNA is the most reliable way we’ve ever had for telling if someone was present at a crime scene."

Located in Seattle, the WSP CODIS Laboratory receives approximately 1,400 convicted offender samples each month. The resulting database contains over 194,000 DNA profiles from Washington state offenders convicted of a felony, or certain gross misdemeanors and misdemeanors. State legislation also requires that registered sex and kidnapping offenders submit a DNA sample.

Samples from convicted criminals are compared regularly with DNA evidence retrieved from the scenes of more than 3,500 crimes statewide. Samples in the state database are also routinely searched against the nationwide CODIS database.

In 2010, over half of Washington’s CODIS hits were linked to burglary cases, while approximately 39% were hits in connection with violent crimes such as homicide, rape, robbery, and assault.

Of note is that 79% of the DNA hits were from convicted offenders whose profiles were in the database for typically less violent crimes, such as burglary or drug possession. This shows the value of capturing DNA from those convicted of less severe, mostly non-violent crimes.

In addition to being an all-time high, the 379 hits generated in 2010 equal a 47% increase over the 257 hits in 2009. This marked increase is attributable to a number of factors, including a pilot project testing evidence from property crimes, and technology improvements implemented by the WSP Crime Laboratory Division.

“The CODIS program is a forensic time machine”, said Forensic Laboratory Services Bureau Director Larry D. Hebert. “Our scientists use this powerful technology to link suspects to unsolved crimes, some of which were committed over 40 years ago. CODIS is also used to link

apparent unrelated cases to each other providing investigators with valuable information.”