

Bensalem Township experiences 42% reduction in property crime

Summary

- The Bensalem Township saw a 42% reduction in property crime within the first three years of implementing a DNA program
- The Bensalem Police Department is a local agency, with no forensics department and no prior DNA experience
- The department recommends more grant funding be sought to expand the program statewide

Overview

The police department of Bensalem Township in Bucks County, Pennsylvania began building a local DNA database with the help of a private lab in 2010. In 2017, it became the first police department in the United States to implement a rapid DNA program. Since bringing its DNA program online, Bensalem Township has experienced a 42% reduction in burglaries, which is especially significant given that the rest of the region only saw a 14% reduction during that same period. Bensalem's Director of Public Safety,

Fred Harran, attributes the reduction in crime to the DNA program—its ability to identify offenders and even deter potential repeat offenders from striking again.

How the program works

With the help of a Justice Assistance grant from the Pennsylvania Commission on Crime and Delinquency, Bensalem acquired an Applied Biosystems™ RapidHIT™ ID System for human identification, and set it up on the desk of Glenn Vandegrift, the Bensalem detective sergeant of forensics. Patrol officers were trained to ask persons of interest for voluntary samples and to fill out a consent form. Obtained samples are brought back to the station and submitted to the evidence locker. The DNA samples go to a forensics detective prior to submission as evidence, and the detective determines what to do with each sample.



Fred Harran, Director
of Public Safety,
Bensalem Township

“The amount of crime it [the RapidHIT ID System] solves and prevents—it’s priceless.”

– Fred Harran, Bensalem Public Safety Director



Detectives at Bensalem take two cheek swabs for all reference samples. Swab A is sent to a private lab, which returns results within 30 days. But with the rapid DNA program, swab B can be immediately processed through the RapidHIT ID System for a result in as little as 90 minutes. That result is then uploaded into their local database, which is searched for a hit. What used to take 12 to 18 months now takes 90 minutes.

Case study

Between April 13 and June 6, 2019, Bucks County, Pennsylvania, and Mercer County, New Jersey, experienced a string of 11 armed robberies. Falls Township Police Department in Bucks County obtained a sweatshirt left behind by a suspect at one of the crime scenes. Since every police officer in the county had been trained on DNA collection and processing, officers swabbed the sweatshirt and sent the sample to a private lab for processing and uploading into their local database. On June 6, 2019, Bensalem officers apprehended the suspect in the midst of yet another armed robbery of a convenience store. Officers obtained the suspect’s DNA and processed it using the RapidHIT ID System. In 90 minutes, Bensalem got a hit linking the suspect to the sweatshirt sample obtained by Bucks County. “Before rapid DNA, we weren’t able to connect the dots; with rapid DNA, we are finally able to get the answers we need to get criminals off the street,” Harran reports.

Source:

<https://ucr.fbi.gov/crime-in-the-u.s/2016/crime-in-the-u.s.-2016/topic-pages/tables/table-2>

Program results

“The amount of crime it [the RapidHIT ID System] solves and prevents—it’s priceless,” says Harran. He likens it to hiring a prolific investigator who is able to solve 35 to 50 felonies in a year with the agency, but who also generates hundreds of leads that may or may not be related to the open case. “We are always searching for new ways to prevent crime. By utilizing the rapid DNA process, we are able to identify criminals and link them to crime scenes in 90 minutes. Not only does this allow us to make a quick apprehension but, more importantly, it prevents tomorrow’s victims.”

Future opportunities

Harran notes that the success of Bensalem’s rapid DNA technology has sparked interest from neighboring agencies. He suggests coordination between multiple agencies for the cooperative purchase of a second RapidHIT ID System in Bucks County. Bensalem uses the RapidHIT ID System not only for criminal investigation but also for the identification of missing persons and the exoneration of innocent individuals. In addition, they have used it to eliminate suspects in a particular crime.

Bensalem’s implementation of rapid DNA is a multi-pronged approach to utilizing forensic DNA evidence every day through the coordination of patrol officers, investigators, prosecutors, and forensic crime laboratories.

Find out more about the RapidHIT ID System at thermofisher.com/rapiddna

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