

Week of November 19-25
Prepared by Rebecca Mitcheson

DNA Evidence and Crime Solving

“DNA Conviction,” The Times (London) November 20, 2004.

Daniel Alderson, 42, was convicted of 2 counts of sexual assault after he was traced through a relative’s DNA. Alderson was arrested after similarities were seen in a sample taken from a relative and evidence from a crime scene. Alderson’s is the first sexual assault case to be solved through a relative’s DNA.

“Orange County; Warrant Issued for DNA Strands; Man known only by his genetic markers is sought in more than a dozen bank robberies in Orange County,” Los Angeles Times November 20, 2004.

In the second such case statewide, a robbery suspect formerly known only by his DNA profile, has been arrested. After 12 years, police have identified a suspect in the rape of a teaching assistant through the state’s DNA Databank.

“Call for ban on covert DNA sampling,” The Australian November 23, 2004.

Legal and Privacy groups argued that gathering DNA samples without court approval should be banned. Police have confirmed that they have been gathering DNA samples from everyday things such as coffee cups and clothing without official approval. New guidelines governing DNA sampling are said to be under review.

Controversies Concerning DNA Databanks and Laboratories

“Md. case rattles confidence in DNA evidence; Computerized forensic analysis subject to flaws of lab workers,” The Baltimore Sun November 19, 2004.

A Montgomery County laboratory employee has been fired after allegedly falsifying DNA testing. The employee of Orchid Cellmark manipulated the analysis in 20 tests electronically overriding procedures for accuracy. The Orchid Cellmark laboratory has analyzed DNA in such high profile cases as the OJ Simpson investigation, the Unabomber and JonBenet Ramsey.

“Police to Keep Rape Kits Longer; Bensenville to hold evidence 10 years,” Chicago Tribune November 25, 2004.

The Bensenville Police Department has changed its policy on the destroying of biological evidence of sexual assault. This week the department changed its policy fearing that they might be destroying evidence that might one day be needed to solve rape cases. The change in policy came after the Police Department was questioned in the destruction of kits after the statute of limitations ran out. The decision of how long to keep rape kits of evidence is left up to the individual Police Departments whose guidelines vary from one to another.

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“Senior Judge calls for DNA Database,” The Guardian (London) November 24, 2004.

A senior appeal court judge has called for a National DNA Database to record everyone living in or entering the country.

“Man Convicted in 1991 Va. Rape of Elementary Teaching Assistant; DNA Match Found Suspect in Attack in Groveton Park,” The Washington Post November 24, 2004.

Twelve years after an elementary school teaching assistant was raped, her assailant has been found through the state’s DNA databank.

“Lawyers Alarmed at Police Powers to be Unveiled in Queen's Speech,” The Guardian (London) November 23, 2004.

In the Queen’s speech today, sweeping new powers for the sampling of DNA from minor offenders by police officers will be unveiled.

DNA Database Funding and Backlog

“Regional Roundup, Fort worth,” The Dallas Morning News, November 24, 2004.

The University of North Texas Health Science Center has received five grants totaling \$1.9 million from the Justice Department. The grants will go towards projects that focus on DNA testing of unidentified remains, and missing or exploited children and ultimately enter them into FBI databases.

“Warrant Issued on DNA Profile; Using New Methods, Investigators Link Evidence from 1984 Rapes,” Hartford Courant (Connecticut) November 25, 2004.

Police have issued a warrant for the arrest of a serial rapist who is known only by his DNA profile, the suspect is called “John Doe #1.” the first such indictment in the state.

DNA-based Post Conviction Challenges

“Accused may receive more aid under fire, court wants defendants' claims of innocence investigated,” The Dallas Morning News November 20, 2004.

Texas’ highest criminal court is asking law makers to establish legal clinics to investigate claims of innocence from inmates. The Texas Court of Criminal Appeals is concerned that the claims are not getting proper attention and that there are not enough properly trained lawyers engaged to help with the claims. The court says that they are acting now because advances in DNA testing have led to more claims of innocence.