

NEW ALASKA STATE SCIENTIFIC CRIME DETECTION LABORATORY

How will the new Crime Lab affect livability in Alaska?

Department of Public Safety (DPS) personnel will be equipped to perform their services efficiently. Criminals will no longer be emboldened to repeat burglaries, rapes, and violent crimes without apprehension. The forcible rape rate in Alaska should decrease while the safety of our roads increases (toxicology tests will be performed here, in a timely manner). Home and vehicle break-ins should decrease as investigations of these crimes lead to more convictions. In addition to being and feeling safer, Alaskans will reap near term benefit from the economic stimulus of this large construction project.

Why do we need a new crime lab?

The existing Crime Lab was built in the early 1980's and is 19,200 SF, designed to accommodate up to 20 staff. Current staff is 39. Serving the entire State of Alaska, the lab is unable to keep pace with caseloads, emergent forensic technologies, and requisite staffing levels. These issues have a direct and measurable effect on Alaska's crime rate, livability and economy. Recent legislation adds to the caseload and storage issues of the lab: HB90 generates an additional 6,000 samples per year; The pending Innocence Project legislation will require retaining all biological evidence; Anonymous Reporting of Sexual Assaults requires storing sexual assault kits indefinitely. Alaska holds the unfortunate statistic of having the highest forcible rape rate in the U.S. Due to the current lab's storage and caseload issues, rape cases that do not have an immediately-identifiable suspect go to the bottom of the pile, adding to the probability that these cases remain unsolved.

Due to the lack of space needed to process crime scene evidence and a backlog of cases, law enforcement officers no longer collect burglary crime scene evidence. The lab's scientists have been forced to prioritize which cases to investigate and must limit this to serious violent crimes.

A study by the Urban Institute Justice Policy Center cited a 40% likelihood that burglaries and non-violent crimes are committed by someone who has already committed a violent crime or even murder, or an 80% chance that they will eventually commit a violent crime. 40% of these non-violent crime scenes could have evidence that would lead us to a match with evidence from a serious assault, rape or murder.

Although current lab staff are highly productive, the existing lab's limited space inhibits the scientific and technological growth required to keep pace with current caseloads. This results in unsolved crimes remaining unsolved due to case prioritization. New DNA forensic technologies are emerging, which would allow old, unsolved cases to be reworked. This technology could allow the investigation of 500-700 existing unsolved cases, but increases the caseload of the existing lab beyond current capacity. In addition to rape and burglary evidence not being submitted, over approximately 300 toxicology cases per year are not submitted to the lab for analysis (and possible later prosecution). Alaskan defense attorneys vigorously challenge the collection and processing of forensic evidence. All of these problems, unalleviated, will get worse with time. Funding is needed now to move this project forward and ensure safety, security and justice for all Alaskans.

How will the new crime lab improve Alaska's criminal justice system?

The new full-service lab will contain nine forensic sections including three new-to-Alaska sections: Toxicology, Question Documents and enhanced DNA Analysis. Unsubmitted evidence will be submitted and processed. The new lab will include training classrooms so that officers from around the State can learn cutting-edge crime scene evidence collection procedures. The facility will accommodate future changes in forensics, improve turnaround time on submitted cases, and allow room to grow as the state's population grows beyond the year 2020. The site will also allow for building expansion, without relocation, after the lab reaches its capacity.

Size and Cost of the new lab

Our crime lab provides services to the entire state of Alaska. Labs in the lower 48 are often part of a multi-lab grouping that overlap service areas and share the workload, thereby able to function with individual smaller-sized labs. In order to provide Alaskans with a fully functioning, self-sufficient lab, we need space for services which are outsourced to the lower 48 or not done at all. The new lab will analyze question documents, trace and toxicology analysis, YSTR/DNA, and Mitochondrial DNA in-house. Trace and QD are currently sent to the FBI; turnaround can take years. Outsourced toxicology takes four months and requires experts from the outsourced labs to be flown to Alaska to testify in criminal trials, at a cost of approximately \$2,000 per day. The crime lab's goal is to process 90% of crime scene evidence within 30 days. Outsourcing costs us money (financed through a limited scope, dwindling grant) and delays during which the guilty escape conviction and the innocent may languish in legal limbo.

A full-service lab requires discrete forensic lab spaces staffed with corresponding lab staff. Several of the labs within the new crime lab will be staffed part-time with cross-discipline-trained staff. For example: trace evidence, a new service in the new lab, requires a discrete lab space, but will be staffed with analysts from other sections, causing a zero net effect to actual projected staff count.

Climatic conditions in Alaska directly affect construction costs. More space is required to accommodate oversized HVAC and heating equipment, space for entry/exit vestibules, evidence drop-off sallyport, a vehicle examination sallyport, and additional exterior wall thickness.

Alaska is considered a "high-growth" service area, with projected average population growth to the year 2020 at 19%, well above the rate for similar population areas in the lower 48. Growth is anticipated to continue at 19% to the year 2020, without the gas pipeline. Add the pipeline, and growth will be well beyond the projected average 19%.

