



Huge backlog at crime lab leaves many victims waiting for justice

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KANSAS CITY, MO (KCTV) - The police department's crime lab is backlogged, causing hundreds of victims to wait for justice, and with about 3,100 pieces of evidence waiting for analysis, many criminals are still on the streets.

For about five years, 10 positions at the police crime laboratory were frozen, meaning the position could not be filled. Police Chief Darryl Forte approved the hiring of six lab positions to try and cut down on the growing backlog.

The lab currently has to triage cases and evidence from some of the most common crimes are not examined for months.

"Burglaries, any kind of property crime, those get pushed to the back burner. It's a constant cycle because of the level of violent crime that we have," Netzel said.

The largest backlog is in the latent fingerprint section of the lab. More than 2,000 fingerprints are waiting to be analyzed.

"That's crucial because that is the fastest way to identify someone - it's faster than DNA analysis," Netzel said.

Currently the lab is overwhelmed with about 600 cases involving firearms on hold.

"We don't work cases first in, first out. What we have to address is the level of violence of a particular crime and whether or not the suspect is known or unknown," said Linda Netzel, the director of the Kansas City, MO, Regional Crime Lab.

DNA analysis is backlogged about 500 cases.

"We've had cases expire the statute of limitations before we were able to get to them," she said.

A new crime lab at 27th Street and Prospect Avenue could make room for more employees; however, the project is over budget by about \$6 million. City leaders will have to decide if they'll downsize the new lab or find funding.

"This is such a highly specialized building. We know going back to the citizens and asking to expand the lab in 10 years is not a wise use of tax dollars. The best thing is to do it right the first time," Netzel said.

Earlier in August, officials said the crime lab is over budget because of what city leaders are calling "soft costs," such as the cost of buying homes that were demolished to build the lab.

City Council members are meeting Thursday night to decide what to do about the shortfall.

The project was budgeted for \$57 million, paid for by the city's 2010 public safety sales tax renewal. Consulting fees, incidentals and acquisition costs drove the budget up to \$74 million.

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