



JAN '25 NEWSLETTER



About the Lab

The Forensic Laboratories deliver accredited scientific services supporting justice and public safety in Onondaga and the surrounding counties. Comprising six disciplines—Digital Evidence, Firearms, Forensic Chemistry, Fire Debris, Forensic Biology/DNA, and Latent Prints— The laboratories analyze evidence to aid law enforcement and the District Attorney's office.

Fast-Track Workflow

The Forensic Laboratories uses a fast-track workflow to expedite firearm operability testing for the Onondaga County DA's Office according to Penal Law 180.80, which allows 120-144 hours from the time of arrest to indictment. Upon arrival to the laboratory, firearms undergo a safety check and are kept in secure storage. When a fast-track request is received, the Latent Prints and Forensic Biology/DNA sections preserve evidence from the firearms prior to the Firearms section testing them for operability. After technical and administrative reviews, a final report is issued that can be used in grand jury. An MOU with DeWitt PD, OCSO, and SPD allows the DA's Office to waive evidence preservation, streamlining the process by skipping two steps. Challenges to this process include requests that are made before the firearms are brought to the laboratory and those with short turnaround times, which affect efficiency and timely turnaround.

Apple iOS 18 Update

The latest iOS 18 update on Apple iPhones introduces a new security feature that significantly impacts forensic data extraction. A 72-hour countdown resets after each access, placing the phone in a locked status that limits data extraction to just 5% without a passcode, whether the phone stays powered on or not. This change greatly reduces the time available for law enforcement to obtain a search warrant. To mitigate this, agencies should secure the passcode from the user or quickly transport the phone to the lab or station to install a specialized client to pause the clock while a warrant is obtained. Swift action is critical to preserve access to essential evidence. This update only affects Apple iPhone 10 and newer models.

Lab Report Distribution

With the upcoming launch of BEAST.NET, report distribution will be streamlined. Users wanting notifications to specific case reports must add themselves to the case's distribution list within the system. Agencies preferring a single point of contact (POC) for all reports can notify the lab to hard-code that individual for automatic receipt. Since the lab is not informed of personnel changes, using a generic agency email or a single POC for reports can help ensure results don't get lost when staff transition or retire. Keeping distribution lists up to date will improve communication and efficiency.

