



# Crime Lab News

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## A Message from our Director



The Arkansas State Crime Laboratory has always been fortunate to have long-term, dedicated professionals that are committed to the field of Forensic Science. One such employee is Norman Kemper. Norman has been working at the laboratory as a Forensic Drug Chemist for 39 years. During this time Norman has been an integral part of Clan Lab analysis, assisting and keeping law enforcement safe while collecting evidence. Norman not only processed Clan Labs but also played an important role in educating and training law enforcement officers throughout the state. Norman is an active member of the Clandestine Laboratory Investigating Chemists Association where he has served as President, Vice President, and served on the Board of Directors.

Norman will be retiring on June 30<sup>th</sup> of 2021. His dedication and service will be missed by all!

*Keith B. Chammell*

## Current Turn-Around Times

### Drug Chemistry

- Little Rock 2.5 months
- Lowell 5 months

### Toxicology

- DUI/DWI (LR) 45 days
- DUI/DWI (Lowell) 52 days
- Coroner (LR) 40 days
- Coroner (Lowell) 87 days
- Medical Examiner 35 days

### Latent Prints

- Comparisons (Homicide) 30 days
- Comparisons (Other) 44 days

### Firearms

- Comparisons (Homicide) 11 months
- Comparisons (Other) 36 months
- NIBIN 42 days

### Digital Evidence

- Computers 7 months
- Mobile Devices 8 months

### Trace Evidence

- Ignitable Liquids 21 days
- Primer GSR 28 days

### Serology

- Homicide 41 days
- Sexual Assault 62 days

### DNA

- Homicide 6 months
- Sexual Assault Kits 8 months
- Property/Other 36 months



## “Stop Work” Initiative

The Arkansas State Crime Laboratory is constantly working on reducing our backlog and providing the results of our analysis in a timelier manner. We realize that if our laboratory isn't efficient, delays can occur in the criminal justice system.

We want to thank all of you who have participated in our **“Stop Work”** initiative by helping us identify those cases that do not need analysis. These are cases that have gone through plea negotiations and require no further laboratory testing.

Please continue to assist us in our **“Stop Work”** initiative, helping us identify those cases that do not need analysis by contacting us at [stopwork@crimelab.arkansas.gov](mailto:stopwork@crimelab.arkansas.gov).

## Help Us by Promoting Video Testimony

The onset of the COVID-19 pandemic has caused delays and procedural changes to court systems around the State of Arkansas. Several counties have employed video testimony in an attempt to keep up with the growing number of cases awaiting trial while mitigating social gatherings. There is an overwhelming number of subpoenas on the calendar with all seventy-five counties resuming jury trials this month. Testifying via video frees up hours of travel and waiting time for our Forensic Scientists and keeps them in the laboratory to process cases. It also allows the scientist to testify in multiple jurisdictions on the same day. Please contact Isabel Higgins-Threats: [isabel.threats@crimelab.arkansas.gov](mailto:isabel.threats@crimelab.arkansas.gov) or 501-683-6149 if you are interested in video testimony.

## Sexual Assault Kit Submission & Tracking

[Arkansas HB 1567/Act 839](#) was enacted on July 19, 2019. The main points highlighted in this bill include:

- Sexual assault kits collected by a healthcare provider shall be taken into custody by a law enforcement agency within 3 business days of notice from the healthcare provider.
- Law enforcement agencies are required to submit ALL sexual assault kits to the laboratory (with the exception of anonymous kits) within 15 days of their receipt of the kit.
- Use of the sexual assault kit tracking system is required.

⇒ This system allows secure electronic access to tracking information by the law enforcement agency, healthcare provider, laboratory, and survivor of a sexual assault

⇒ The laboratory maintains this tracking software. If law enforcement or a medical provider needs any assistance, they can reach out to Andrea Swift or email [SAKT Admin@crimelab.arkansas.gov](mailto:SAKT Admin@crimelab.arkansas.gov)

Please refer to the following resources for more information:

- <https://crimelabsakt.arkansas.gov/SexualAssaultKitTracking/>
- [Sexual Assault Kit Tracking Webinar](#)

## Updated Case Management Guidelines and Reminders

The goal of the Arkansas State Crime Laboratory is to provide forensic services to all law enforcement agencies in Arkansas' seventy-five counties. Cases should be analyzed in chronological order unless priority has been made by the Director, Assistant Director, or the appropriate Section Chief. In order to provide quality and timely services for the criminal justice system the following case management guidelines have been established.



Investigators should prioritize evidence items on the ASCL Submission Sheet (except Drug and Toxicology submissions), listing the first 5 pieces of evidence in order of priority. The most probative item(s) in the case will be examined first. The extent of analysis will depend on investigative needs, as determined by the analyst and the submitting agency.

### **General:**

Once identification has been established between an item of evidence and a developed suspect(s), the analysis of evidence may be discontinued, pending discussions with the prosecuting attorney having jurisdiction over the case.

### **Drugs:**

- Plants should be submitted without soil and in paper bags or cardboard boxes. If possible, strip leaves from large stalks before submitting the evidence.
- Semi-quantitative testing will be performed to provide general guidance on whether a sample has a response of less than or greater than 1%  $\Delta^9$ -THC. Quantitative analysis is not routinely performed but will be considered, if requested by the prosecuting attorney.

### **Latent Prints:**

The ASCL does not conduct footwear or tire analysis.

### **Physical Evidence:**

**Trace:** Items must be packaged in an airtight container (paint can or canning jar) at the time of collection in order to be tested for accelerants.

**Serology:** Crimes Against Persons Cases- No more than two items, identified by the analyst and/or submitting agency as the most probative item(s) in the case, will be tested. If the items tested have positive findings (e.g., blood), a report will be generated, samples will be submitted to DNA, and all testing will be concluded.

### **Forensic DNA:**

- If a probative DNA profile is obtained that identifies a developed suspect, all further testing may be discontinued unless case circumstances warrant additional testing.
- Property Cases: No more than two items, identified by the analyst and/or submitting agency as the most probative item(s) in the case, will be tested.
- Y-STR testing may be used for cases involving homicides and sexual assaults.

### **Firearms:**

Cartridge casings from .300 Blackout rifles will be routinely entered into the NIBIN database. Operation Shutdown: Swabs will not be collected for 'Touch DNA'.

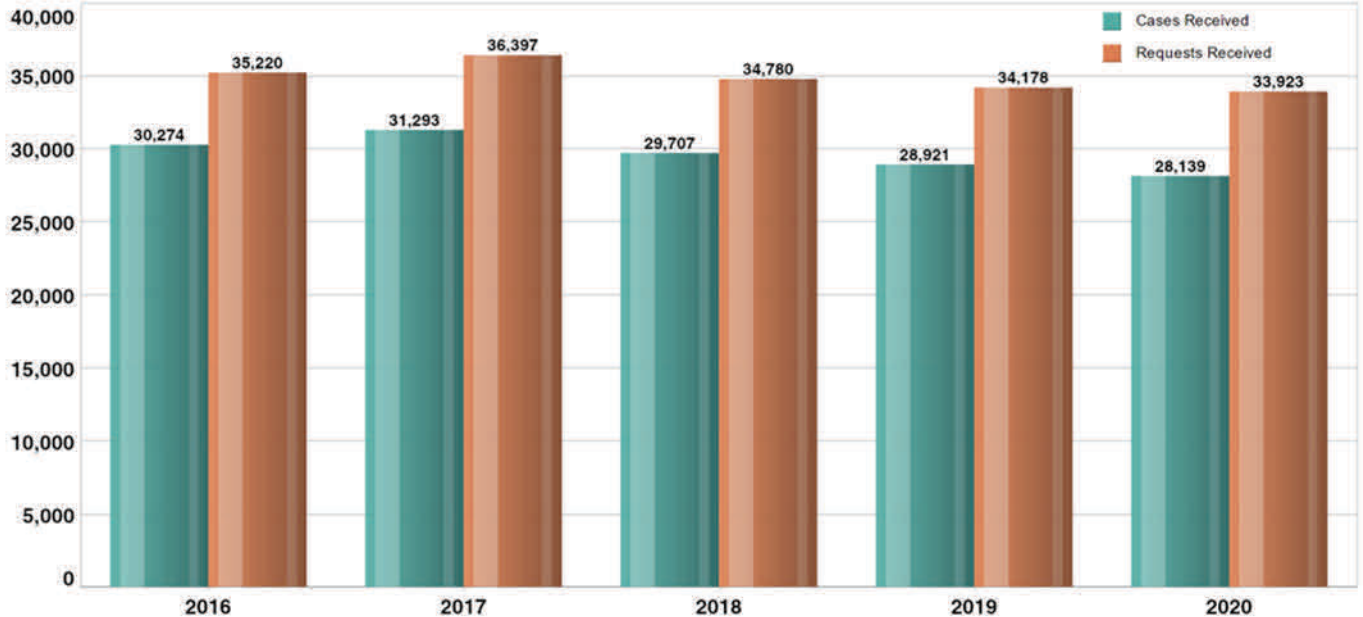
### **Toxicology**

Only drug overdose death cases and Medical Examiner cases will undergo quantitation of drugs.

## A Look Back at 2020 & Beyond

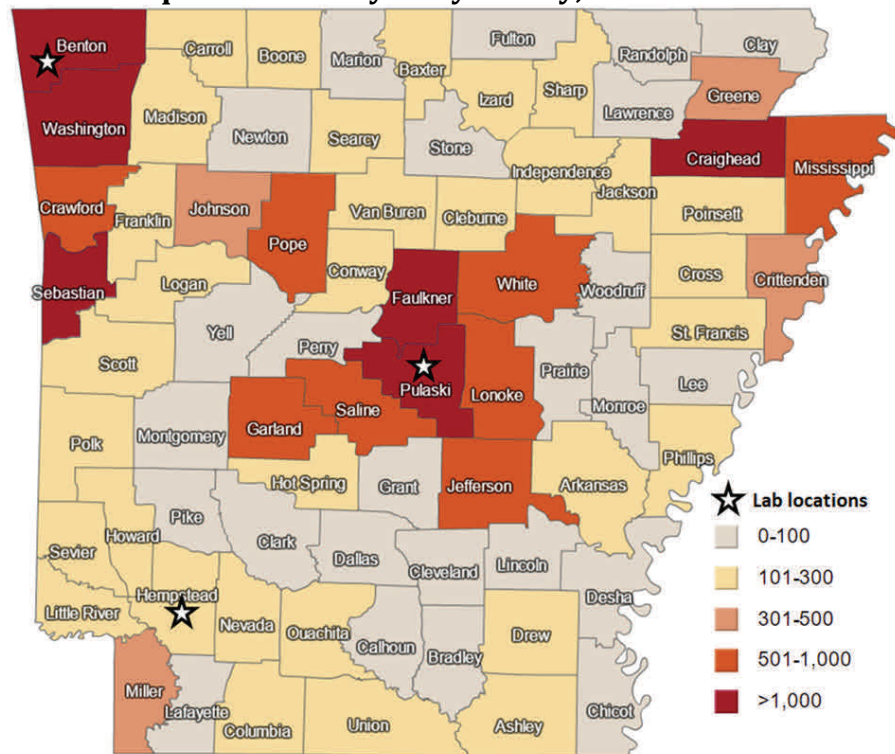
In calendar year 2020, the ASCL received 28,139 cases, which comprised 33,923 requests. This is consistent with cases and requests received in 2019.

Cases/Requests received for analysis, 2016-2020

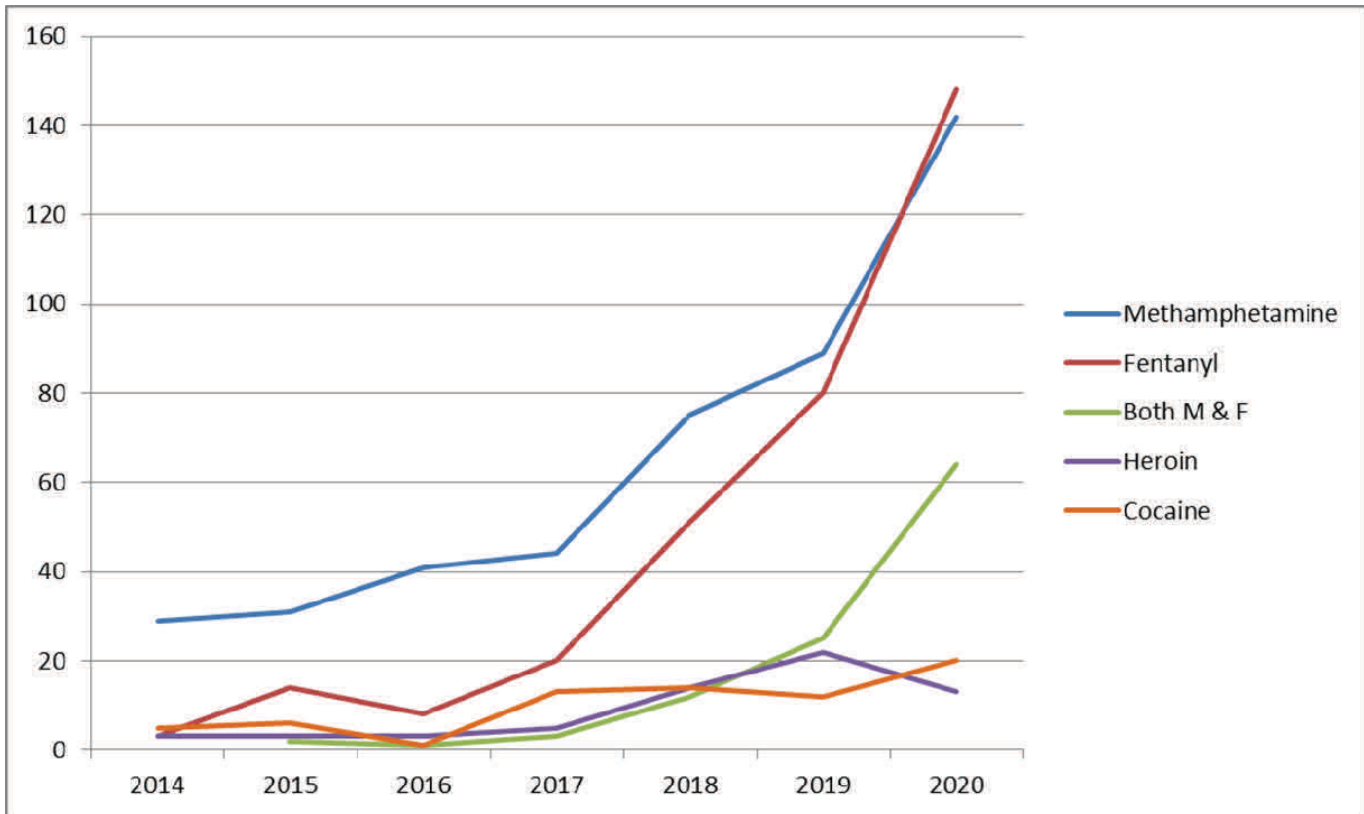


The map below shows that central and northwest regions of the state submit a higher caseload. Benton and Washington counties are in the High Intensity Drug Trafficking Area (HIDTA) and reflect the necessity for the new Lowell Regional Laboratory.

Requests for analysis by county, 2020



2014-2020 ASCL Autopsies—Cause of Death: Drug Overdose



In 2020, there was an 85% increase in fentanyl-related drug overdose deaths. In fact, fentanyl surpassed methamphetamine-related deaths. These alarming statistics show trends that are seen across the United States. In the 2021 Arkansas Legislative Session, Act 887 was enacted, increasing the charge for possession, purpose to deliver, delivery, and trafficking for heroin and fentanyl.

The table below depicts the 34% increase in homicide deaths in 2020, when compared to 2019.

Year	Cause: Drug Overdose	Manner: Homicide	Total	Fentanyl	Heroin	Meth
2014	222	238	1422	3	3	29
2015	209	218	1268	14	3	31
2016	207	270	1445	8	8	41
2017	285	300	1562	19	5	44
2018	322	285	1504	51	14	75
2019	263	288	1448	80	22	89
2020	<b>327</b>	<b>386</b>	1427	148	13	142

## Announcements!



Welcome aboard! Congratulations to our newest employees:

- \* Michelle DePriest — Administrative Support
- \* Sue Peña — Morgue Technician
- \* Megan Kuchiniski — Forensic Technician (Lowell)
- \* Jessica Szuba — Forensic Technician (Lowell)



Emme Copeland has accepted a position as a Forensic Serologist in the Physical Evidence Section. She'll be transitioning gradually from her current duties in Evidence Receiving. We know that she'll be a great asset to the work that we do for the people of Arkansas!



Norman Kemper, after 39 years of service, is retiring from the Forensic Chemistry Section on June 30. If you have questions about an illicit laboratory, please contact Terry Lucas (Little Rock) at 501-683-6229 or Brandon Davis (Lowell) at 479-365-8707

## Section Focus: Medical Examiner's Office

The ASCL Medical Examiner Section serves all 75 counties in the state, conducting approximately 1,500 forensic examinations per year on individuals where the death was unexplained, or where the death is due to unnatural causes. Their work attempts to identify and explain both the cause and manner of death.

In Arkansas, like the rest of the nation, there is a need to strengthen the Medical Examiner workforce by addressing the critical shortage of board-certified Forensic Pathologists. There are currently only 400-500 physicians who practice forensic pathology full-time, less than half of the total estimated need for 1,100-1,200 forensic pathologists in the United States.

Due to the shortage of Forensic Pathologists nationwide, Medical Examiner's Offices have been understaffed, including in Arkansas. Recent support by the General Assembly has enabled the laboratory to compete on a national level and successfully fill a existing vacancy.

Forensic Pathology services are critical to the citizens of Arkansas, and our laboratory will continue to provide timely and accurate services that families of victims deserve.

## ASCL Performance Survey

Feedback from our customers is important in order to keep up with expectations. Continued feedback is necessary to remain aligned to goals, make important decisions, develop strategies, and improve relationships. Please take a moment to check out our survey at the link below:

<https://forms.gle/ps49najmPKUeZ1aA> A \$25 Amazon gift card is given out quarterly to one participant, so don't miss out!! Below are just a few comments from our customers:

- "Great staff, always helpful ."
- "The employees at Little Rock crime lab evidence intake are exceptional and conduct their job beyond exceptional ."
- "Pleasant experience"



## CORE VALUES

<b>Quality</b>	Excellence, getting it right the first time, consistent performance, continuous improvement, taking pride in one’s work
<b>Teamwork</b>	Having a common vision, ensuring cohesiveness, assisting one another, supporting other sections, putting others’ interests first and making decisions based on what is best for the laboratory
<b>Safety</b>	Providing a safe work environment and educating employees on safety practices
<b>Clear Communication</b>	Communicate often, promptly, professionally and in person when appropriate
<b>Accountability</b>	Holding oneself and others responsible for productive and ethical behavior
<b>Professional Development</b>	Growing and engaging employees through training, mentoring, and providing leadership opportunities



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