



# Crime Lab News

Fall 2021

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## A Message from our Director



Many states have had difficulty trying to fill Forensic Pathologist positions because the demand is high and the number of students completing the Forensic Pathology programs are low. Lower salaries and excessive workloads contribute to individuals choosing other specializations in medicine.

Arkansas was one of these states until the 93<sup>rd</sup> General Assembly passed Act 360, which gave the ASCL the ability to develop a student loan program. Along with this benefit, the salaries for Forensic Pathologists were increased, allowing the lab to become competitive with other states. Due to these measures, the ASCL was able to recruit and hire a Chief Medical Examiner, Dr. Ted Brown, and an Associate Medical Examiner, Christy Cunningham.

The laboratory will continue to seek improvements that will make our Medical Examiner's Section and all the disciplines the laboratory the best in the nation.

## Current Turn Around Times

### Drug Chemistry

- Little Rock 4 months
- Lowell 5 months

### Toxicology

- DUI/DWI 4 months
- Coroner 4 months
- Medical Examiner 4 months

### Latent Prints

- Comparisons (Homicide) 30 days
- Comparisons (Other) 2 months

### Firearms

- Comparisons (Homicide) 11 months
- Comparisons (Other) 36 months
- NIBIN 3 months

### Digital Evidence

- Computers 12 months
- Mobile Devices 12 months

### Trace Evidence

- Ignitable Liquids 2 months
- Primer GSR 3 months

### Serology

- Homicide 30 days
- Sexual Assault 3 months

### DNA

- Homicide 11 months
- Sexual Assault Kits 8 months
- Property/Other 36 months



## Stop Work Initiative

The ASCL is constantly working on reducing the 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.



I would like 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 or other adjudication and require no further laboratory testing.

Since April of 2019, we have received emails from Prosecutors to “**Stop Work**” on 2,234 drug cases!! By looking in Court Connect, we have closed 1,462 additional cases for a total of **3,696 cases!**

Your active participation has helped improve our turn-around-time in analysis, and therefore the lab is able to get results back to you in a timelier manner.

Please continue to assist us in our “**Stop Work**” initiative, helping us identify those cases that don't need analysis by contacting us at [stopwork@crimelab.arkansas.gov](mailto:stopwork@crimelab.arkansas.gov). Your continued assistance is greatly appreciated.

## Case Management Guidelines—Drug Chemistry

**Paraphernalia is tested if it meets one of the following conditions:**

- ◆ It is the only item in the case
- ◆ It substantiates the highest charge
- ◆ It is the probable cause

### **Found Property**

- ◆ We generally do not test evidence when a suspect is not listed on the submission sheet
- ◆ Exceptions are evidence that may be a public health issue

### **Pharmaceutical Tablets/Capsules**

- ◆ Due to the increase in counterfeit tablets, results based on identification from markings will not be reported. Results will only be reported when analytical testing has been performed.

### **Illicit Tablets—NEW**

- ◆ **We will initially test five different subgroups and issue a report. If more testing is necessary, please contact a Forensic Chemistry Section Chief**

### **THC Semi-Quantitation: Plant Material**

- ◆ Qualitative test that provides general guidance on whether a sample has a response of less than or greater than a 1% delta 9 THC standard
- ◆ Performed on 14 grams or more of plant material that substantiates the highest charge
- ◆ Performed on 0.5 grams or more of plant material that is a probable cause or potential third drug

## ASCL Recognized 3rd Year in Row as Efficient Laboratory

The 2021 Foresight Maximum award was presented to fifteen participant laboratories operating at 90% or better of peak efficiency. **We are proud to announce that the Arkansas State Crime Laboratory has received this prestigious award for the third straight year.**

An endless array of metrics could be devised from the data in any crime laboratory, including but not limited to: turnaround times, funding, research & development hours, case output, and expenditure per case.

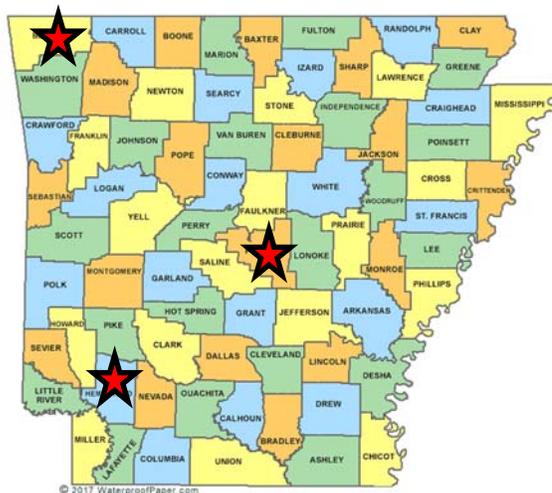
“Maximus Award winning laboratories are organizations performing at the highest level, improving efficiency, reducing turnover, and reconsidering strategic priorities to improve their contributions to the justice system in their communities. We congratulate them for their dedication to improving forensic science,” commented American Society of Crime Laboratory Directors President Erin Forry.



## Regional Laboratories

The Arkansas State Crime Laboratory is dedicated to providing quality forensic services to the criminal justice community and the State of Arkansas. As part of our efforts to continuously improve our services, we are now accepting **all** types of criminal cases at our regional laboratories (Lowell and Hope).

If the evidence cannot be analyzed at the respective regional lab, it will be transferred by our staff to the Little Rock Laboratory for testing, keeping your officers in the community that they serve. When testing is complete at the Little Rock laboratory, the evidence will be returned to the regional labs for agency pick-up.



I hope you find this service beneficial to your agency and as always, feel free to contact Andrea Swift, Evidence Receiving Section Chief ([andrea.swift@crimelab.arkansas.gov](mailto:andrea.swift@crimelab.arkansas.gov); (501) 683-6100), if you have any questions and/or concerns .

## The Medical Examiner's Section Saves Lives

Arkansas is one of the most active states with promoting organ procurement! The Medical Examiner's Section of the Crime Lab works with organ procurement organizations such as ARORA (the Arkansas Regional Organ Recovery Agency) to coordinate and maximize the possibility of organ and tissue donations, which saves and restores lives.



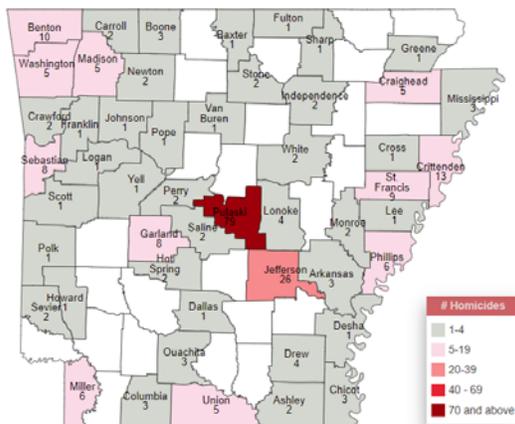
Currently, more than 100,000 people are waiting for an organ transplant. Each day, 18-20 people die because an organ did not become available to them. These are potentially *preventable* deaths; the possibility of receiving an organ for transplant increases as more and more people register to become donors. Transplantable organs include heart, liver, kidneys, pancreas, intestine and lungs. The release of organ donors from the medical legal investigative system is vitally important to saving lives.

In 2020 a total of 64 donors in Arkansas gave the gift of life-saving organs. Of those 64 donors, the Medical Examiner's Section granted release for 19. Those 19 donors gave a total of 68 organs and saved 63 lives. These donations would not have happened and lives would have been lost without the cooperation of the Arkansas ME's Section.

The Medical Examiner's Section also grants release on numerous tissue donors. The healing impact of tissue donation can be extensive. A single tissue donor can help restore the lives of 50 or more people. Skin, bone, heart valves, veins, tendons, osteoarticular tissue, and corneas can be recovered. The benefits of tissue donation are life-enhancing and lifesaving. Burn patients can recover from their wounds through donated skin, and mastectomy repairs are possible thanks to tissue donation. Bone grafts are used for spinal fusions and trauma repair. Heart valves can be donated to patients needing a heart valve replaced; donated veins can be used for patients requiring a heart bypass and kidney patients undergoing dialysis. Donated tendons can repair sports injuries, while osteoarticular donations are needed for joint repair. And cornea donation literally restores site to the blind. The Arkansas State Crime Laboratory will continue work with organ procurement organizations in order to save lives!

## Crime Lab Stats

### Homicides - Jan - Sept 2021

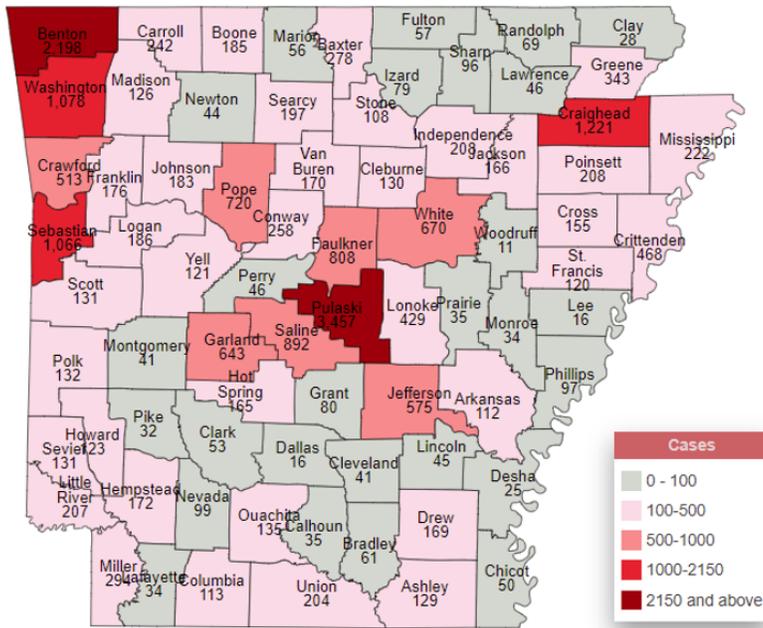


Year	# Homicides
2018	285
2019	288
<b>2020</b>	<b>386</b>
2021	337*

\*projected based on Jan - Sept

## Crime Lab Stats Continued...

### Cases Received - Jan - Sept 2021

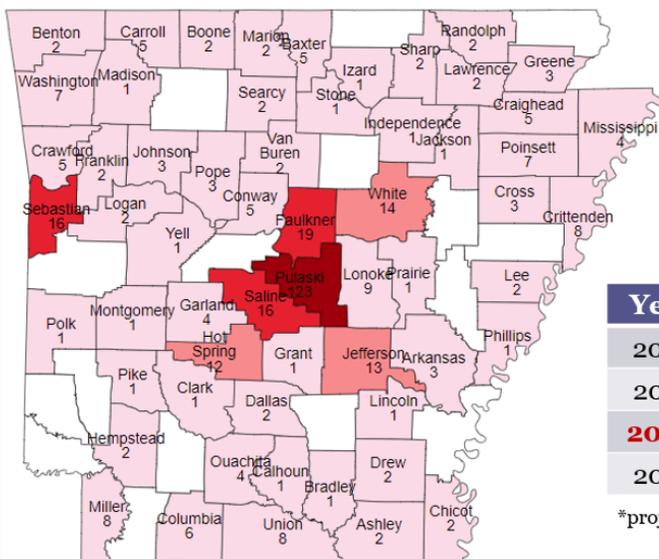


### Seized Drug Cases

Year	Cases Received
2013	16,836
2014	17,448
2015	18,075
2016	21,150
2017	22,011
2018	22,248
2019	22,063
2020	19,804
2021	22,583*

\*Projected based on cases received Jan-Aug

### Drug Overdose Deaths - May 2020 - April 2021



Year	# Drug OD
2018	322
2019	263
2020	329
2021	432*

\*projected based on Jan-April

#### Why are we seeing an increase in Drug OD cases?

- 88% are accidental
- Multi-drug intoxication – drug-drug & drug-alcohol interactions
- Illicit and counterfeit prescription drug mimic tablets
- Over 50% are fentanyl related
  - Average fentanyl concentration in blood- 22ng/mL, with deaths occurring with as little as 4ng/mL

## Announcements!

Welcome aboard! Congratulations to our newest employees since April:

- \* Nicole Hunter — DNA Analyst
- \* Meredith Lusk — DNA Technician
- \* Bryce Hansard — DNA Technician
- \* Emily Davis — Toxicologist
- \* Kintress Watson — Toxicologist
- \* Emily Murdoch — Toxicologist
- \* Virginia Rankin — Forensic Chemist
- \* Jacob Kordsmeier — Forensic Chemist
- \* Julia Vancena — Forensic Chemistry Technician
- \* Braulio Diaz — Evidence Technician
- \* Dr. Ted Brown — Chief Medical Examiner
- \* Dr. Christy Cunningham — Associate Medical Examiner



Terra Lucas was recently promoted to Forensic Chemistry Section Chief in our Lowell Regional Laboratory. She will be transitioning to Northwest Arkansas in the coming weeks to lead the Forensic Chemistry staff!

## 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 **new** survey at the link below:

<https://forms.gle/ps49najJmPKUeZ1aA>

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:

- "Very professional crew!"
- "I appreciate the courtesy and professionalism of the staff!"
- "The amazing people working in evidence are a pleasure to work with. The professionalism is top shelf."





## 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



### ARKANSAS STATE CRIME LABORATORY

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