

New Mexico State University News Release

ATTN: CITY DESK - Photo is available for Web-sharing (see bottom of release for photo name/location)

May 12, 2009

WRITER: Justin Bannister, (575) 646-5981 or
jbbannist@nmsu.edu

CONTACT: Stefan Long, (866) 833-6895 or s.long@ftldna.com

NMSU's Forensic Testing Laboratory designs new DNA tool
that saves time, money

Representatives from New Mexico State University's Forensics Testing Laboratory have been invited to speak at an International Criminal Police Organization (INTERPOL) conference in Lyon, France, later this month and at a meeting of the Disaster Mortuary Operational Response Teams (DMORT) in Indiana. The representatives from FTL will speak about a new tool they have developed to help identify victims of a mass-casualty incident through DNA.

The tool, a DNA extraction device, can take a DNA sample either in a laboratory setting or at the place a body is discovered. It then leaves a small device on the body used for tracking - something important for cases where many victims are found at once. Currently, DNA identification procedures are both costly and time-consuming because samples must be taken in a clean environment where a certified technician performs the procedure.

"We are excited to be part of this conference. People in the field really need this kind of device," said Jack Ellis, FTL's vice president. Technicians at FTL have worked on the device for the last three years, testing and documenting results.

FTL is one of only nine full-service forensic testing labs in the nation. The lab is fully accredited to handle criminal evidence and has already helped the Las Cruces Police Department and the Dona Ana County Sheriff's Office with cases. The lab can use specialized DNA testing to test bones or a single strand of hair. Recently, the lab helped identify bones found on a beach in the Dominican Republic as those belonging to a missing teenager. He had been missing six weeks before the bones were discovered. Local police told the family that it was up to them to identify the remains, so they found FTL.

"These bones had been sitting on the beach for many months and were sun-bleached. Solar radiation can be very destructive to bones, so we had to use a process called mitochondrial DNA testing, where we find some of the hardest genetic material," said Stefan Long, FTL's general manager. "For most labs, that test would cost \$5,000 or more. We did it for about \$1,000, and it only took a couple of days."

Ellis said DMORT had already placed an order for the DNA extraction tool and he expects to see more orders soon. For more information on the Forensic Testing Laboratory, visit www.ftldna.com.

-30-

Photo is available at

http://ucommphoto.nmsu.edu/newsphoto/lab_03a_050709.jpg

CUTLINE: Mark Tidwell, a forensic analyst at NMSU's Forensic Testing Laboratory, works with a robot that removes DNA from samples collected for testing.

(NMSU Photo by Robert Yee)

-30-

