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DEPARTMENT OF JUSTICE RELEASES INTERACTIVE TRAINING TOOL ON PRINCIPLES OF FORENSIC DNA

WASHINGTON - The Department of Justice today issued an interactive electronic training program, *Principles of Forensic DNA for Officers of the Court*, to educate criminal justice professionals and other practitioners about the science of DNA analysis and the legal issues regarding the use of DNA in the courtroom.

The National Institute of Justice (NIJ), the research, development and evaluation arm of the Department of Justice, developed the training tool. Additionally, the tool is part of President Bush's DNA Initiative, *Advancing Justice Through DNA Technology*, and was developed in response to the President's call in his 2005 State of the Union address to improve state criminal justice systems through training for judges, prosecutors, and defense counsel to ensure they are adequately trained to handle criminal trials.

"This DNA training tool will serve as a crucial primer on DNA evidence for all of those who work in the courtroom and within the criminal justice system," said Regina B. Schofield, Assistant Attorney General for the Office of Justice Programs. "As more crimes are solved using DNA evidence, it is important for prosecutors, defense attorneys, judges, juries and other criminal justice professionals in the courtroom to understand the science behind DNA analysis when it is presented as evidence."

DNA was first introduced as evidence in the United States in a state courtroom in 1987. Now, lawyers and judges regularly participate in admissibility hearings about DNA evidence. This interactive training tool will assist prosecutors, defense attorneys, and judges in cases in which forensic DNA is an issue.

The President's DNA Initiative is a five-year, \$1 billion commitment to improve the nation's capacity to use DNA evidence by eliminating casework and convicted offender backlogs; funding research and development; improving crime lab capacity; providing training for all stakeholders in the criminal justice system; and conducting testing to identify the missing. Administered by NIJ, the President's DNA Initiative has awarded more than \$200 million in DNA grants to communities nationwide.

As part of the President's DNA Initiative, *Principles of Forensic DNA for Officers of the Court*, has 15 training modules including:

- information on the biology of DNA
- the history of forensic DNA analysis
- how to understand a forensic DNA lab report
- factors in post conviction DNA testing requests
- information about forensic DNA databases
- issues involved in presenting DNA evidence in the courtroom
- information on the admissibility issues regarding the use of DNA evidence
- an extensive glossary with basic definitions relating to forensic DNA analysis

Newer DNA analysis techniques can yield results from biological evidence invisible to the naked eye, even in cases where the evidence is contaminated. Today, police departments throughout America are reexamining unsolved rape and homicide cases using advanced DNA methods. Newly-processed DNA profiles are uploaded into the FBI database, the Combined DNA Index System, so the data can be compared with DNA profiles derived from convicted offenders and evidence samples already in the national system.

Principles of Forensic DNA for Officers of the Court and more information about the President's DNA Initiative can be found at www.dna.gov. NIJ made the training tool available for the first time today at the annual meeting of the American Academy of Forensic Scientists in Seattle, Wash.

The Office of Justice Programs (OJP) provides federal leadership in developing the nation's capacity to prevent and control crime, administer justice, and assist victims. OJP is headed by an Assistant Attorney General and comprises five component bureaus and an office: the Bureau of Justice Assistance; the Bureau of Justice Statistics; the National Institute of Justice; the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention; and the Office for Victims of Crime, as well as the Community Capacity Development Office, which incorporates the Weed and Seed strategy and OJP's American Indian and Alaska Native Affairs Desk. More information can be found at www.ojp.usdoj.gov.

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