

FBI Statement for discontinuing GSR yet supporting GSR field

By Marc LeBeau

In the May 26th issue of the Baltimore Sun, an article entitled
>"FBI lab scraps gunfire residue" by Julie Bykowicz was printed. I would
>like to take this opportunity to correct some misleading impressions
>that this article may have made.

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> While it is true that the FBI Laboratory has discontinued its
>gunshot residue (GSR) program, this decision was made solely on the
>limited number of requests for this examination and was in no way
>related to the GSR symposium that we hosted in 2005 or testing of our
>facility for the presence of gunshot residue. For the past 4 years, the
>FBI Laboratory has received less than ten cases per year from our field
>offices and other federal agencies. Consequently, the decision was made
>to direct our resources to areas that are related to the FBI's number
>one priority of combating terrorism.

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> In 2005, the FBI Laboratory hosted a symposium on GSR.
>Participants from state, local, private, and other federal laboratories
>participated in the symposium to identify consensus in certain areas of
>the GSR examination and reporting processes. We are publishing the
>results of that symposium in the next issue of Forensic Science
>Communications. However, there were no significant observations or
>discussions at that symposium that played any role in the decision to
>discontinue this service in the FBI Laboratory.

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> In the summer of 2005, as part of a limited training exercise
>for a new employee, the areas of two different units in the FBI
>Laboratory building were sampled for the presence of GSR. One of the
>units involved in this exercise was the Firearms and Toolmarks Unit
>where weapons are test fired and analyzed. It is important to note that
>this is not the unit that conducts the GSR examinations in our
>laboratory. As part of this training exercise, the laboratory and
>office spaces of the personnel assigned to the Firearms and Toolmarks
>Unit were sampled and tested. Because of their intimate contact with
>firearms, this unit was expected to contain high levels of GSR and the
>trainee's analysis confirmed this suspicion. However, sampling of items
>for GSR, as well as GSR analyses, were traditionally conducted in the
>Chemistry Unit in an area that was about 200 yards - or the length of
>two football fields - away from the Firearms and Toolmarks Unit. This
>unit was also sampled and tested and the Chemistry Unit's examination
>areas proved to be negative for GSR. Further, contamination was checked
>with every case that was analyzed for GSR through the use of "negative
>control" samples carried through the examination process. These control

>samples proved that any GSR detected on evidentiary items did not come
>from the analytical process.

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> Finally, I would like to emphasize to that the FBI Laboratory
>stands behind all of the GSR reports that it has ever issued. If
>requested, our experts will testify to the reports that have already
>been issued. Should a future FBI case require GSR analysis, the FBI
>Laboratory will provide a list of other federal, state, local, and
>private laboratories that continue to offer the GSR examination.
>Further, we consider this a valuable examination that can provide
>valuable probative evidence in criminal investigations.

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>Sincerely,
> Marc A.
>LeBeau, Ph.D.

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>Chemistry Unit Chief
> FBI
>Laboratory