



Fact Sheet



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Solving crime through smart forensics

AFP Forensic Services supports both the AFP's national functions and ACT community policing work. In 25 years the area has grown from the original team of around 30 police to 140 specialists with state-of-the-art equipment and world-class expertise. Responsibilities have extended beyond the original fields to include explosives analysis, DNA and computer forensics.

In the 1980s, drugs were a key focus for AFP forensics. As the organisation became increasingly involved in seizures, including unpacking and recovering drugs, the forensics area built an international reputation for its professional and sophisticated approach to drug substitutions and controlled deliveries.

While illicit drug work remains a focus, other areas have also come to the fore. For example, in the early 1980s, the AFP supported fingerprint research at the Australian National University. This resulted in the development of the Polilight—a specialist light source for enhancing fingerprints which was exported to more than 100 labs overseas. This put the AFP at the forefront of fingerprint research.

The 1990s saw the consolidation of several regional AFP forensic services groups and the expansion of the team to include more staff with scientific qualifications. Together with the establishment of a professional laboratory, this meant the team could deliver a greater range of forensic services including work on trace and biological evidence. By 1996 the laboratory facility had been further upgraded and accredited by Australia's National Association of Testing Authorities.

In parallel, we were gradually changing the profile of staff working in the area through education programs and working with tertiary institutions to produce graduates with forensic backgrounds. In 1990, there was no forensic science program in Australia, and now there are 20 programs.

The AFP's active participation in research programs has led to several operational advances. For example, conventional fingerprint detection techniques did not work on the new polymer banknotes. One technique showed promise—vacuum metal deposition (VMD). The AFP worked with the University of Technology Sydney (UTS) on a three-year PhD research project to optimise VMD technology to the point where today latent prints up to at least 18 months old can be detected on the polymer banknotes.

More recently, AFP Forensic Services were integral to the organisation's high profile role in the Bali bombing investigation. The AFP's forensic experts worked closely with the Indonesian National Police on crime scene investigation and blast site interpretation, as well as the painstaking disaster victim identification process

through DNA sampling, analysis and matching. The forensic investigation generated thousands of exhibits and samples used during the ensuing trial.

A major growth area now is computer forensics. The AFP's Computer Forensics Team specialises in obtaining, analysing and presenting electronic evidence stored on computers and other electronic devices. Laboratories in Brisbane, Sydney, Melbourne, Perth and Canberra provide services primarily to ACT Community Policing and AFP National Operations, as well as other Government and law enforcement agencies.

Australian Bomb Data Centre

The Australian Bomb Data Centre (ABDC) was established in 1978. From its inception, the Centre's role has been to collect, collate and disseminate data related to the illegal use of explosives.

The ABDC joined the Forensic area of the AFP in 2002 with the benefits of this closer association being seen in joint deployments like the Bali bombings investigations.

In East Timor, ABDC staff have trained East Timorese Police in basic bomb search management techniques in an initiative funded through the AFP's Law Enforcement Cooperation Program (LECP). Twenty-five police have completed the ABDC's training course to date and a new police unit dealing with explosives—the Dili Police Operational Search Team—has been formed. The ABDC is also working with the Royal Malaysian Police to enhance the capabilities of their bomb data centre and with the Philippines to develop a bomb data centre.

For more information:

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