

[Back to document](#)



## Crime-busting costs promote sharing ; Efforts are under way to have Greater Portland police departments use a regional forensics facility.

DAVID HENCH Staff Writer. *Portland Press Herald* [Portland, Me] 02 July 2006: pp. B1.

### Abstract (summary)

"The equipment is very expensive, the training is very expensive and time-consuming, and that's an issue for all police departments, especially the smaller departments." Tim Burton, Portland police chief  
Area police chiefs - representing... [Show all](#)

### Full Text

"The equipment is very expensive, the training is very expensive and time-consuming, and that's an issue for all police departments, especially the smaller departments." Tim Burton, Portland police chief

Advancements in forensic technology create remarkable possibilities for investigators, from the ability to find minute fibers or blood stains on clothing to recovering long-deleted files from a suspect's computer.

But those cutting edge techniques, which have captured the public's imagination through television programs like "CSI," can come with a heavy price tag in real life.

It can take two years to certify an officer in computer forensic analysis, and the laser equipment needed to create a digital map of a crime scene costs \$15,000.

Police departments in Greater Portland are considering banding together to form a regional facility where agencies could share the crime scene investigation and evidence-processing specialties each has developed. The effort also could support new ventures they may not be able to afford individually.

"With one central facility, the evidence officers - the CSI officers - can draw on each other's experience and technical expertise," said Cumberland County Sheriff Mark Dion.

"If I have a very serious aggravated assault with blunt trauma, I could call upon (evidence technician) Kevin MacDonald from Portland P.D. to provide blood spatter analysis. There's no way the sheriff's office could invest in duplicating the expertise and training he has," Dion said.

The idea was born out of a group of local managers and political leaders called the Metro Coalition discussing a regional approach to municipal services.

"The broad issue is how can the communities of Greater Portland be cooperating more for the purposes of saving money and and/or improving the quality of services," said Portland Mayor James Cohen, one of those spearheading the effort.

Area police chiefs - representing Scarborough, Westbrook, Portland, South Portland, Cape Elizabeth, Falmouth and Cumberland County - are conducting an inventory of their individual capabilities and plan to report back to the cooperative steering committee next month.

Portland Police Chief Tim Burton said the talks are only in the preliminary stages, but said the topic is worth exploring because of the expense of advanced forensics.

"The equipment is very expensive, the training is very expensive and time-consuming, and that's an issue for all police departments, especially the smaller departments," Burton said. "There really isn't a reason to duplicate expensive pieces of equipment within close geographic proximity."

For example, the Cumberland County Sheriff's Office has invested in a portable forensic light source that uses ultraviolet rays to illuminate bodily fluids, hairs and fibers that may not be visible to the human eye.

The equipment costs \$16,000, plus the cost of training a deputy to use it. It's a technology that could be available to other departments that lack the staff and resources to pursue it on their own, Dion said.

Portland recently added a computer forensics investigator who will work with the Maine Computer Crimes Task Force. Computer forensic analysis is becoming a major investigative tool for many types of crime because of the amount of data and communications preserved on computers and the abundance of digital security video saved as computer files.

The Maine Computer Crimes Task Force, comprised of officers from a handful of departments, is a similar model of inter-agency cooperation, so every department in need of computer analysis doesn't have to dedicate one of its own officers.

But the task force has a heavy backlog, and must concentrate on the most serious cases, leaving some departments waiting months for information important to an investigation.

#### MORE CRIMES COULD BE SOLVED

Collaborating on evidence processing could save taxpayers money, but area chiefs say what is more important is that it could improve investigations.

"This is going to allow departments to do better investigations and solve crimes that may return people's property," said Falmouth Police Chief Ed Tolan, adding that crime doesn't respect municipal boundaries so sharing crime scene analysis could benefit all departments.

"We're all dealing with the same people committing the crimes. We may arrest a guy this week who's committed burglaries that has also committed burglaries in Portland and Scarborough," Tolan said.

The Portland Police Department, which is looking at ways to expand its crowded evidence processing office, is studying whether it could provide the space to house a regional forensics team.

It was the availability of space in the York County Sheriff's Office when it opened two years ago that led agencies to develop a cooperative forensics team in that county.

York County Chief Deputy Maurice Ouellette made workspace available to any department that needed it for evidence processing. The county also obtained a \$65,000 federal Justice Assistance grant and offered training and equipment.

Now, forensic investigators from each police department in the county comprise a task force that meets monthly to discuss ongoing cases, Ouellette said.

When a Buxton home invasion led to a shoot-out in April, evidence was gathered from crime scenes in Buxton, Biddeford and Kennebunkport by officers in each department and was easily consolidated into a single case, Ouellette said.

The county's police chiefs are now considering an agreement to share detectives at major crime scenes, he said. The county also is considering working with other agencies to purchase a \$35,000 piece of equipment to maintain its own fingerprint database.

"I am a firm believer that regionalizing a lab like that makes all the sense in the world," Ouellette said.

#### COOPERATION IS TRADITIONAL

Even without formal cooperatives, police departments in Greater Portland and around the state share some capabilities when needed.

On Thursday, the Cumberland County Sheriff's Office sent its laser mapping team to a serious accident in Fryeburg, and the Portland Police Department's bomb squad and its remote control robot have been called upon by neighboring departments.

Currently, the State Crime Laboratory run by the Department of Public Safety provides a range of forensic services to Maine departments, everything from analyzing DNA evidence to comparing the ballistic signatures of weapons and ammunition used in crimes. The lab's services also include fingerprint, footprint and tire impression analysis.

The state's crime lab also has a backlog, including about 80 cases of latent fingerprints and about 150 cases in the chemistry section, where samples are prescreened for the presence of DNA. Creating a regional forensics lab could speed the turnaround time on certain analyses now done by the state.

Elliot Kollman, director of the state crime lab in Augusta, said departments need to proceed with caution however.

Processing evidence correctly so traces are not overlooked and doing so with the expertise needed to testify in court can require extensive training and certification.

Departments that try to reach beyond their training could damage investigations.

"Evidence can be compromised if not processed correctly," Kollman said.

If an investigator submits a fluid stain for DNA analysis rather than the entire article of clothing it came from, it could mean important clues don't get picked up, he said.

But he said the interest of local police agencies in forensics is encouraging.

"It is important they do have an understanding of what the limitations are the lab has," Kollman said, "and sometimes there are things we can do that they don't even know that we can do."

Staff Writer David Hench can be contacted at 791-6327 or at:

dhench@pressherald.com

### Illustration

Caption: Staff photo by John Patriquin Detective Josh Potvin of the Cumberland County Sheriff's Office shows how officers look for fingerprints on a handgun using the department's ultraviolet light source. The forensics equipment could be used by other police departments under a cooperative arrangement.

### Indexing (details)

Subjects	Burton, Tim, Dion, Mark, Ouellette, Maurice, Kollman, Elliot
People	Burton, Tim, Dion, Mark, Ouellette, Maurice, Kollman, Elliot
Title	Crime-busting costs promote sharing ; Efforts are under way to have Greater Portland police departments use a regional forensics facility.; [FINAL Edition]
Authors	DAVID HENCH Staff Writer
Publication title	Portland Press Herald
Pages	B1
Number of pages	0
Publication year	2006
Publication Date	Jul 2, 2006
Year	2006
Section	Maine & New England
Publisher	Portland Newspapers
Place of Publication	Portland, Me.
Country of publication	United States
Source type	Newspapers
Language of Publication	English
Document Type	NEWSPAPER
ProQuest Document ID	277319509
Document URL	<a href="http://libraries.maine.edu/mainedatabases/authmaine.asp?url=/docview/277319509?accountid=17222">http://libraries.maine.edu/mainedatabases/authmaine.asp?url=/docview/277319509?accountid=17222</a>
Copyright	Copyright 2006 Blethen Maine Newspapers Inc.
Last Updated	2010-06-14
Database	ProQuest Newsstand

---

Copyright © 2011 ProQuest LLC. All rights reserved. - Terms and Conditions