

DNA News
Week of March 19-25, 2006
Prepared by Alice Sodroski

DNA Evidence and Crime-Solving

“Beaverton man, 24, convicted of two rapes” *The Oregonian* (Portland, Oregon) March 22, 2006

A jury found Eric A. Morales, 24, guilty Tuesday of raping a 13-year-old girl in her bed and a 15-year-old girl he picked up at a transit center in Hillsboro, Oregon. Morales was convicted of rape, sexual abuse, and burglary, as well as giving alcohol to a minor. Morales’s DNA was found during an examination of the 15-year-old after the rape and on the pajamas of the 13-year-old girl.

“Prosecutor says DNA ties convict to 2 sex assaults” *Chicago Tribune* March 23, 2006

Walter Vega, 33, is currently serving a 28-year sentence for sexually assaulting a 14-year-old girl in 1999. Through DNA evidence, Vega has since been linked to two other assaults, including one on an 11-year-old girl. Upon conviction, Vega’s DNA was entered into the Illinois databank, which allowed police to link him to these other crimes.

“DNA results in rape case arrest” *The Courier Mail* March 23, 2006

An unnamed 30-year-old was recently arrested for raping a 27-year-old mother whose daughter was sleeping near-by in 1999. He had been accused of raping a 15-year-old girl in 2002, and DNA collected during the 2002 investigation helped police to link him to the 1999 rape.

Controversies Concerning DNA Databanks and Laboratories

“Teacher wins legal fight over police DNA record” *The Daily Telegraph* March 24, 2006

Philippa Jones, a teacher who was arrested but not prosecuted after being accused of hitting a student won a legal battle against London police to have her fingerprints, DNA sample and photograph destroyed. Jones also awarded pounds 250 damages from the chief constable of West Midlands and payment of her legal costs.

Expanding the DNA Databank

“Report urges requiring all convicts to give DNA” *The New York Times* March 21, 2006

A New York State Investigation Commission report calls for DNA samples to be collected from anyone convicted of a crime in an effort to expand New York’s DNA Database. New York collects DNA from fewer than half of those convicted of felonies in the state and is one of only seven states that do not compile DNA records for all felons.

“Backing for police to retain 'innocent' DNA” *The Herald* (Glasgow) March 22, 2006

Ministers in Scotland are currently debating whether to allow police to retain the DNA samples of innocent and guilty alike. In England and Wales, DNA that is collected and stored is based on arrest, not conviction. Police are pushing for the same to apply in Scotland, where over five hundred thousand GBP are spent each year in destroying DNA samples that cannot be stored.

DNA-based Post Conviction Challenges

“DNA tests help win retrial; '86 rape conviction was `manifest error,' Appellate Court rules” *Chicago Tribune* March 24, 2006

The Illinois Appellate Court on Thursday ordered a new trial for convicted rapist Bennie Starks, ruling that DNA tests have shown a crime-lab analyst presented false scientific evidence at his 1986 trial. Starks has already served 20 years of his 60-year sentence for the sexual assault of a 69-year-old woman.

“DNA frees man imprisoned 18 years in attack Dallas: Judge apologizes, immediately releases innocent worker” *The Dallas Morning News* March 24, 2006

47-year-old George Wallis has served 18 years in prison for a crime that, DNA evidence recently proved, he did not commit. Judge John Creuzot apologized to Wallis and granted him his freedom.

DNA Evidence and Sentencing

“DNA leads to decades in jail for serial rapist” *The Advertiser* March 24, 2006

Robert Shane Lowick was sentenced to 24 years in prison after DNA evidence lead to his arrest and conviction for the violent sexual assault of five women within a two-year period.