



**NEWS RELEASE**

*For Immediate Release*

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**State Police, Department of Health and Hospitals Complete DNA Contracts, Select Vendors**

Baton Rouge – Officials with the Louisiana State Police and the Department of Health and Hospitals announced today that contracts are now in place to begin conducting the DNA analysis that is critical to identifying many of the remaining victims of Hurricane Katrina.

In addition to an earlier project management and technical oversight contract that State Police awarded to Sozer, Niezgodna and Associates of Virginia, the most recent contracts have been awarded to ReliaGene of Louisiana to conduct buccal swab collection and to the Bode Technology Group, one of two contractors who will conduct bone tissue analysis. The second contract for bone analysis should be signed later this week.

Buccal swab collection involves taking a saliva sample from an individual’s mouth. These samples will be collected from relatives of people who have been reported missing or deceased. These samples will then be compared to the laboratory analysis conducted on the bone samples taken from the unidentified deceased victims in an attempt to make a genetic match and determine identity. Currently, there are more than 200 unidentified bodies at the Victim Identification Center in Carville, La.

The Louisiana State Police is now shipping bone samples to Bode Technology to begin the analysis. According to State Police officials, the process of identifying a victim might be relatively quick or it can be quite lengthy. In some instances, not every victim can be identified. “There are indications as to the identity of approximately half of the remaining bodies at the morgue. We are actively contacting the presumed families of these victims asking them to provide samples if they have not already done so” said Dr. Amanda Sozer, DNA expert with the Louisiana State Police. “To have any success with DNA testing, DNA from the bodies must be matched to DNA known to be from the victim or the victim’s close relatives. We hope that family members are willing to provide samples. We have collection kits and are prepared to collect samples from individuals anywhere in the world.”

Dr. Sozer used the 9/11 disaster as an example, noting that it took more than three years to identify 1,596 of the 2,749 people who died. It required the analysis of 15,000 personal effects and/or family samples and more than 19,000 human remains.

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## **DNA Contracts Awarded Add One**

With more than 4,000 people reported missing in Louisiana, there could be as many as 12,000 swabs that require analysis in order to identify those bodies for which there are no clues or leads.

Dr. Louis Cataldie, Louisiana State Medical Examiner, said DNA test results will help to bring closure to families who are desperately trying to find out what happened to their missing loved ones.

“The calls I get from family members, almost every caller is emotional and their story is heartbreaking,” he said. “These people want to know what happened, and they want to conduct their funeral and pay their final respects.”

Cataldie said that DNA serves as the identification “tool of last resort.”

“Despite the lack of DNA testing, identification has not stopped,” he said. “In mid-October, there were only 150 identification made on about 800 bodies at the morgue. On Dec. 1, that number had jumped to more than 600 identifications. Without a doubt, we have been, and continue to make progress.”

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