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NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF JUSTICE RELEASES BEST PRACTICES FOR SEXUAL ASSAULT KITS

Focuses on Accurate, Timely and Effective Collection, Processing of DNA Evidence

WASHINGTON — The Department of Justice's National Institute of Justice (NIJ) today released a report on *National Best Practices for Sexual Assault Kits: A Multidisciplinary Approach*.

The report describes a victim-centered response to sexual assault cases that positively impacts sexual assault response, the experiences of victims, and ultimately results in safer communities.

An NIJ working group consisting of victims, victim advocates, sexual assault nurse and medical examiners, prosecutors, forensic scientists, and law enforcement officials, created the report in response to the Sexual Assault Forensic Evidence Reporting (SAFER) Act of 2013, which focuses on the accurate, timely, and effective collection and processing of DNA evidence in sexual assault investigations.

Since the early 2000s, technological advances, including the FBI's Combined DNA Index System, have increased the use and value of DNA evidence in identifying perpetrators of crimes.

The group developed 35 recommendations that provide a roadmap for collecting, transferring, preserving, storing and analyzing sexual assault kits. The recommendations apply to medical professionals, members of law enforcement, victim advocates, prosecutors and laboratories. A coordinated, collaborative and multidisciplinary approach to sexual assault investigations helps reassure and support victims of sexual violence, encourages victim engagement and increases the potential for just legal resolutions.

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The report emphasizes the importance of victim engagement. The recommendations call for careful, step-by-step medical-forensic examinations performed by health care professionals specifically trained in sexual assault examinations. They include laboratory guidelines and timelines for efficiently generating CODIS-eligible DNA profiles and a call for mandatory training of all who respond to or deal with incidents of sexual assault.

Jurisdictions can evaluate their individual needs and resources and use these recommendations to develop or enhance policies and protocols for untested sexual assault kits. The best practices are designed to improve evidence collection and preservation. They also outline steps agencies can take to ensure consistency and uniformity in the way evidence is prioritized and transferred. Other recommendations focus on improving investigative practices and agency protocols related to evidence inventory, tracking and audits, and communication systems.

For more information on the 35 recommendations, please visit:
<https://www.ncjrs.gov/pdffiles1/nij/250384.pdf>

The Office of Justice Programs, headed by Acting Assistant Attorney General Alan R. Hanson, provides federal leadership in developing the nation's capacity to prevent and control crime, administer justice and assist victims. OJP has six bureaus and offices: the Bureau of Justice Assistance; the Bureau of Justice Statistics; the National Institute of Justice; the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention; the Office for Victims of Crime; and the Office of Sex Offender Sentencing, Monitoring, Apprehending, Registering and Tracking (SMART). More information about OJP and its components can be found at www.ojp.gov.

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