

**Texas Forensic Science Commission
Minutes from September 28, 2015 Rio Grande Identification Project Panel Meeting in
Edinburg, Texas**

The Texas Forensic Science Commission's Rio Grande Identification Project Panel met at 10:00 a.m. on Monday, September 28, 2015, at the Edinburg Conference Center, 118 Paseo Del Prado, Edinburg, Texas 78539.

Members of the Panel were present as follows:

Members Present: Hughes-Stamm, Eisenberg, Peerwani, Lerma

Members Absent: None

Staff Present: Lynn Garcia, General Counsel
Leigh Tomlin, Commission Coordinator

Status update on current remains-identification work, including DNA and anthropological analysis as well as reference sample issues.

Garcia led a discussion with key stakeholders related to the current state of remains-identification work, including DNA and other anthropological analyses.

Dr. Lori Baker provided an update and background on anthropological analyses and the process for collecting biological information from remains at Baylor University's anthropology department.

A key issue in the identification process is the inability to share DNA profiles and other identification information across databases such as CODIS, the Argentine Forensic Anthropology Team (EAAF) database, BODE's database, and other DNA-based identification databases like the local database of UNT's Center for Human Identification. Members will work to encourage collaboration and compliance with federal law to be able to input reference profiles into CODIS for comparison purposes only.

Discuss lessons learned in Brooks County and development of systemic best practices plan for moving forward on the processing and identification of remains

Dr. Corinne Stern, Chief Medical Examiner for Webb County, detailed the process her office has developed for processing and identification of remains found in Webb County and 10 surrounding counties in the Rio Grande Valley.

Discuss resource and budgeting requirements necessary for the project.

Dr. Stern and Dr. Norma Farley, Chief Forensic Pathologist for Hidalgo County, explained some of the hurdles medical examiners and pathologists in the Rio Grande Valley face in collecting, storing, burying and processing human remains found in the Valley. Stakeholders discussed the significant cost barriers to properly processing, storing and burying remains and intact bodies found along Texas borders.

Discuss addition of stakeholders and geographical expansion.

The panel plans to expand the scope of stakeholders to cover the rest of the Rio Grande Valley after this initial “best practices” meeting. Attendees discussed encouraging collaboration among stakeholders in the identification process through increased communication and sharing of information.

Attendees and commissioners discussed expanding educational programs related to the proper processing of human remains, to educate judges, law enforcement, and other key stakeholders in a unified process.

Discuss storage issues and potential technology necessary for identification, including RFID chips.

Stakeholders discussed the lack of technology available for identification of human remains, such as the lack of proper refrigeration and other cold-storage facilities for unidentified intact remains. There is a need for technological improvements across counties such as DEXIS fingerprinting software and RFID chips for identifying bodies that have been buried and may need to be exhumed later for identification.

Public Comment.

Stakeholders and other members of the public provided comment and discussion throughout the meeting.

Adjourn.