May 15, 2024

NEWS RELEASE: BALLISTICS TANK TECHNOLOGY IMPLEMENTED FOR INVESTIGATIVE PURPOSES

The Chester County District Attorney’s Office and the Chester County Detectives are pleased to announce that they have fully implemented Ballistics Tank technology into the investigative process of firearm identification. This will allow firearms recovered by police to be tested almost immediately by a Chester County Detectives Firearms Examiner. This is the final piece of equipment funded by a PCCD\(^1\) grant and supported by the Chester County Commissioners. Prior to the activation of the Ballistics Tank, it would take six to twelve months to test-fire a firearm, conduct a microscopic examination, and get results.

Chester County District Attorney Christopher L. de Barrena-Sarobe said, “Giving law enforcement timely access to the latest technologies is critical to fighting gun violence. When used in conjunction with the existing NIBIN\(^2\) Program, this Ballistics Tank will give law enforcement leads that will solve crimes and stop cycles of violence that sometimes emerge in our community.”

Chester County Commissioners Josh Maxwell, Marian Moskowitz, and Eric Roe noted, “Everyone dedicated to law enforcement in Chester County—from the DA’s Office staff and our County Detectives to all municipal detectives and officers—

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\(^1\) PCCD is short for the Pennsylvania Commission on Crime and Delinquency.

\(^2\) NIBIN is short for the National Integrated Ballistics Information Network.
deserves to have the latest technology that supports speed and precision in solving crimes. It is why we approved funding through the American Rescue Plan Act for rapid DNA technology, and it is why we support this important equipment to strengthen ballistics evidence.”

When a gun is fired, it typically leaves a unique tool mark on the bullet and any fired cartridge casings (commonly referred to as a “FCC” or shell casing). Thus, a firearms examiner uses a ballistic tank to safely test-fire firearms not just for operability, but to also use the test-fired bullets and casings to conduct microscopic comparison of ballistic evidence recovered from a crime scene.

The Ballistics Tank is essentially a large water tank. When a gun is test-fired into the tank, friction from the bullet passing through the water slows the bullets down and eventually allows the bullet to sink to the bottom of the tank, thereby creating a pristine sample that can be compared to evidence from crime scenes. The sample bullets and fired cartridge casings are then entered into NIBIN. There, a computer program is used to compare the tool markings to images of submitted ballistic evidence from shooting scenes across the country with the recovered firearms. Any potential matches are then reviewed by a firearms examiner and immediately shared with investigators from those jurisdictions. The Chester County District Attorney’s Office has partnered with Bucks County, Delaware County, and Montgomery County to obtain NIBIN this past year, which was funded through the federal HIDTA\(^3\) Program.

District Attorney de Barrena-Sarobe continued, “Crime does not know municipal and county lines. We are already using this technology to link crime scenes and follow up on possible illegal gun purchases. This is a pivotal tool for law enforcement.”

The PCCD grant that funded this project totaled $450,000. It includes roughly $60,000 for the Ballistics Tank, with the balance of the grant funding already spent on personnel and other equipment.

Approved for release by Christopher L. de Barrena-Sarobe, District Attorney

\(^3\) HIDTA is short for the Liberty Mid-Atlantic High Intensity Drug Trafficking Area program