

Forensic Case Study

# Central Ohio Regional Crime Laboratory



American Association for Laboratory Accreditation

# Central Ohio Regional Crime Laboratory

## the path to accreditation

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When officials in Licking County, OH wanted to open a forensic laboratory in 2018, forensic scientist Mark Hiatt stepped up to take on the challenge. Along with help from several local public safety agencies and other colleagues, Hiatt started the Central Ohio Regional Crime Laboratory. The lab is located in Newark, Ohio and provides forensic testing services for Licking County and agencies involved in the Central Ohio Drug Enforcement Task Force.

Hiatt began the laboratory accreditation process shortly after starting operations. It was a goal of Hiatt's to become accredited from the start.

"I wanted to achieve accreditation for the laboratory to bolster our credibility in the legal system," said Hiatt. "There's no mandate in the state of Ohio, but it gives the prosecution and attorneys confidence in the results we produce."

Hiatt was also able to supplement the cost of accreditation with grant funding from the [Paul Coverdell Forensic Science Improvement Grants Program](#). The program, "awards grants to states and units of local government to help improve forensic science and medical examiner/coroner services, including services provided by laboratories operated by states and units of local government."

### Application and Assessment Preparation

After much preparation, Hiatt and his team submitted their application for accreditation in the summer of 2022. They started the process nearly two years earlier, but the process was slowed by a growing caseload, hiring and training new personnel, and the general slowdown caused by the COVID-19 pandemic.

"One thing I really appreciated throughout the application process was that the team at A2LA regularly checked in with me," said Hiatt. "It served as a reminder, and overall, they offered a really personable customer service experience."

The team at the Central Ohio Regional Crime Laboratory prepared by writing the quality manual, reviewing documents,





and even performing an informal audit with colleagues who are knowledgeable about forensic laboratory accreditation.

“We culled through everything, identified where the gaps were, and did an unofficial document review. We did a lot of the hard work on the front end so the assessment would go as smooth as possible,” said Hiatt.

### Assessment and Corrective Actions

The assessment took place over two days on a Thursday and Friday in October of 2022. The assessor, Bethany Pridgen, began by reviewing the ISO/IEC 17025 standard with Hiatt and the team, as well as the quality manual the team created. The second day consisted of a review of supplemental documentation, especially regarding the training and authorizations of additional personnel.

“If I didn’t understand something, Bethany did a great job of explaining it,” said Hiatt. “I felt like we really learned a lot from each other, chatting and telling stories throughout the process.”

Pridgen identified two deficiencies from the 300+ criteria addressed in the assessment. The first was regarding document security, which requires all documentation to be backed up in some form so that it may be retrieved if the original document were to be lost or destroyed.

The second deficiency was in regards to document labeling. Commonly called the “dropped paper deficiency,” the standard requires that documentation be properly labeled, so in the case the papers are mixed up, or “dropped,” it’s easy to simply put them back together based on proper labeling, which includes page numbers and the appropriate footer.

Hiatt and his team were able to take corrective actions to address these deficiencies, and about two weeks after the assessment, submitted them for review.



Left to right: Criminalist Tim Elliget, Lab Director Mark Hiatt, Forensic Scientist Ashley Nutter

### Achieving Accreditation

The Central Ohio Regional Crime Laboratory achieved accreditation in early December of 2022. They proudly showcase their accreditation in the lab and include it in every report.



“We did what we set out to do and we’re getting more positive feedback. We have more credibility, and our agency partners are recognizing that,” said Hiatt. “We’re out of the start-up stages and we’re able to better serve the justice process in our area.”

The lab’s accreditation also led to some [local news coverage](#), detailing the achievements of the lab staff and how their laboratory will [decrease the time](#) it takes to test evidence in some time-sensitive cases.

“I would absolutely recommend working with A2LA for forensic laboratory accreditation,” said Hiatt. “It was a good choice for our lab. After working with the team for a few years, it always feels like we’re catching up with old friends whenever we get a chance to chat.”

### Start The Accreditation Process

Want to learn more about laboratory accreditation for your forensic laboratory? Scan the QR code below to visit our [Forensic Examination Accreditation Program](#) page at [A2LA.org](#). Then, be sure to fill out the “[Accreditation Estimate Request Form](#)” at the top.



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achieve accreditation!**

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