

American Statistical Association Supports Major Reforms of the Nation's Forensic Science System

ALEXANDRIA, VA (PRWEB) MAY 3, 2010 – The American Statistical Association (ASA) Board of Directors recently voted to endorse recommendations of the 2009 National Academies' report, *Strengthening Forensic Science in the United States: A Path Forward*. In its statement, the ASA Board recognized the pivotal role of forensic science in our judicial system and cited the value of statistical methods and research to improve forensic methods.

The report identified many serious deficiencies in the nation's forensic science system and called for major reforms and new research. It came after years of critiques of specific forensic science practices as well as calls for reform, but especially broke new ground by offering a comprehensive review of the forensic science system and adding the authority of the National Academies to the issue.

“Statisticians have played an important role in the constructive criticism of current forensic science practices,” said Sastry Pantula, ASA president. “We can continue to play an important role in the reforms urged by the National Academies. Statisticians can make vital contributions toward establishing measurement protocols, quantifying uncertainty, designing experiments for testing new protocols or methodologies, and analyzing data from such experiments.”

One of the recommendations of the report is the establishment of an institute of forensic science, and the ASA board noted that sound statistical practices are essential for the proposed institute to achieve its mission. Examples of such practices include:

- The assessment of current and newly developed forensic practices using properly designed experiments and data analytic methods
- The use of statistical methods based on established principles and procedures for the analysis of data, including estimated error rates
- The review, in mainstream scientific journals, of novel methods (beyond variants of established methods) developed for the analysis of data; reviewers should include statistically qualified experts
- The employment of modern statistical quality control and quality assurance procedures to assure that measurements, procedures, and testimony are of high quality
- The application of proficiency tests that employ accepted statistical designs, and, whenever possible, are double blind to avoid potential biases
- The availability of all expert reports to interested parties and the provision of sufficient supporting data and information to permit independent review

The complete statement approved by the ASA board, including background, may be viewed at http://www.amstat.org/outreach/pdfs/Forensic_Science_Endorsement.pdf.

About the American Statistical Association

The American Statistical Association (ASA), a scientific and educational society founded in Boston in 1839, is the second oldest continuously operating professional society in the United States. For more than 170 years, ASA has been providing its 18,000 members serving in academia, government, and industry and the public with up-to-date, useful information about statistics. The ASA has a proud tradition of service to statisticians, quantitative scientists, and users of statistics across a wealth of academic areas and applications. For additional information about the American Statistical Association, please visit the association's web site at <http://www.amstat.org> or call 703.684.1221.

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For more information:

Rosanne Desmone
703.302.1861 office
703.946.3820 mobile
rosanne (at) amstat.org