

**Westchester County**  
**Robert P. Astorino, County Executive**

**Department of Laboratories and Research**  
**Dr. Kunjlata Ashar, Pathologist-Medical Examiner**

**2015 Annual Report - Executive Summary**

The Department of Laboratories and Research consists of five distinct divisions responsible for all major laboratory analyses and related functions in Westchester County:

- Environmental Services
- Forensic Science Laboratory
- Forensic Toxicology Laboratory
- Medical Examiner's Office
- Microbiological Services

The Department handles samples from County departments, Westchester municipalities, other governmental agencies, private companies and individual households. The Department is the behind-the-scenes agency that conducts scientific tests in matters ranging from criminal evidence to public health concerns.

This arrangement groups nearly all County laboratories under a single administrative control, thus permitting interchange of scientific knowledge, technology and data. Whether it is analyzing crime specimens for DNA, blood and urine for DWI and death investigations, toys for possible lead or patient specimens for TB, the Department works to protect the public's health and safety.

In 2004, we opened an enhanced Biosafety Level 3 laboratory to identify select agents and new and emerging pathogens. In 2007, we opened a state-of-the-art DNA Crime Lab that can analyze evidence more quickly and establish through DNA with the smallest of samples.

### **Environmental Services**

Provides chemical, microbiological and radiological testing of drinking water, natural and recreational waters, as well as wastewater, solid and hazardous waste, soil and other items.

### **Forensic Science Laboratory**

Provides laboratory analytical services on a variety of evidence submitted by the 47 municipal law enforcement agencies in Westchester County. These include DNA, drugs, arson, gunshot residue, trace analysis and audio/video evidence. The DNA section is part of the FBI CODIS DNA network. The lab responds to crime scenes on a selective basis when laboratory level analysis is required at the scene. We currently are the only Forensic laboratory in the State accredited to conduct audio/video analysis on evidence such as surveillance recordings from crime scenes. The laboratory conducts training sessions for local law enforcement on how to properly detect, collect and package evidence for submission to the laboratory. The laboratory also maintains an International accreditation, meeting the ISO/IEC 17025 Standards and supplemental requirements for the operation of a Crime laboratory.

### **Forensic Toxicology Laboratory**

Analyzes blood, urine and other biological samples for alcohol, illicit, prescription and over the counter drugs as well as poisons. The analyses are used to provide evidence for DWI, DWAI and Drugs Facilitated Sexual Assault cases. The Medical Examiners use this information to establish manner and cause of death. The laboratory works closely with all of the law enforcement agencies in Westchester County and with the District Attorney's office. We also consult, advise and testify in court cases involving the Alcohol Breath Testing instruments used for the prosecution of DWI defendants.

### **Medical Examiner's Office**

Responsible for investigating and determining both cause and manner of death in all deaths occurring "in or presumably in the County of Westchester due to unlawful act, criminal neglect, violence, casualties or by sudden or unexplained circumstances".

\*Notification of such deaths is usually made to the office by a police officer, physician or funeral director at the scene of death. Because duty personnel are available every day of the year, 24 hours a day, notification should be made as soon as possible. In this way a decision as to whether or not the case falls under the Medical Examiner's jurisdiction can be made quickly. When accepted as a Medical Examiner case, the death undergoes an investigation the extent of which depends on the nature of the case.

\*Westchester County Administrative Code 273.141

### **Microbiological Services**

Provides testing for TB, sexually transmitted diseases (Syphilis, Gonorrhea, Chlamydia, Herpes, HIV), Influenza and other infectious diseases. The laboratory is equipped to test for new and emerging infectious diseases such as Bird Flu, Swine Flu, multi-drug resistant TB and agents of bioterrorism. The laboratory helps identify pandemics and other communicable disease that may threaten the public health of the residents of Westchester County. It provides support to the Department of Health in quickly identifying infectious diseases in the County and thus helps in preventing the spread of such diseases.