

Important Definitions

Sexual Assault Kit (SAK)

A set of items used by medical personnel for the preservation of physical evidence collected from a person, living or deceased, following an allegation or suspicion of sexual assault.

Unsubmitted SAKs

SAKs that have not been submitted to a forensic laboratory for testing and analysis using CODIS-eligible DNA methodologies.

CODIS

The Combined DNA Index System (CODIS) is a system of federal, state and local databases that contain DNA profiles from both known offenders and crime scenes. CODIS is used to generate investigative leads.

CODIS Hit

When a DNA profile is uploaded into CODIS and finds a matching DNA profile from a separate criminal offense or known offender, it is referred to as a "CODIS Hit" and can be used as an investigative lead by law enforcement.

Working Group

Representatives of agencies that provide services or interventions for victims of sexual assault that have come together to implement specific aspects of the SAKI project. See back panel for a list of member agencies.

Alaska SAKI Working Group Members

Alaska Department of Public Safety

Alaska Department of Law

Alaska Office of the Governor

Alaska Native Tribal Health Consortium

Alaska State Troopers

Alaska Scientific Crime Detection Laboratory

Anchorage Police Department

Council on Domestic Violence & Sexual Assault

Bering Sea Women's Group

ADE Forensic Consulting

Office of Victims' Rights

Standing Together Against Rape

University of Alaska Anchorage Justice Center

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SAKI Sexual Assault Kit Initiative



Alaska SAKI Project

The Sexual Assault Kit Initiative (SAKI) is a proactive, objective evaluation of the issue of previously unsubmitted sexual assault kits in the State of Alaska. In 2016, Governor Bill Walker, in partnership with the Department of Public Safety, launched the Alaska SAKI to address unsubmitted SAKs and revise policies and practices, with a vision of improving the response to crimes of sexual assault and abuse in a victim-centered way.

Alaska was awarded \$1.5 M in grants to support the efforts. An additional \$2.75 M was appropriated by the legislature to test the remaining unsubmitted SAKs in possession of law enforcement agencies across the state.

A multidisciplinary working group was formed to address the factors that led to SAKs being unsubmitted and provide input to begin addressing barriers to testing.

Goals & Objectives

Create a coordinated statewide response that ensures just resolution to sexual assault cases through:

- 1 A comprehensive and victim-centered approach;
- 2 Supporting the investigation and prosecution of cases for which SAKs were previously unsubmitted
- 3 Reviewing and implementing best practices and recommendations put forth by the Alaska SAKI working group.

Alaska's Response

The State of Alaska has identified the number of unsubmitted SAKs and has begun testing these kits.

As these kits are being tested, the DNA evidence may result in a CODIS-Hit which helps to identify or confirm the suspect. In these instances, contact with victims from assaults that may have occurred several years ago may be necessary.

The Alaska SAKI working group has developed a victim notification procedure to ensure this process focuses on victims' needs and wishes while aiming to minimize potential re-traumatization. Other police departments in Alaska are encouraged to use this procedure as a template.

A specially trained investigator and prosecutor will be assigned to the SAKI project. They will work in partnership to reevaluate cases that may be impacted by the results of DNA evidence. They will consult and work with local victim advocacy agencies located throughout the state to ensure victims have needed resources and confidential support.

The Alaska SAKI working group will also be making recommendations to enact changes to the collections, processing, and handling of forensic evidence in sexual assault cases.

Frequently Asked Questions:

Why haven't some SAKs been submitted?

Historically, SAKs are not submitted for a variety of reasons, including, but not limited to:

- Identity of suspect was known
- DNA would not aid a prosecution
- Lack of training or understanding about DNA/ CODIS
- Inadequate criminal justice resources

Why are SAKs getting tested now?

Advances in science and technology can be leveraged to benefit these investigations more today than ever before. Cases may be linked and serial offenders identified, which may prevent subsequent assaults. The State of Alaska recognized the importance of proactively and objectively evaluating the issue of unsubmitted kits in our state. DPS received federal funds to specifically test unsubmitted SAKs. The legislature then provided additional funds for testing.

What is being done to prevent accumulation of SAKs in the future?

The Alaska SAKI working group will continue working to evaluate current practices, identify where change is needed, and develop a path forward. This is a systematic approach that will take time while we continue to be mindful of the immediate and ongoing needs the criminal justice community has for forensic laboratory services in the State of Alaska.