

# Convicts obliged to give DNA for database

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CONVICTS in South Africa will soon be subjected to having their DNA information loaded onto a national forensic profile database.

Forensics Services commissioner Lieutenant General Khomotso Phahlane said yesterday an estimated 160 000 convicts would have their samples taken in accordance with the recently passed Criminal Law Forensic Amendment Act.

Phahlane said at conference in Pretoria yesterday that the move is aimed at solving murders, rapes and other serious crimes through scientific evidence.

More than 5 000 trained police officers are expected to complete training to oversee DNA collection by the end of next month.

"The Act formally establishes the National Forensic DNA Database which will consist of a number of indices containing the forensic DNA profile collected from different categories of persons and crime samples," he said.

Section head for forensic collection management Brigadier Joe Smith described the process as simple and non-invasive.

It is carried out by using a sponge device that is placed inside a person's cheek for 15 seconds to absorb DNA material.

It comes in an evidence collection kit that includes protective gloves to avoid contamination.

Smith said the actual DNA sample must be destroyed after the information has been captured into the system.

He said a person could opt to conduct the procedure themselves under strict supervision. The evidence can either be used to link a person to a crime or prove them innocent.

Last month police minister Nathi Nhleko appointed the Forensic and Oversight Ethical Board which is meant to oversee the implementation of the new law.

Board member DNA Project founder Vanessa Lynch said having a database would increase the chances of linking suspects to crimes.

The board is made up of five members of the public, a retired judge with 15 years experience and people of various government departments.

Lynch said the DNA profiles of convicts will remain in the system indefinitely.

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