Police hold DNA workshop

LOUISE CARTER

SINCE the DNA Act was passed into law early last year about 5 400 police detectives have been trained in the handling, collecting and administration of test kits through awareness workshops.

The new act, the Criminal Law (Forensic Procedures) Amendment Act 37 of 2013, was finally passed into law on January 27 last year and makes it possible to use DNA testing in all criminal cases.

Last week officers, paramedics, detectives and other “first responders” were present at the Port Alfred Civic Centre where a DNA handling awareness workshop was conducted by trainer Lee Ah Kun from the DNA CSI training programme. The workshop, sponsored in conjunction with the non-profit organisation Nemato Change a Life, looked at teaching the importance of proper preservation and collection of valuable DNA evidence left at crime scenes.

"Too many cases come under dispute when evidence isn’t collected accurately and this type of mishandling creates a sort of loophole in the justice process of linking criminals to their crimes,” Ah Kun said.

Part of the workshop was also to promote the compilation of a DNA profile database.

Currently South Africa’s database only has about 135 000 profiles, while in countries such as the United States, where DNA testing has been implemented for years, there are about 12 million profiles.

DNA plays an important role in cold cases across the world and the Innocence Project of SA often makes use of DNA evidence in exonerating those wrongfully convicted.

Port Alfred station commander Colonel Lizette Zeelie expressed her gratitude for the workshop and highlighted the importance of the new legislation as an intelligence tool for investigations.

Lee explained that they have used a simple acronym, also the name of their organisation (DNA CSI), to simplify what to do at a crime scene.