to assist the laboratory to develop the national criminal intelligence DNA database of DNA profiles.

THE police forensic science laboratory. Pictures courtesy of the DNA Project, a private initiative founded by Vanessa Lynch (left) to assist the laboratory, especially to develop a national criminal DNA database

The project's Dr Carolyn Hancock, who is a geneticist, said this was important because DNA evidence might be used when there was no suspect in a criminal case.

"In such instances, DNA obtained at a crime scene may be compared to all DNA profiles in a database. If all previously convicted criminals are recorded on the database, many crimes may be solved as perpetrators of petty crimes often later commit more serious crimes," Hancock said.

She added that the South African database contained insufficient profiles and there was no systematic collection of DNA profiles from criminals currently in prison.

Lynch said it was hoped that eventually all DNA profiles lifted from crime scenes, as well as from suspects and convicted criminals, would be added to the database because the more DNA profiles that were on the database, the more likely a match between a crime stain and a criminal was to be made.

"It should not be necessary for a suspect to be identified in order for a crime stain to be entered on to the DNA database - in fact, the more crime stains that are entered, the more likely an eventual suspect is to be identified and convicted for not only the crime for which he has been arrested, but for all the other crimes where his DNA profile has been collected."

• As part of its efforts, the DNA Project recently brought to South Africa representatives of the Forensic Science Services in the United Kingdom.

The visitors said that the United Kingdom's DNA database, which consisted of more than four million DNA profiles, had made a significant impact on crime.

Every week suspects arrested for relatively minor crimes were matched to DNA samples recovered from undetected murders and serious sexual offences.

One of the challenges faced by the laboratories relates to the cost of training scientists to be able to work independently, according to Omar, as well as the duration of training.

"Biology DNA training costs approximately R450 000 per person, while the training for ballistics amounts to approximately R300 000 per trainee. Chemistry toxicology and chemistry drugs training costs approximately R350 000 per person."

Bilkis also emphasised that the DNA process was complex and involved multiple agencies and role players, including detectives, forensic field workers, analysts, prosecutors and magistrates.

"A successful prosecution is largely dependent on the successful collection, analysis and interpretation of DNA," she said.

Omar said there were challenges relating to the evidence collection phase at crime scenes. These included:

Insufficient training of forensic field workers;

Poor samples as a result of degradation of samples because of exposure to environmental factors;

Health-care practitioners submitting crime kits that were only partly complete;

the blood, a bottle from which the perpetrators had been drinking being thrown away by police who did not believe it was possible to obtain DNA evidence from the bottle, and the victim's clothes, which might have contained DNA traces from the perpetrators, being thrown away by the hospital.

A further aim of the DNA Project is to investigate the development of a dedicated training bus or mobile training facility to manage the training of investigating officers in the handling of a crime scene, where now a large majority of crucial evidence is lost, according to Hancock.

DNA, or deoxyribonucleic acid, is the fundamental building block for an individual's entire genetic make-up. Each individual inherits half his or her DNA from the mother and the other half from the father. With the exception of identical twins, no two individuals share the same DNA sequence. DNA is found in the nucleus of every cell in the body except red blood cells and is the same throughout the body.

According to Hancock, DNA profiling has revolutionised crime detection and replaced fingerprinting as the forensic tool of choice to be used by investigators to link suspects to a crime scene.

"It is highly effective as DNA can be extracted from any cell in the body – that is, evidence can be collected from hair, semen, saliva, sweat, etc. Therefore, this tech-

vehicle."

Caswell said the markings were made by a syndicate member who patrolled the streets identifying possible victims.

The markings were intended to alert the observer or information gatherer who obtained more information about the threats and weaknesses of a particular property. The information was passed on to the person who actually committed the crime.

Warnings

AN attempted hijacking occurred when a motorist was coming from the Shongweni Dam Road about 2pm last Sunday, according to Blue Security. The driver managed to get away but was chased along Kassier Road by a white Golf that appeared to be damaged or rusty on the front left fender and was occupied by five men.

The driver was followed into a service station, but the men fled when approached by armed response officers who were parked there.

Meanwhile, Blue Security also reported that a home owner Newlands was held up by people posing as employees from SARS.

The robbers were driving a white Toyota RunX. After gaining access to the property they held up the home owner at gunpoint and stole a safe containing jewellery.

crime awareness tips, don't forget to tune in to Crimewatch on East Coast Radio with Melini Moses 9.20am every Monday, Wednesday and Friday

E-mails are being circ[...] indicating that if you enter [...] bank Pin in reverse, the p[...] will be notified. It does not [...]

Chief operating officer of [...] care 911 Wayne Grindell sai[...] organisation's name had [...] misused in a series of e-mail[...] cluding one about a woman [...] ing a silver Toyota Yaris [...] went missing.

"We urge members of the [...] lic to be vigilant to the exis[...] of these hoax e-mails as the[...] not originate from Netcare[...] This is not something we w[...] associate ourselves w[...]" Grindell said.

Events

THE annual meeting of [...] Durban North and Umhl[...] Community Policing Forum [...] be held at the Church of [...] Good Shepherd in Macken[...] Avenue, Durban North, at [...] next Wednesday. New office[...] rers will be appointed to va[...] vacant posts.