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KC crime lab urged to correct 13 essential deficiencies

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The Kansas City Police Crime Lab must correct 13 essential shortcomings or risk losing its accreditation, according to an inspection report.

Auditors found instances in which the lab failed to handle criminal evidence according to standards set by the American Society of Crime Laboratory Directors.

But lab director Linda Netzel said the shortcomings cited by the accrediting agency were primarily matters of documentation that can be remedied and the lab has not compromised evidence.

"If (the agency) felt that this lab was so egregious in its processes toward evidence that we were compromising case work or evidence, then there is a process that allows them to suspend or sanction or revoke our accreditation," she said.

The agency, based in North Carolina, did none of those things. The Kansas City lab has until February to satisfy the inspectors that it has corrected the shortcomings.

Police Chief Jim Corwin is out of town but has been briefed on the inspection report and is confident the issues can be resolved, said police spokesman Capt. Rich Lockhart.

Jackson County Prosecutor Jim Kanatzer was in trial Monday and unavailable for comment.

The accreditation is voluntary, but the Kansas City crime lab receives about half a million dollars a year in federal grants based on being accredited, Netzel said. That money pays for several staff positions. Several police agencies use the crime lab, including Independence, Gladstone and Lawrence.

The Kansas City lab will operate and remain accredited pending resolution of the issues cited.

The inspection team spent a week in August at the Kansas City lab, looking at how it handled hundreds of cases. In 91 areas that the accrediting agency deems "essential," the lab failed 13. Those have to be remedied for the accreditation to be renewed. In 45 other areas deemed "important," the lab failed seven.

Ralph Keaton, executive director of the accrediting agency, said Monday that it is not abnormal for a lab to receive failing marks in several essential areas.

"Some labs do have slippage at times and they don't realize they are not in compliance," Keaton said.

Several of the deficiencies cited had to do with handling evidence, including chain of custody, proper seals and storage. Netzel said the lab has electronic systems to control and track access to evidence. But in some cases the lab needs to change its procedures to comply with the accrediting standards.

"There has never been a case where somebody has come in and proven that the lab is not maintaining the chain of custody," Netzel said.

Other shortcomings had to do with proper training and proficiency testing. Netzel said her staff has the necessary training when required but that sometimes it has not been completed and documented in a timely manner.

The accrediting agency also said the lab's fire alarm is inadequate.

Netzel said the lab has been working to upgrade the system.

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