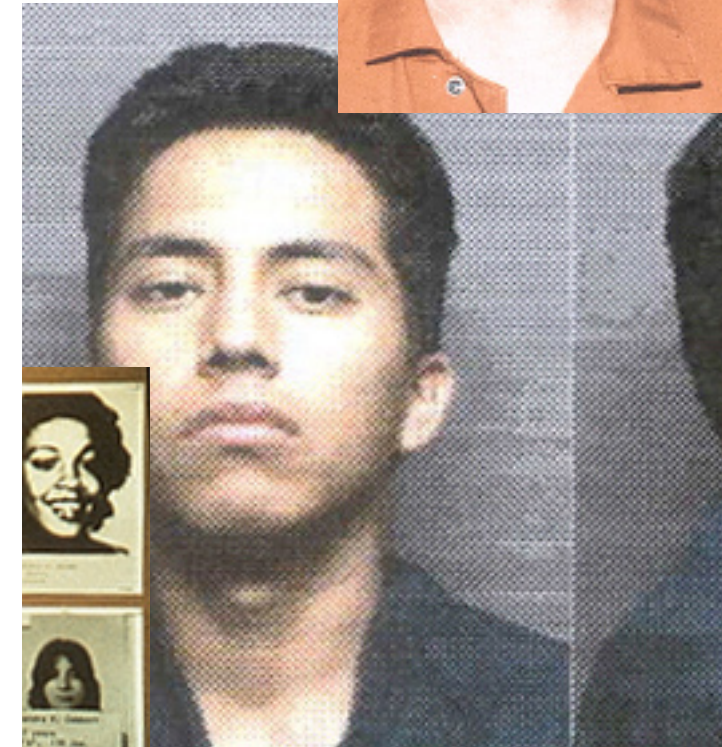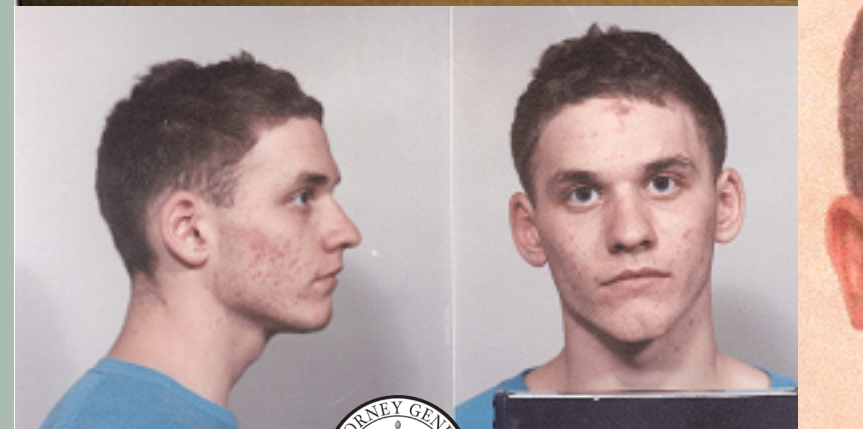# HITS

Homicide Investigation Tracking System

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Washington State Attorney General's Office

HITS
Homicide Investigation Tracking System

The Homicide Investigation and Tracking System (HITS), housed in the Criminal Justice Division of the Attorney General's Office, was originally funded as part of the Community Protection Act of 1990.

The Community Protection Act funding for the HITS unit came on the heels of several high-profile cases, including serial killers:

- • Ted Bundy
- • Gary Ridgway, aka the "Green River killer"
- • Wesley Allen Dodd
- • Child molester/mutilator Earl Shriner.

The Dodd case, perhaps more than any other, exemplified for law enforcement the critical need for *statewide* information sharing on violent offenders.

Prior to killing three young boys in Clark County, Dodd had been implicated in child luring and molestation in the Tri-Cities and King County areas.

By the time Dodd moved to Clark County, however, he was just another transient offender able to evade law enforcement's statewide view of his propensity for harming young children.

He did so by simply moving to another county and another jurisdiction each time he came under the scrutiny of local law enforcement.

At the time, an offender's crossing into another jurisdiction crippled the sharing of information by law enforcement.

It is interesting to note that Dodd, following his conviction, outlined some of the "holes" in the state's criminal justice system in a hand-written letter to then Attorney General Ken Eikenberry.

Dodd described himself as a sexual predator, who was basically "ignored" by law enforcement authorities as he moved from community to community.

In enabling legislation in 1990, the Washington State Legislature found that the HITS Unit was the "only homicide information system in the state and provided invaluable assistance in the investigation of homicides."

The HITS system created "…a reasonable and efficient means for the collection, analysis, storage, and use of homicide information in order to provide greater protection of the public, to ensure better use of limited law enforcement resources, and to enhance the administration of justice in the state of Washington."

What was believed to be true in 1990 has been proven to be true through thousands of real life applications of the HITS capabilities to solve violent crime in the intervening 15 years.

In the beginning, the HITS Unit gathered data related solely to homicide. Over time, the need to capture sex-related and other crime data became more compelling. The HITS Unit recognized that gathering more than just homicide data was critical to realizing the full potential of the system. As a result, the HITS Unit currently collects, codes, maintains, and most importantly, shares, data about nearly 65,000 cases.

2006 HITS Statistics

Total Homicide Cases........................8,880

Total Rape Cases..............................8,038

Total Cases in Crime File................64,603

Miscellaneous Crime Data

The HITS database now collects **other crimes and incidents** that do not rise to the level of rape or homicide. As with rape and homicide, this number continues to grow every day. The data captured in this file typically involves other crimes that have occurred and are historically predatory in nature, such as:

- • Non-rape sexual assaults (i.e. molestation, fondling, incest, etc.)
- • Sex offender registration and changes of address forms
- • Child luring
- • Stalking
- • Child Pornography (internet and non-internet related)
- • Identity theft
- • Suspicious circumstances (i.e. children approached on the way to school, bloody clothing found, abandoned vehicle, missing persons, etc.)

Information received from other states also gets entered into the "Crime Data" section of the database. This information comes to the HITS Unit by teletype, bulletins, newspaper accounts, phone call, etc.

How often is it used?

Those who are aware of HITS use it quite often. The requests for information that the HITS receives has consistently gone up for the span of time that records have been kept. In 2006, the Unit received 652 requests for information.

Total requests for
information assistance....................652

Total Bulletins Sent.............................488

Total Recipients on mailing list..........2,000+

Why is HITS important?

Often times an offender doesn't commit just one violent crime, they are sometimes spread among different jurisdictions and their commission can span several years. HITS is the only way that violent crimes from different jurisdictions, committed at different times can be compared to determine if they have significant characteristics in common which might indicate a common perpetrator. Without the HITS system offenders who commit more than one violent crime may avoid apprehension; jurisdictions may not know that they are pursuing a common offender. Being able to match and connect crimes greatly enhances public protection by increasing the solvability of various violent crimes.

In addition to supplying information from the database the HITS investigators assist local law enforcement with ongoing investigations, conduct training and provide a 'bulletin' serves that instantaneously provides crime information to almost 3,000 investigators state and region wide.

Does it really work?

To weigh the value and usefulness of the HITS system the Washington State University conducted an exhaustive survey of Washington law enforcement agencies. According to the survey a majority of police chiefs and sheriffs contacted opined that HITS has had a **significant effect** on homicide investigations. The data on supervisor and criminal investigator satisfaction with services indicate an **80%+ approval rate** of the HITS program The comments offered by some law enforcement is the best indicator of HITS value:

- • <u>From a criminal investigator:</u> **"This program could be the best tool within the State if it was expanded to a more useful degree. We have the same problem as a lot of small agencies manpower; time and money."**

- • <u>From a supervising investigator:</u> "HITS has been valuable to me from day one as a detective. Networking is what it is all about for a small agency and I'm glad HITS is there.

- • <u>From an online survey:</u> "This is a very small jurisdiction with low crime rates. I feel HITS is excellent and would use it when needed."

- • <u>From a criminal investigator:</u> "HITS is a great resource for small agencies around the state."

Why does HITS need more funding?

To remain an effective tool for local law enforcement, the HITS system must be current with evolving technology. The current program and operating system is based upon technology that is slow, archaic and outdated. The funding would be used to rewrite the HITS program and migrate it to a more useful operating system. Failure to fund the rewrite will make HITS less useful and effective in providing assistance on investigating violent crimes.

Rewriting the current applications and optimizing the searching of the databases is estimated to cost between $440,000 and $570,000. Adding additional applications to track additional types of crimes will add another $60,000 to $80,000 to the cost.

The benefits far outweigh the costs. If the HITS improvements save one more missing child, prevent one more senseless death or result in the capture of one more evil offender, it will be well worth the cost. **Notable cases where HITS has provided crucial evidence include:**

- • Spokane serial murder case, Robert Yates
- • Vancouver BC serial murderer, Robert Pickton
- • Green River murderer Gary Ridgway
- • DC snipers Lee Malvo and John Muhammad
- • Murder of Asst. US Attorney Thomas Wales