



# Florida FIRST

FLORIDA INSTITUTE FOR RESEARCH, SECURITY AND TACTICAL TRAINING

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*Frequently Asked Questions about the Research & Training Facility*

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## **WHAT IS THE ADAM KENNEDY MEMORIAL FORENSICS FIELD?**

The Forensic Field is a 3 acre parcel of land dedicated to applied and experimental research in forensics. It provides a space to hold trainings for how to process outdoor crime scenes, for using geophysical methods to locate buried remains, and tactical training. It will be located on the training grounds of the Pasco County's FIRST Facility (Florida Institute for Research, Security, and Tactical Training).

## **HOW WAS THE LOCATION CHOSEN?**

The Pasco Sheriff's (PSO) K9 and forensics units are currently located on this property. In partnership, IFAAS (Florida Institute for Forensic Anthropology & Applied Science) and PSO proposed to use 3 of these acres for the research site, thereby expanding the types of training already offered. This site is not only used by PSO, but also by many other law enforcement agencies, as PSO routinely invite law enforcement from around the country to use their grounds. The proposed training through this program will also be of interest and use to agencies around our state and throughout the country.

## **WHY IS RESEARCH IN FORENSICS NEEDED?**

Science has transformed criminal investigations, but there is a lot of research needed to develop new and improved methods; for example, how to manage large mass disasters involving a criminal act, identifying unknown homicide victims, locating clandestine burials, and identifying trace evidence in outdoor crime scenes. These methods need to be relevant to our local climate and environment. They also have to be validated so that they are admissible in court.

## **WHAT KIND OF RESEARCH WILL BE DONE?**

The forensic and scientific research conducted at the facility is very broad and multi-disciplinary, combining anthropology, medicine, geology, chemistry, biochemistry, engineering, and entomology. Research ranges from remote sensing to locate burials, to general observations on how a cadaver decomposes (such as color change), to evaluating chemical changes in the soils. We also perform simulated case studies for the medico-legal community and graduate students to conduct independent studies relating to their research.

**WHAT KIND OF TRAINING WILL BE DONE AT THE FACILITY?**

The facility is used by students in anthropology, geology, forensics, GIS, chemistry, entomology, and forensic medicine. It will be used in workshops to train professionals in the law enforcement and medicolegal community on how to process outdoor crime scenes, locate burials, and excavate them.

**WHY DON'T YOU CALL IT A "BODY FARM"?**

We recognize that the media has made this term popular and is a reference to a Patricia Cornwell novel. However, we do not believe it reflects the range of research and training goals developed through this program, nor does it maintain the dignity of those who donate themselves and loved ones to the program. Anatomical gifts are a tremendous resource and a gift to society that benefits from the knowledge it generates, as is standard at medical schools across the country. We are very grateful to our donors and always treat remains with dignity and respect.

**WHO WILL BENEFIT FROM THE FACILITY?**

This program is important because it provides new tools for us to use in the search for missing persons, homicides, and cold cases. Returning the remains of missing persons to families is a tremendous gift to give. By providing education, training, and much needed research into missing person and homicide investigations, we benefit law enforcement, medical examiners, attorneys, and the victims' families.

**WHY DOES FLORIDA NEED AN OUTDOOR FACILITY FOR RESEARCH AND TRAINING IF OTHER STATES HAVE THEM?**

First and foremost, Florida has a climate, soils, and vegetation that are unlike other places around the country doing similar research (i.e. Tennessee, Boston, and Colorado), and therefore we need methods and research that are local. Second, through this program we are able to purchase equipment and instrumentation that can also be used in actual crime scene work and will be available to agencies that need it. For local law enforcement to be able to respond to cases that come up in our area, such as when a child goes missing or a homicide occurs, we need to have all the available tools here and ready to use.

**WILL IT MAKE THE COMMUNITY SMELL BAD?**

No. Any odor is contained directly at the site. The closest neighbors will not smell anything. Odors from this facility do not travel distances. For example, the facility in Knoxville, Tennessee is located behind the hospital, in between 2 parking lots. People who park in the adjacent lots do not smell anything from the facility.

**WILL IT BOTHER THE NEIGHBORS?**

No. This facility is not open to the public. It is too far from residences to be visible. Additionally, several layers of security and fencing are already present at the site. Therefore, it is very private and remote.

**WILL IT CONTAMINATE THE GROUND WATER?**

No. The donated cadavers are not embalmed. There are no chemicals used. As the human body decomposes in the ground or on the surface, the natural elements primarily evaporate. It is a process like any other large mammal that may die in the woods. Studies specifically looking at

phosphates and other elements from the body that decompose and enter the soil reveal that the elements stay within 3 feet of the body. Therefore there is no leaching of chemicals or other elements into the local reservoir, ground water, or environment.

**WHERE DO THE CADAVERS COME FROM?**

IFAAS has a Living Donation Program. Individuals donate themselves for the purpose of forensic science research. The next of kin can also donate a loved one upon request.

**CAN THIS BE AN INDOOR FACILITY AND DONE INSIDE A MEDICAL SCHOOL?**

No. Medical school cadavers have to be embalmed. They are used for dissection to teach anatomy, not for research in the forensic sciences. Also, the goals of the program are specifically designed to help find missing persons who are presumed dead and/or reconstruct crime scenes for violent crimes against people in outdoor contexts. The natural environment has many variables that affect a crime scene. These variables cannot be replicated inside of a building.

**DO REMAINS STAY OUT THERE FOREVER?**

No. Donated remains are placed at the facility, buried or laid on the surface. Once they are skeletonized and the research module has ended, they are collected, cleaned and placed in the USF Donated Skeletal Collection which is used by students and researchers. The data that comes from skeletal studies enables human identification and is critically important.

**WHY CAN'T OTHER ANIMALS BE USED?**

Beginning in 2006 we started a training program for USF students using animal models. The sites for this program included the woods behind USF at the Ecological Park, the MOSI woods, and the Tampa city park Backwater Hammock. This program was very successful and popular. We trained our students and hosted numerous law enforcement programs for training. However, for the research program we are now proposing, especially regarding remote sensing and sequences for estimating time since death, human models are needed. Therefore, we are building on the success of our training sites and chose the PSO facility as it is the most secure.

Note that the sites in which animal models were used are within very urban and residential areas. Yet even so, there was no detrimental effect on the water, environment, or local property values.