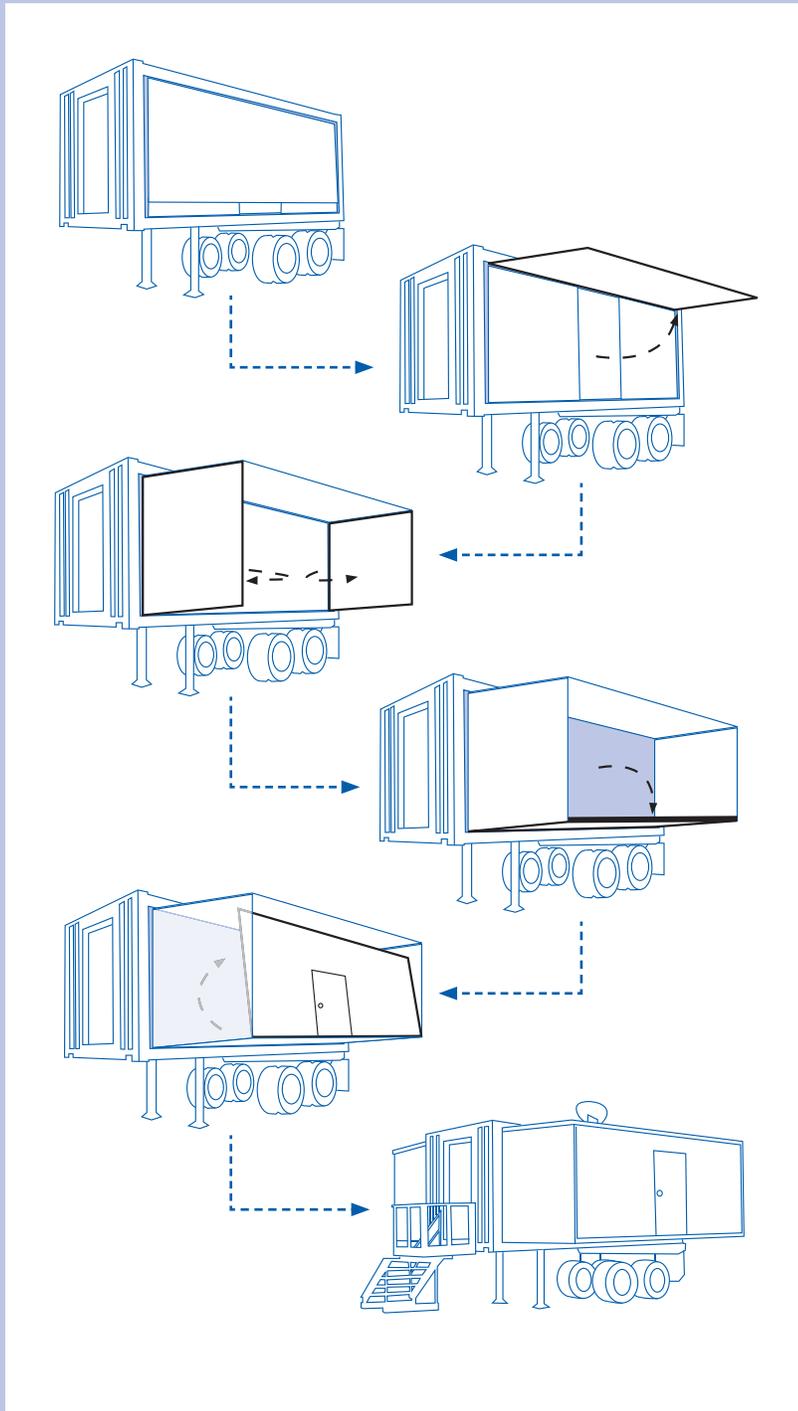


## FROM BATTLEFIELD TO HOMEFRONT: Mobile Laboratories Are Changing the Way We Respond to Crisis



**M**obile forensic laboratories are an innovative and efficient way to expand or replace forensic capabilities in combat areas or regions that have experienced a natural disaster or other crisis. They were developed by the National Forensic Science Technology Center in partnership with the Department of Defense, which used similar laboratories in Iraq and Afghanistan to study improvised explosive devices.

In addition to helping agencies respond to natural disasters, the mobile forensic laboratories can be used for security training exercises.

### Nuts and Bolts

- ▶ Because they are created from a standard shipping container, mobile forensic laboratories can be delivered by truck, transport plane, train, ship or helicopter, bringing laboratory support to even the most remote areas.
- ▶ Each laboratory measures 8' x 20' x 8.5' and rests on a standard transport trailer for ease of movement. Once folded out, the laboratory provides a maximum of 400 square feet of usable space, complete with lighting, wrap-around power access and open floor space. Multiple laboratories can be connected to allow for different disciplines, contamination prevention, administrative areas or other uses.
- ▶ Each section is self-supporting and can be used separately for smaller projects. A diesel-powered generator offers a minimum of 33 hours of power on a single tank, providing air conditioning or heat, light satellite communications and even conditioned power for sensitive forensic equipment. Interior separators can provide dust- and light-proof work areas within each unit.
- ▶ A small team can set up the laboratory in less than an hour, not including equipment startup. Each lab features full data sharing and an access-controlled entryway.

To learn more, go to <http://www.nfstc.org>.

NCJ 228385



## Mobile Forensics Laboratory Helps Cedar Rapids CSI Recover From Devastating Flood

by Bill Cote

In his 18 years on the force, Cedar Rapids Police Sergeant Joe Clark thought he had seen it all. However, nothing prepared him for the sight of the department's crime lab swamped in more than eight feet of water.

"It was unbelievable. Water was almost up to the ceiling," he said. "The crime lab was completely ruined."

Luckily, in what they thought was an abundance of caution, his investigative unit had moved its new Automated Fingerprint Identification System out of the crime lab that occupied the basement of its headquarters before the flood. However, no one had anticipated that more than 30 feet of water would engulf the city. The rest of the forensic equipment was destroyed.

For a few months, the officers conducted forensics analysis in a makeshift lab set up in an unventilated garage.

"You can imagine how difficult that was — with cross-contamination and security issues," said Clark. "Not to mention how cold it got in there as fall arrived."

Clark contacted Joe Polski, chief operating officer of the International Association for Identification, who put him in touch with the

*Within a few weeks, Clark had a 400-square-foot mobile forensics lab up and running in the parking lot.*

National Forensic Science Technology Center in Largo, Fla., to discuss using one of its mobile labs. Within a few weeks, Clark had a 400-square-foot mobile forensics lab up and running in the parking lot.

Although the town of Cedar Rapids is still a long way from being back to normal after the historic flood, the Police Department's crime scene investigation unit is now running again.

"I don't know what we would have done without this lab," said Clark. "Our evidence processing ability would have been next to nothing during the last several months. And we can't just quit investigating crimes because we get flooded."

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Bill Cote is on staff at the National Forensic Science Technology Center.