



Search for evidence: Police are fingerprinted when they join the force but officers are concerned that samples of their DNA could be obtained by criminals and planted at crime scenes.

Picture: Paul Chappells

## **Police outrage over demand for their DNA**

*JASON ALLARDYCE*

PLANS to force police to give DNA samples have sparked a rebellion among rank-and-file officers.

It is understood all eight of Scotland's police forces are about to demand that in future new recruits hand over samples to be included in a national genetic database.

This would allow any body matter, such as hair or saliva, found at a crime scene, to be compared with the DNA records of officers, so investigations are not thrown off course through accidental contamination by officers working there.

But rank-and-file police fear that calculating criminals with a grudge against members of the force could manipulate the system to damage the careers of innocent officers.

Members of the Scottish Police Federation believe criminals could deliberately contaminate the scene with officers' DNA, either to implicate them in serious crimes or to give the impression that they had planted evidence. A federation spokesman said: "A point made by many of our members is that it is relatively easy for anyone so minded to obtain DNA traces of a police officer - for example from a discarded cigarette butt - and to deliberately contaminate a locus with it.

"Apart from the suspicion which may or may not fall on the officer, it has the potential to diminish the evidential value of any DNA traces of the real perpetrator of the crime."

Last night the officers' fears were dismissed as "far fetched" by a source close to the Association of Chief Police Officers in Scotland, which is driving the new plan forward.

But the possibility of framing police officers is an extremely sensitive issue for the force. A policewoman lost her job after being wrongly accused of leaving her fingerprint at a murder scene. All officers already have to provide fingerprints as a condition of appointment.

Former Strathclyde WPC Shirley McKie was accused of contaminating the scene of the murder of Ayrshire woman Marion Ross, who was found stabbed at her Kilmarnock home in January 1997.

McKie maintained that although she was one of the first officers to arrive at the scene, she had never been in Ross's house.

Despite the defence argument that the murder scene had been contaminated by police

incompetence, David Asbury was convicted on other fingerprint evidence and sentenced to life imprisonment. But 10 months after the conviction, McKie was charged with perjury and suspended by Strathclyde Police for allegedly lying on oath, although she was later fully acquitted.

Civil liberties campaigners last night voiced concerns about the DNA testing plan. John Scott, the chairman of the Scottish Human Rights Centre, said the move was "an intrusion into personal privacy".

He said it would be easier to justify checking samples against police DNA when the need arose, rather than impose blanket DNA testing.

Scott also agreed a determined criminal could attempt to frame a police officer with a stolen DNA sample. "There have been cases where it has been suspected that fingerprint evidence has been planted," he said. "If you have access to someone's DNA it allows greater scope for the possibility that evidence can be planted."

The police federation also doubts whether the planned DNA database represents good value for money. It has suggested it may be cheaper simply to obtain samples as required from an individual officer if it is suspected he may have contaminated a crime scene.

But the Scottish Executive, which is prepared to change the law to allow the testing regime to begin shortly, rejected such concerns. An Executive spokeswoman said: "The creation of such a database has clear benefits in terms of providing operational, time and financial savings."

The requirement for new recruits to provide a DNA sample as a condition of appointment has been in place south of the Border since last summer.

Under the Scottish plan, samples would be stored on a database to be searched only if a senior investigating officer had reasonable grounds to believe that innocent contamination of a scene of crime might have taken place.

Supporters say because technological developments had produced highly sensitive analytical techniques, there is a risk that a DNA profile could be inadvertently contaminated - for example as a result of an officer sneezing, coughing or shedding a stray hair.

While this may not lead to a wrongful conviction, it could delay an investigation or at worst prevent the real offender being identified.

Backers of the policy say that if investigators could quickly identify such innocent contamination using the DNA database and discard it, inquiries could proceed quicker.

A spokeswoman for Acpos confirmed that following a meeting last week, all forces had agreed to require new recruits to take a DNA test and follow the English model, although Scotland's biggest force, Strathclyde Police, is considering requiring all its officers to provide a sample.

A source close to the association said: "The fact that you've got someone's DNA at a crime scene does not mean people will believe that person is responsible.

"It is simply an indication that the person may have been at the locus. It would merely start an investigation which would require to look for corroboration."

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