

CSI fact catching up with fiction as chemists develop new technology

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Real-life crime scene analysis of bloodstains, fingerprints, and other evidence does not match the speed and certainty on television shows such as CSI. But thanks to advances in chemistry, fact is catching up with fiction as researchers develop faster, more sensitive forensics tools, according to an article scheduled for the March 24 issue of Chemical & Engineering News, ACS' weekly newsmagazine.

The article, written by C&EN Senior Editor Mitch Jacoby, describes up and coming forensics tools just unveiled at Pittcon, a major laboratory science conference held earlier this month in New Orleans.

These new tools include a highly-sensitive method for identifying the specific dyes used to color acrylics, cotton, nylon, and other types of fibers, a technique that could help distinguish between fibers that appear similar. Other innovative tools include a handheld spectrometer for on-site detection of explosives and illegal drug residues and a long-lasting fluorescent dye solution that allows a longer, more detailed analysis of bloodstains than do conventional dyes.

The popularization of forensics on television has also spurred a new appreciation for this science among college students and the general public, the article suggests. But instant crime-solving remains the stuff of fiction. "Real chemists can't always come up with solutions quite that fast. But they're working on it," Jacoby notes in the article.

Source: ACS

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