

PUB MRT at OLWAZINI DISCOVERY CENTER

The first in a series of PUB MRTs was held at the Olwazini Science Centre in Pietermaritzburg on the 17th of September. Various speakers from the SAPS as well as a legal advisor were invited to speak on the topic “Forensic Science in Fighting Crime”.

The first speaker was Captain Chetty from the SAPS who spoke about ACT (Against Crime Together) and crime prevention techniques. He emphasized the importance of getting to know your neighbours and the ABCD of reporting suspicious activity (A-age, B-build, C-colour, D-description). Similarly, facial indentikit expert Detective Sergeant Rose Kleyhans stressed that when experiencing a crime, all senses must be utilized so that an accurate description of the perpetrator can be put together.

Inspector Marius van der Merwe highlighted how evidence is collected as well as the different methods of processing exhibits (police term for evidence). He also explained the Locard Principle – “every contact leaves a trace” – that applies to crime scenes. Crime scene preservation is very important for **all** the evidence to be collected.

Sergeant Samantha van der Byl went into detail on DNA evidence.

Deoxyribonucleic acid (DNA) is the inherited (half paternal, half maternal) code or set of genetic instructions that is found in all nucleic cells. Every persons DNA is unique with the exception of identical twins. DNA can be obtained from crime scenes from blood, hair, semen or other biological evidence. Forensics labs analyze the DNA evidence and then use various methods to match the DNA to a suspect. A positive match places the suspect at the crime scene. Sergeant van der Byl then explained the process from crime scene to forensic lab and then to court.

With every case that goes to court, all evidence collected and used must be obtained legally. Mrs Samkelisizwe said that this also applies to biological evidence i.e. DNA evidence. She emphasized that a suspect is innocent until proven guilty and that it is the burden of the court to prove its case beyond any reasonable doubt.