



## Slow drug testing could allow drug dealers to go free 🗣️

03:16 PM CDT on Tuesday, July 25, 2006

By CHRIS HAWES / WFAA-TV

Tonight a number of North Texas drug dealers are walking the streets, when they very likely should be in jail. We've learned drug testing labs in Tarrant County are thousands of cases behind, thanks to private labs closing and an overwhelming number of cases.

Somewhere out there, a criminal's praying the drug lab botches a test. That by some miracle a machine won't confirm what it has is indeed crack-cocaine. But the drug's former owner could still get lucky.

That's because the Department of Public Safety Crime Lab in Garland is one of two labs serving Tarrant County with an enormous backlog of cases. "Actually I checked it this morning and it was 2, 300 cases," said Manuel Valadez, DPS Lab in Garland.

So what happens to the suspected drug dealers waiting in jail while prosecutors are waiting on lab results? Under Texas law, if enough time passes without an indictment, the judge has to let him go free.

"That's happened at least once here," said Judge Gill.

Judge Bob Gill told us slow drug testing caused one case before him to be temporarily dismissed. In another case he had to let a suspect walk the streets until prosecutors could get drug test results.

"I see it happening more in the future," said Judge Gill.

Maybe not today, but as weeks and months pass with drug cases stuck in limbo, Judge Gill predicts more and more suspects will find themselves walking free. "My hands are tied, the law mandates it," said Judge Gill.

However, there is help on the way. A new, bigger lab at the Department of Public Safety in Garland will open by 2008. Also, tomorrow, the Tarrant County Commissioner's Court will consider funding extra staffing at another county lab.

E-mail [chawes@wfaa.com](mailto:chawes@wfaa.com)



WFAA-TV

Judge Gill predicts more and more suspects will continue to walk free due to slow drug tests.

**Also Online**

**VIDEO** [Chris Hawes reports](#)

---

Online at:

[http://www.wfaa.com/sharedcontent/dws/wfaa/latestnews/stories/wfaa060725\\_jfh\\_drugtesting.1b12bff.html](http://www.wfaa.com/sharedcontent/dws/wfaa/latestnews/stories/wfaa060725_jfh_drugtesting.1b12bff.html)