When the King County, Washington, Regional Automated Fingerprint Identification Program System (AFIS) replaced their aging AFIS with a MorphoTrak system in early 2011, they added palmprint storage, mobile ID, search, and match capability. Wanting to get the best possible use of their existing palm file, they decided to digitize all 350,000 palmprint records instead of building a new database from arrests after the system went “live” (often known as a Day One Forward migration). Within months they had proof that they had made the right decision:
In December 2011, investigators solved the rape of a 12 year old girl in her own bedroom. The AFIS made an identification based on a palmprint left on a glass surface and matched it to a print taken in 2006 for driving with a suspended license. Based on this print evidence, detectives arrested a suspect within three days. The perpetrator has been sentenced to 25 years to life for the offense.

With more than 1.9 million people, King County is the 14th most populous county in the United States. It covers more than 2,000 square miles; almost double the size of the average US county. The Regional AFIS Program provides criminal fingerprint identification services for all 39 cities and unincorporated areas of King County. Since 1988 the program has been funded through a voter-approved property tax levy that in 2012 was less than $13 on a $350,000 home.

In addition to providing the equipment and staff to fingerprint and identify all inmates booked into County jails, the King County Regional AFIS Program also responds to crime scenes throughout the County. Their fingerprinting expertise contributes to the AFIS Program's latent success.

Expanding AFIS Capabilities

One innovation of the recent Regional AFIS replacement is the ability for examiners to perform AFIS work from their office desktop workstations. Their virtual AFIS environment has been “amazing”, say the examiners, who no longer have to move to a dedicated workstation for tenprint and latent work. With all their resources available in one place, staff are more productive and satisfied.

The system replacement also included automating some of their manual processes. For example, the County’s Name Index, which contains no fingerprints, is now directly linked to the system, for a fingerprint-based (and more accurate) look-up. Yet the system still has the ability to make only demographic information available to individuals who have no need or authorization to see fingerprint records.

The new system began providing hits on cold cases immediately — while staff was still undergoing training.

They made approximately 200 hits within the first year, including 20 new suspect names in homicide cases, and 19 new suspects, rape, robbery, and kidnapping cases that had not been previously associated with these cold cases.

The system also includes a network of livescan devices in more than 30 locations designed to capture high quality fingerprints and palm prints and to transmit them electronically. The Regional AFIS Program also has results from their pilot program of handheld MorphoDent devices that allow officers in the field to capture a suspicious person’s index fingerprints, search the prints against the AFIS database, and receive a hit response in less than two minutes. Persons giving false names are quickly identified, all without having to transport them to the police station or jail for printing. This saves the agency fuel, wear & tear, and most critically, officer time. By keeping their officers on the streets rather than transporting suspects for identification, the community benefits from greater levels of public safety. The pilot is so successful that the program plans to expand the use of mobile ID throughout the county.

The Regional AFIS Program, with technology from MorphoTrak, provides criminal identification services for all police agencies within King County. Its civilian staff provides not only fingerprinting services in jails, but also tenprint and latent, mugshot and DNA sample handling services. The program is recognized for its high standards in quality, accuracy, and service, that officers, investigators, prosecutors, and corrections staff have all come to rely upon.

The numerous success stories of the new Regional AFIS include the following:

1. Helped hospitals and the Medical Examiner’s Office identify unknown injured or deceased individuals little or no information was available.
2. Solved a 1978 homicide case in which an 80 year old woman was killed in her home. Low-quality prints at the scene could not be matched at the time. But MorphoTrak technology led to an arrest in Reno in 2011.
3. Solved a vandalism case involving at least 55 instances of graffiti, based on fingerprints left on a paint can dropped at the scene.
4. Obtained a confession from a bank robber after his prints were developed from the demand note he used in the robbery.