



**Latent Print Section**  
**Handling of Evidence & Documentation Procedures**  
Comparative and Analytical Division



## 1. Handling of Evidence & Documentation Procedures

### 1.1 Scope

- 1.1.1 This procedure establishes the requirements to receive, handle, document, protect, store, and transfer physical evidence in the Latent Print Section of the Houston Forensic Science Center (HFSC).

### 1.2 Procedure

#### 1.2.1 Chain of Custody

- 1.2.1.1 A chain of custody is maintained for all items of evidence submitted to the Latent Print Section. This is accomplished through written signatures, initials, and/or electronic equivalent.
- 1.2.1.2 Intra-section transfers, or items transferred from another section within the Houston Forensic Science Center (HFSC), and items transferred between examiners/processors/CS/CM Personnel/storage locations shall be documented with a chain of custody record as stated above in 1.2.1.1.

#### 1.2.2 Evidence Security

- 1.2.2.1 The Latent Print Section is located within a secure, electronic badge controlled limited access building.
- 1.2.2.2 The Latent Print Section and its processing laboratory are secure limited access areas. Access is controlled by electronic badge readers.
- 1.2.2.3 The evidence storage vaults located within the processing lab and the latent print examiner section have separate electronic badge scanners.
- 1.2.2.4 All physical evidence received by the Latent Print Section shall be stored inside the 18<sup>th</sup> Floor Vault or the 15<sup>th</sup> Floor Vault. In instances where item(s) cannot be stored inside either of those locations the item(s) will be retained inside the Latent Print Processing laboratory and secured to protect evidence from loss, contamination, cross transfer and deleterious change. All items will be clearly labeled as evidence.
- 1.2.2.5 Physical evidence to be returned to the submitting agency after completion of analysis shall be stored in one of the locations listed above.
- 1.2.2.6 When a latent print examiner ends their shift, latent lift evidence will either be secured inside the examiner's workstation desk or placed within the Latent Print evidence vault.
- 1.2.2.7 Physical evidence being transferred to temporary storage locations within the Latent Print Section for technical review, administrative review, verifications, etc. must be secured in a manner that prevents loss, cross transfer, contamination and/or deleterious change of the evidence, but does not have to have a permanent seal affixed. Evidence in envelopes, this can be accomplished by placing a piece of tape over the opening of the envelope in a manner that prevents the contents from being lost.

#### 1.2.3 Evidence Inventory



- 1.2.3.1 Upon inventorying the contents of a package, any discrepancies will be documented in the case record.
- 1.2.3.2 Evidence seals are inspected to ensure they protect evidence from loss, cross-transfer, contamination, or deleterious change.
- 1.2.3.3 If packaging is not suitable or there is a chance the test items' integrity could be compromised, a rejection of testing report may be issued. The processor/examiner should consult with a Supervisor/Technical Lead/Section Manager to determine the course of action to be taken.
  
- 1.2.4 Evidence Packaging
  - 1.2.4.1 All evidence packaging opened or created by the initial examiner/processor, which may include DVD's or physically obtained inked prints, will have the following clearly marked on the outside of the packaging:
    - Forensic Case Number – Item Number – Examiner Initials – Date Opened/Created  
(Example: 2014-00001 Item 1 TJS 6/17/14)
  - 1.2.4.2 Physically obtained inked finger/palm prints must be added to the case as an item of evidence through LIMS and the Evidence Management System (EMS).
  - 1.2.4.3 Physical evidence received or created within the Latent Print Section shall be packaged as to prevent the items from loss, cross-transfer, contamination, or deleterious change.
  - 1.2.4.4 Upon completion of analysis the evidence packaging will be sealed and clearly identified with the following:
    - Examiner/Processor's initials
    - Date Sealed
  
- 1.2.5 Sub-Itemization of Latent Print Comparative Evidence
  - 1.2.5.1 Evidence received or created may contain more than one item within the outer packaging. The entire package is considered an item.
  - 1.2.5.2 The contents of the package will be sub-itemized within LIMS and this sub-itemization number will be written on the respective item(s). **With the exception of physically obtained inked finger/palm prints that should not be sub-itemized.**
  - 1.2.5.3 Each item contained within evidence packaging will have the following written on a clear area of the card in permanent ink, **or the digital equivalent**, by the primary examiner:
    - Forensic Case Number – Item Number or Sub-item Number – Examiner Initials – Date  
(Example: 2014-00001 Item 001-06 TJS 6/17/14)
  - 1.2.5.4 Printed labels may be affixed to the items containing the above information. If printed labels are used, the examiner must initial on the seam of the label in a way that the initials are on both the surface of the item and the label.
  
- 1.2.6 Sub-Itemization of Evidence to be Processed



1.2.6.1 Evidence received may contain more than one item within the outer packaging. The entire package is considered an item.

1.2.6.2 The contents of the package will be sub-itemized within LIMS. This sub-itemization number will be written on the evidence, if the area permits without possible destruction of undeveloped latent impressions.

#### 1.2.7 Documenting the Analysis of Latent Impressions

1.2.7.1 When an examiner determines that a latent lift or image of a latent print is suitable for comparison, the following will be marked on the image or lift near the latent impression:

- Latent fingerprints with known orientation - will be identified as being suitable by drawing a half circle around the top of a finger indicating distal orientation of the print.
- The proximal and medial phalanges of the finger with known orientation – will be identified as being suitable by drawing vertical lines on both sides of the print.
- Latent palm prints with known orientation – will be identified by drawing an open bracket around the bottom of a palm print with the bracket opening towards the top indicating distal orientation of the print.
- Latent prints where origin (finger or palm) cannot be determined – will be identified by drawing a circle around the entire print.
- Latent prints that are known fingers, palms, or phalanges but orientation cannot be determined– will be identified by drawing a question mark to the side of the latent print in addition to the half circle or open bracket.

1.2.7.2 The latent prints determined suitable for comparison will be assigned a latent number (ex. L-001, L-002, and L-003).

1.2.7.3 All latent prints deemed suitable will have a legible copy retained digitally in the case record.

1.2.7.4 All final analysis conclusions of latent prints will be documented in the case record.

1.2.7.5 Anytime latent prints are annotated electronically, such as marking corresponding minutiae within Photoshop or another commercially available photographic editing program, the image must be saved in LIMS or a digital image management system (e.g. Mideo). Due to encryption constraints, when an examiner is using the FBI proprietary software Universal Latent Workstation's comparator tool (ULW) and IDEMIA to view encrypted file transmissions, any annotations made within the program do not have to be saved.

#### 1.2.8 Documenting Identifications

1.2.8.1 If an identification is effected, the examiner will write the identification symbol ( $\phi$ ), finger number and/or finger abbreviation or palm abbreviation (Ex. LM, RR, RM, LP), the name on the database or physically recorded record finger or palm print card, the examiner's initials, and the date near the latent impression identified on the latent item or digital image. In cases where the first and last name are the same on more than one person compared, ex. family members,



include the middle initial with the first and last name.) In cases where there is not a middle initial or it is the same, use a unique identifier.

**1.2.9 Documenting Verifications**

1.2.9.1 After the verifier has reached a conclusion of identification, they will write the verifier's initials, and date. For each latent print identified, the verifier will write the above information beside or near the latent print verified.

1.2.9.2 The verifier will indicate their findings in the case record.

**1.2.10 Documenting Exclusions and Inconclusive Results**

1.2.10.1 All exclusions and inconclusive results will be documented in the case record.

**1.2.11 Documenting Preliminary AFIS Associations**

1.2.11.1 When an AFIS Candidate Comparison Sheet (ACCS) is generated, the initial examiner shall ensure that the ACCS image is accurately labeled with the original latent number and Forensic Case Number (FCN), that were assigned to the searched latent, which resulted in the PAA.

1.2.11.2 All ACCS images that produce a PAA shall be digitally recorded in the case record.

1.2.11.3 Unsolved Latent Match (ULM) Exception: ULM PAA's are generated from previously registered latent's which are not readily available to examiners. Therefore, original latent numbers and FCN's cannot be ensured.

1.2.11.4 The primary examiner shall ensure that all ACCS sheets reflect the original latent print(s).

**1.2.12 Un-release/Issuing Amended Reports**

1.2.12.1 If a report has been released and later it is found to contain errors, whether technical or administrative, the individual discovering the error will notify a **supervisor, technical lead or manager** and provide details of the problem. The section manager will also be notified of the circumstances. The Section Manager or designee is the only person authorized within the Latent Print Section to reset a completed report for amendments. The Manager or designee will notify the Quality Division when amended reports are issued.

**1.3 Quality Assurance/Quality Control**

1.3.1 Technical and administrative reviews are performed on all casework before a final report is released.

**1.4 Records**

1.4.1 Case records and reports will be maintained within the HFSC LIMS, digital image management system, and/or case record folders.

**1.5 References**



SWGFAST, *Document #8 Standard for the Documentation of Analysis, Comparison, Evaluation, and Verification (ACE-V)* 9/11/12 Ver. 2.0

SWGFAST, *Document #10 Standards for Examining Friction Ridge Impressions and Resulting Conclusions (Latent/Tenprint)* 3/13/13 Ver. 2.0

SWGFAST, *Document #5 Standards for Reporting Friction Ridge Examinations (Latent/Tenprint)* 9/14/12 Ver. 2.0

HFSC Latent Print Section, *Reporting Results and Interpretations*

HFSC Latent Print Section, *Analysis, Comparison, Evaluation and Verification Methodology*

HFSC Latent Print Section, *Automated Fingerprint Identification System (AFIS) Operations*