



Latent Print Section
Evidence Handling and Documentation
Comparative and Analytical Division



I. Scope

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

II. Procedure

- a. An electronic chain of custody is maintained for all evidence submitted to the Latent Print Section and created by the Latent Print Section, in accordance with the Quality Manual.
 - i. When a paper chain of custody is necessary it will be maintained in the case record in accordance with the Quality Manual.
- b. To sub-itemize latent lift cards in LIMS, the evidence must be electronically transferred into the custody of the latent print personnel. Evidence not physically transferred during an electronic transaction requires additional documentation in the chain of custody.

III. Evidence Security

- a. Access to the Latent Print Section (e.g. administrative area, processing laboratory and evidence vaults) is restricted to authorized personnel.
- b. Prior to case assignment, all evidence received shall be stored inside the 18th Floor Vault or 15th Floor Vault. In instances where item(s) cannot be stored inside either of those locations, the item(s) shall be retained inside the Latent Print Processing laboratory and secured to protect evidence from loss, contamination, cross transfer, and deleterious change. All items shall be clearly labeled as evidence.
- c. All drug evidence received shall be secured in the designated drug locker inside the 18th Floor Vault. Keys for this locker shall only be accessible by authorized latent print processors/examiners and CS/CM personnel.
- d. Evidentiary items being returned to the submitting agency upon completion of examination shall be stored in one of the locations listed above. Refer to III.b. for evidence that cannot be stored in any of these locations.
- e. When the latent print personnel's shift ends, all evidence will be secured in either a temporary storage location or transferred to an evidence vault.
- f. Latent print personnel may utilize an evidence locker in the Latent Print Processing laboratory for temporary storage, as appropriate for the type of evidence being stored. Refer to III.b. for evidence that cannot be stored in any of this location.
- g. Evidence in temporary storage locations do not require a permanent seal and will be secured by a lock and key that is assigned to each latent print personnel.
- h. Evidence being processed may be left for short periods of time in the Latent Print Processing laboratory without being secured in temporary storage. Such items shall be clearly labeled as evidence.

IV. Multi-Disciplinary Requests (MDR)



- a. Evidence submitted with requests for multiple forensic services will be evaluated by the laboratory.
 - i. Due to the nature of the type of evidence, the laboratory may determine that it is not possible to perform all requested analyses on the same piece of evidence. In these instances, the requestor will be consulted to determine which type of analysis is preferred.
- b. Prior to processing a submitted item, the processor/examiner must check for an MDR. This can be checked in the Laboratory Information Management System (LIMS) and Where's My Result (Portal). If there is an MDR on the item(s) requested for processing, the processor/examiner must ensure that any applicable forensic analysis has been completed prior to processing. For the general discipline MDR workflow, refer to the Quality Manual.

V. Evidence Inventory

- a. Evidence seals are inspected to ensure they protect evidence from loss, cross-transfer, contamination, or deleterious change.
- b. If an evidentiary item is unsealed or improperly packaged, refer to the Quality Manual for remediation steps.
- c. Inventory of all items received will occur prior to any physical or chemical processing and/or any analysis is conducted.
- d. Upon inventorying the submitted evidence, any discrepancies will be documented in the case record.
 - i. Administrative documentation contained within the packaging will be documented in the case record and does not require itemization.
- e. Any request for processing of currency requires the assigned processor/examiner to count and inventory the quantity of each denomination and total dollar amount. A second processor/examiner shall verify the currency total and denomination quantity. The currency inventory and verification will be documented in the case record.
- f. For any processing request containing twenty (20) or more of the same type of item (e.g. unfired cartridges), the assigned processor/examiner must count the quantity of items and the quantity must be verified by a second processor/examiner. The count verification shall be documented in the case record.

VI. Evidence Handling for Processing

- a. Latent print evidence is fragile in nature and can be damaged by excessive handling or improper packaging.
- b. Proper PPE should be worn when examining and collecting latent print evidence. The processor/examiner will handle items in a way that will minimize the potential to damage potential latent prints, such as holding an item by the corners or edges.
- c. If there is any concern that an item of evidence was compromised, the Latent Print Technical Lead, Latent Print Supervisor, Latent Print Manager and/or designee should be notified as soon as practicable. Refer to the Analysis, Comparison, Evaluation and Verification Methodology policy for proper documentation of this circumstance.



- d. When any case is documented as containing or potentially containing fentanyl, and when any drug case received is processed prior to handling by the Seized Drugs section, the Latent Print Processing laboratory will be locked down with the following rules in place:
 - i. CS/CM and latent personnel will be notified via email that the lab is locking down and will be informed when the lab reopens.
 - 1. Notification will be at least two business days prior to locking down.
 - ii. A sign will be placed on the laboratory door indicating that it is locked down.
 - iii. Only essential processors/examiners will be permitted in the laboratory.
 - iv. Processors/examiners will remain inside the laboratory for the entirety of the processing.
 - v. Processors/examiners will wear N95 masks and Koda Powder Free Nitrile Examination gloves in addition to the standard personal protective equipment.
 - vi. The laboratory will be thoroughly cleaned prior to reopening.
- e. Developed possible suitable latent prints (PSLs) will be preserved through either digital or physical (lift card) means.
 - i. Digitally preserved images will be retained in an approved digital management system. Images will be made available upon request in an electronic format or DVD.
 - 1. When a DVD is requested, it will be itemized in LIMS and the Evidence Management System (EMS) and have the following information documented on the front of the disc:
 - a. Forensic Case Number (FCN)
 - b. Agency Case Number
 - c. Lab name and section
 - d. Authorized latent print processor name
 - e. Date burned
 - f. Description of contents
 - ii. Lift card(s) created during latent print processing will be maintained through and are subject to the verification process.
 - 1. If determined to be a PSL, the lift card(s) will be packaged in its own container and will be itemized in LIMS and EMS. Each lift should include the following information written on a clear area of the card, in permanent ink:
 - a. FCN
 - b. Item number
 - c. Authorized latent print processor/examiner initials
 - d. Date lifted
 - e. Evidence description
 - f. Sketch of the item of evidence with an "X" to indicate where the Possible Suitable Latent (PSL) was lifted from
 - g. Upward arrow to indicate the orientation of the latent lift

VII. Evidence Handling for Comparison



- a. The most common form of physical latent print comparison evidence is latent lift cards.
- b. Gloves will be worn while handling any latent lift evidence.
- c. Lift cards that contain potentially biohazardous materials should be handled with proper PPE.
 - i. Packaging will be documented accordingly if not already done so.
- d. In instances where items appear to require latent print processing, items should be secured from further handling and the Latent Print Manager and/or Technical Lead will be notified as soon as practicable.
- e. Physically obtained inked fingerprints, palmprints, and/or footprints must be added to the case as an evidentiary item through LIMS and EMS.

VIII. Evidence Packaging Documentation

- a. The following information must be documented on all outer evidence packaging for items that will be examined:
 - i. FCN
 - ii. Item Number
 - iii. Latent print personnel initials
 - iv. Date opened or created
- b. Inner packaging opened by a latent print processor/examiner will be labeled with the following after it has been confirmed that the packaging is not evidence through the review process.
 - i. FCN
 - ii. Item Number
 - iii. Latent print personnel/examiner initials
 - iv. Date case information documentation occurs
- c. Evidence received or created within the Latent Print Section shall be packaged as to prevent the item(s) from loss, cross-transfer, contamination, or deleterious change.
- d. When the evidence is ready to be returned to the submitter, ensure the packaging is sealed and clearly marked, on at least part of the evidence tape, with the following when applicable:
 - i. Latent print personnel's initials
 - ii. Date sealed

IX. Sub-Itemization of Latent Print Processing Evidence

- a. Evidence received may contain more than one item within the outer packaging. The entire package is considered one item.
- b. Each item contained in the outer package shall be sub-itemized in LIMS prior to processing. If the case does not allow for sub-itemization, prior authorization shall be received from the technical lead, manager, and/or designee.
- c. Prior to repackaging the evidence for return, each item contained within the evidence packaging will have the following information written on a clear area of the item, if permitted, in permanent ink, by the assigned latent print processor:
 - i. FCN



- ii. Item number and sub-item number
- iii. Latent print processor initials
- iv. Date labeled
- d. If an item does not permit such information to be documented due to size, possible destruction of ridge detail, or being personal property, the above listed information will be written on the proximal container.

X. Sub-Itemization of Latent Print Comparison Evidence

- a. Submitted or created evidence packaging will be treated as one item, regardless of the quantity of items contained within.
- b. Each item contained within evidence packaging will have the following information labeled on a clear area of the card, in permanent ink, by the latent print personnel who is scanning:
 - i. FCN
 - ii. Item number and sub-item number (when applicable)
 - iii. Latent print personnel's initials
 - iv. Date inventoried
- c. The contents of the package shall be sub-itemized within LIMS, and this sub-itemization number will be written on the respective item(s).
 - i. DVDs and physically obtained known records (obtained by HFSC personnel or an external entity) do not require sub-itemization.
 - ii. Elimination prints may require sub-itemization
- d. Miscellaneous documentation contained within an item is not considered evidence and does not need to be sub-itemized.
- e. Printed labels may be affixed to the items containing the above information. If printed labels are used, the latent print personnel 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.

XI. Documenting Possible Suitable Latents (PSL)

- a. All latent print processing tests and results will be documented in the case notes. Case notes will contain the following:
 - i. Date of processing
 - ii. Result (PSL or No PSL)
 - iii. The PSLs will be assigned a letter
- b. When a processor determines ridge detail is a PSL, the PSL shall be captured via photography. Scanning may be utilized when it is deemed necessary (refer to the Digital Imaging SOP for more detail). The following shall be included in the photograph or scan of the PSL:
 - i. Scale
 - ii. FCN
 - iii. Item number
 - iv. PSL letter
 - v. Latent print processor initials
 - vi. Date captured



- c. After processing is complete, overall photographs of each item with PSLs shall be captured. The following shall be included in the file name of the image:
 - i. FCN
 - ii. Item number
 - iii. PSL letter(s) (shall be included in both the photograph and the file name)
 - iv. Latent print processor initials
 - v. Date captured (the date in the filename will override any dates in the photograph)
- d. All images containing PSLs will be digitally preserved and retained in the case record.

XII. Documenting Analysis of Latents and of Possible Suitable Latents

- a. All latent print analysis and suitability determinations will be documented in the digital images and worksheets.
 - i. Digital Imaging Documentation
 - 1. Any markings to include second level detail that was utilized in determining the sufficiency of the friction ridge detail.
 - 2. When a latent print is suitable for comparison
 - a. Latent fingerprints with known orientation - a half circle will be drawn around the top of a finger indicating distal orientation of the print
 - b. Latent proximal and medial phalanges of the finger with known orientation – vertical lines will be drawn on both sides of the print
 - c. Latent palm prints with known orientation – an open bracket will be drawn around the base of a palm print with the bracket opening towards the distal orientation of the print
 - d. Latent prints of unknown anatomical source and orientation – a circle will be drawn around the entire print
 - e. Latent prints that are known fingers, palms, or phalanges but unknown orientation a question mark will be drawn to the side of the latent print in addition to the aforementioned annotations
 - ii. The following information will be documented in the worksheet:
 - 1. Date of analysis
 - 2. Suitability determination (NRD, NV, NAQ, AQ and VEO)
 - 3. Latent prints that are determined to be suitable for comparison (NAQ, AQ, VEO) will be assigned a latent number (e.g. L-001, L-002, and L-003)
- b. All suitable latent prints will be digitally preserved and retained in the case record.
 - i. Refer to Digital Imaging SOP for image requirements.

XIII. Documenting Comparisons and Evaluations

- a. Latent to Latent Comparisons
 - i. Latent to latent comparisons of friction ridge skin impressions are not conducted on a routine basis. Any request received for a latent to latent



- impression comparison must be approved by the section manager and/or designee.
- ii. No conclusions or exclusions to an individual(s) will be reported.
- b. Documenting conclusions:
 - i. All conclusions, except for AFIS Hits will have the following information documented in the worksheet:
 - 1. Date the evaluation occurred
 - 2. Individual compared
 - 3. Comparison conclusion
 - 4. Anatomical source, if applicable
 - ii. Documenting Identifications
 - 1. Digital Image Documentation will contain the following:
 - a. Identification symbol (\emptyset)
 - b. Anatomical source
 - c. Individual compared
 - i. In instances where the first and last name are the same on more than one person compared, include the middle initial or full middle name.
 - ii. In cases where there is not a middle initial/middle name or it is the same, use a unique identifier.
 - d. Examiner initials
 - e. Date evaluation occurred
- c. Documenting Automated Fingerprint Identification System (AFIS) Searches
 - i. Results for all AFIS searches will contain the following information in the worksheet:
 - 1. Date the search occurred
 - 2. System searched
 - 3. Result of search
 - ii. When an AFIS Hit is determined, an AFIS Candidate Comparison Sheet (ACCS) is generated.
 - 1. Available information may include Harris County Sheriff's Office (HCSO) number, State Identification (SID) number, and/or Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) number.
 - 2. Image file name will contain:
 - a. L-###
 - b. FCN
 - c. ACCS
 - d. Examiner Initials
 - iii. A reverse hit is generated from previously registered latent prints.
 - 1. When a reverse hit is determined it will be treated in the same manner as an AFIS Hit.
 - 2. Original evidence may be pulled when necessary.

XIV. Documenting Suitability Reviews and/or Verification



- a. Documenting Suitability Reviews
 - i. When conducting Suitability Reviews, evidence should be electronically transferred to the custody of the reviewing latent print processor/examiner. If the evidence remains in the custody of the primary processor, the reviewing latent print processor/examiner shall document that the review was conducted while evidence was in custody of the primary processor in the case record.
 - ii. The reviewing latent print processor/examiner shall document their review utilizing the review DUI.
 - iii. When reviewing a firearm, the reviewing latent print processor/examiner shall document that the firearm was safety checked in the review DUI.
 - iv. When reviewing currency, the reviewing latent print processor/examiner shall verify the currency total and denomination quantity. The verification shall be documented in the case record.
 - v. When reviewing twenty (20) or more of the same type of item, the reviewing latent print processor/examiner shall verify the quantity of the items. The verification shall be documented in the case record.
- b. Documenting Verifications
 - i. The verifier shall document their findings in the case record.
 - ii. All verified comparison conclusion(s) shall be indicated as such by the verifier writing their name and verification date next to the conclusion(s) in the case record.
 - 1. If multiple comparison conclusions for the same latent print are documented, only the reported comparison conclusion shall be verified.
 - iii. When an identification is verified, the verifier shall write their initials and the verification date near the latent print.

XV. Safety

- a. All latent print personnel shall be able to locate and understand Safety Data Sheets. Safety Data Sheets are available in the Latent Print Laboratory and electronically in the approved document management system.
- b. All latent print personnel shall utilize appropriate safe work practices as written in the Health and Safety Manual when handling evidence and chemicals.
- c. Safe work practices include:
 - i. Wearing appropriate personal protective equipment
 - ii. Using caution when handling chemicals, unknown substances, biohazardous materials, sharp objects, etc.
 - iii. Properly cleaning/sterilizing all surfaces and equipment utilized when handling potentially biohazardous materials
 - iv. Following proper lifting techniques and caution when handling heavy items
 - v. Ensuring that all engineering controls (e.g. ventilation hoods) are functioning properly
- d. When using the LASER or alternate light source (ALS), all persons in the room shall wear proper eye protection and close the door to the photo room indicating the LASER or ALS is in use.



- e. Throughout the process of examining and processing a firearm, all latent print processing personnel shall adhere to the following firearm safety rules, always:
 - i. Treat all firearms as if they are loaded
 - ii. Keep the firearm muzzle pointed in a safe direction
 - iii. Keep fingers off the trigger
- f. The Latent Print Processing laboratory is equipped with Narcan[®] (naloxone HCl) Nasal Spray. All latent print processors/examiners shall be able to identify its location and understand how to use it.
 - i. If Narcan[®] is used, immediately call 911.

References:

1. SWGFAST, *Document #8 Standard for the Documentation of Analysis, Comparison, Evaluation, and Verification (ACE-V)* 9/11/12 Ver 2.0
2. SWGFAST, *Document #10 Standards for Examining Friction Ridge Impressions and Resulting Conclusions (Latent/Tenprint)* 3/13/13 Ver. 2.0
3. SWGFAST, *Document #5 Standards for Reporting Friction Ridge Examinations (Latent/Tenprint)* 9/14/12 Ver. 2.0

Wording Removed from Previous Versions

Clause	Wording Removed
	Since major revisions were made to this document, the section titles are in red text to signify changes to the respective sections.