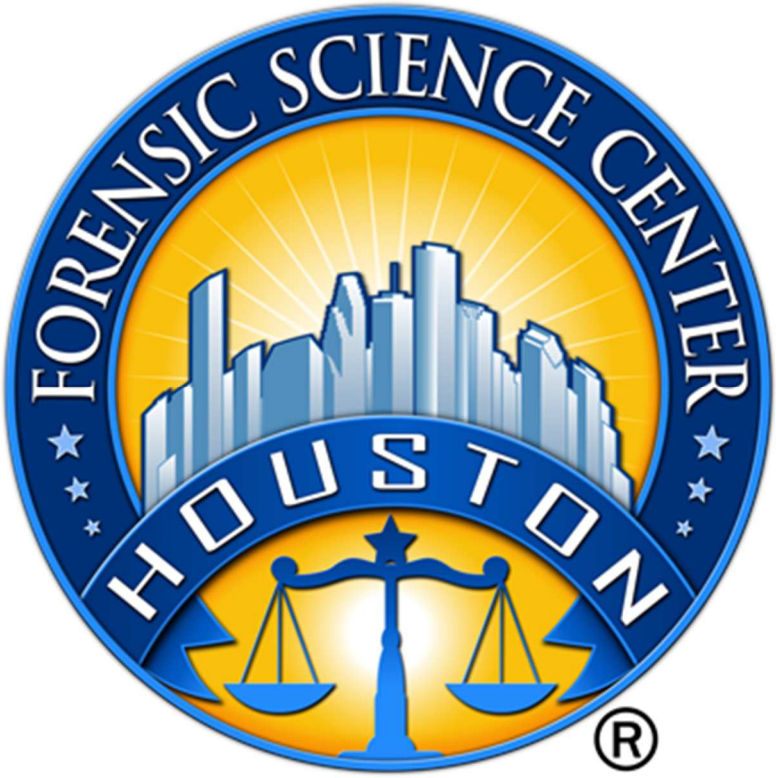

Latent Print Section
Handling of Evidence & Documentation Procedures

Forensic Analysis 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, 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/technicians/clerical staff/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 security/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. Additionally, there is an outside monitored alarm system on all entry doors that is PIN activated when the last person leaves for the day. The processing area is monitored by an outside alarm system that is separate from the main alarm system in the Latent Print Section.

1.2.2.3 Non-HFSC staff members and visitors must be escorted at all times while in the Latent Print Section.

1.2.2.4 The evidence storage vault located within the processing lab has a separate electronic badge scanner.

1.2.2.5 All physical evidence received by the Latent Print Section shall be stored inside the evidence vault if the case has not been assigned to a latent print examiner or latent print technician.

1.2.2.6 Physical evidence to be returned to the submitting agency after completion of analysis shall be stored in the evidence vault.

- Exceptions can be made in the case of large, bulky items that cannot be stored inside the vault. Since the processing lab has a separate, monitored alarm and is a limited access area, these items can be temporarily stored there pending return to the submitting agency.

1.2.2.7 Multiple, lockable steel cages are located in the Latent Print Processing Area that are designated secure storage locations for evidence that is currently assigned and/or is in the process of being analyzed by a latent print examiner or latent print technician.

1.2.2.8 When an examiner/technician ends their shift, all evidence currently being analyzed in the Latent Print Processing Area will be secured either in the Evidence Storage Vault or a lockable steel cage. For large bulky items that cannot be secured in the vault or a cage, the item can be left in the processing area.

1.2.2.9 Physical evidence being transferred to temporary storage locations within the Latent Print Section for AFIS entry, technical review, administrative review, verifications, etc. has to be secured in a manner that prevents loss or degradation of the evidence, but does not have to have a permanent seal affixed. For latent lift cards and physical photographs in envelopes, this is generally 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 Receiving Outside Submissions of Evidence

1.2.3.1 Upon submission to the Latent Print Section, evidence packaging should be inspected to ensure it is appropriate for the items said to be contained inside.

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 technician/examiner should consult with a supervisor/Section Manager to determine the course of action to be taken.

1.2.3.4 The evidence packaging will be labeled with a HFSC Laboratory Information Management System (LIMS) barcode. A barcode will be affixed to the outside packaging upon initial receipt by the Latent Print Section, if there is not a barcode already affixed.

1.2.3.5 All evidence packaging received by the initial examiner/technician will have the following clearly marked on the outside of the packaging:

- Forensic Case Number – Item Number – Examiner Initials – Date Received (Example: 2014-00001 Item 1 TJS 6/17/14)

1.2.3.6 If the evidence packaging has a LIMS decal clearly displaying the Forensic Case Number and Item number, then the examiner/technician will just initial and date the packaging.

1.2.3.7 If the evidence has been previously marked by the initial examiner and another examiner takes possession of it, then the receiving examiner must initial the packaging. If evidence has previously been analyzed by another section and has the HFSC bar code on it, then a new one is not necessary.

1.2.3.8 During the examination process, evidence may be transferred within the section to temporary locations, such as AFIS Entry or Verification, and does not have to be sealed with evidence tape. The container/ envelope must be secured in such a way as to preserve the contents from becoming lost or falling out. A piece of tape will be placed over the opening on the packaging to sufficiently create a temporary seal.

1.2.4 Physical Evidence Created within the Latent Print Section

1.2.4.1 Physical evidence created within the Latent Print Section, such as but not limited to, latent lifts, printed photographs, and record finger and palm print cards, shall be packaged as to prevent the items from loss, cross-transfer, contamination, or deleterious change.

1.2.4.2 Upon completion of analysis or when evidence created needs to be transferred, the evidence packaging will be sealed and clearly identified with the following:

- Forensic Case Number/LIMS barcode
- Item Number
- Examiner/Technician's initials

1.2.5 Evidence Inventory

1.2.5.1 All latent lift cards/physical evidence received must be inventoried to ensure the contents received match the chain of custody document (currently residing in LIMS). If a discrepancy is discovered, the initial examiner/technician shall contact the submitter to inquire about the circumstances immediately so that steps can be taken to correct the error.

1.2.5.2 The examiner/technician will document their inventory by filling out the Exhibit List area in the case record. Any discrepancies will be documented in the case record.

1.2.6 Sub-Itemization of Latent Lift Card Evidence

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 and this sub-itemization number will be written on the respective lift card.

1.2.6.3 Each latent print card contained within evidence packaging will have the following written on the front and back of the card in permanent ink by the initial examiner:

- Forensic Case Number – Item Number or Sub-item Number – Examiner Initials – Date Received
  (Example: 2014-00001 Item 1.6 TJS 6/17/14)

1.2.7 Sub-Itemization of Evidence to be Processed

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

1.2.7.2 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.

1.2.8 Record Finger and Palm Prints

1.2.8.1 When a record finger or palm print card is retrieved from the in-house databases or obtained by physically recording a person's friction ridge skin, it must be added to the case as an item of evidence through LIMS.

1.2.8.2 Record finger and palm prints must have the same information written as the latent lift cards.

- Forensic Case Number – Item Number – Examiner Initials – Date Received (Example: 2014-00001 Item 1 TJS 6/17/14)

1.2.9 Documenting the Analysis of Latent Impressions

1.2.9.1 The analysis definitions and guidelines outlined in the ACE-V Methodology SOP will be followed when determining suitability of latent print evidence.

1.2.9.2 Anytime latent prints are marked electronically the record must be saved in LIMS or a digital image management system (e.g. Mideo).

1.2.9.3 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 with a small arrow indicating distal orientation 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.

*Note: Latent impressions developed during processing will have circles as much as possible drawn around the possible suitable latent impressions. These indicate the areas where latent impressions were developed and do not indicate any type of orientation.

- Latent prints that are known fingers or palms but orientation cannot be determined– will be identified by drawing a question mark to the side of the latent print.

1.2.9.4 The latent prints determined potentially suitable for identification will have a latent number assigned to them beginning with L1 and each latent after will be labelled in ascending numerical order (i.e. L1, L2, and L3).

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

1.2.10 Documenting Identifications

1.2.10.1 If an identification is effected, the examiner will write the finger number and finger abbreviation or palm abbreviation (Ex. LM, RR, RM, LP), the name on the record finger or palm print card (Last Name, First Name), the examiner's initials, and the date. In cases where the first and last name are the same on more than one person compared, i.e. 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.

1.2.10.2 The examiner will also initial and date beside the area of the record finger or palm print card used to make the identification.

1.2.11 Documenting Verifications

1.2.11.1 After the verifier has reached a conclusion of identification, they will write under or near the primary examiner's annotation, the abbreviation (VER), 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.

1.2.11.2 The verifier will also initial and date beside the area of the record finger or palm print card used to make the identification.

1.2.11.3 The verifier will also complete the Verification Worksheet and include it in the case record.

1.2.12 Documenting Exclusions and Inconclusive Results

1.2.12.1 All non-identifications and inconclusive results will be documented in the case record.

1.3 Quality Assurance/Quality Control

1.3.1 A technical and administrative review is 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,* October 26, 2015.

HFSC Latent Print Section, *Analysis, Comparison, Evaluation and Verification Methodology*, September 24, 2015.