



Houston Forensic Science Center

INTEROFFICE MEMO

To: HFSC Stakeholders

From: Jackeline Moral, Quality Director

CC: Peter Stout, President/CEO

Date: April 12, 2023

Re: Removal of the requirements to initial and photograph evidence for each analysis

This memo is to notify HFSC stakeholders of a change in the upcoming Toxicology Analytical Manual v3.9 regarding the requirements to initial and photograph evidence for each analysis. The requirement was added to Analytical Manual v3.2 issued on 10/05/2018 in clause 3.8.1. "Evidence must have representative images uploaded into LIMS. Pictures may include: . . . 3.8.1.2. Tested specimen after analysis to record the initials of analysts having opened the container to conduct analysis." The section implemented this practice because historically 1) some chain of custody (COC) comments were inadequate or omitted and 2) the section wanted to provide photographs in place of having physical evidence in court, a practice that poses biohazard risks to those handling biological materials. These historical issues have been resolved by 1) ensuring appropriate chain of custody comments are added by analysts and reviewed for accuracy, and 2) photographing evidence during the accessioning process. While the current practice supplements COC comments and provides an additional layer of documentation, it requires a significant amount of time for analysts to take and upload the pictures as well as for reviewers to verify the documents, reducing efficiency of casework processes.

The Toxicology section conducted a risk assessment with the help of a Quality specialist and determined that the benefits of removing the photograph requirement outweigh the risks. More details can be found in Preventive Action Report 2023-PAR4. Upon issuance of Analytical Manual v3.9, Toxicology analysts will no longer initial or take a picture of evidence for each analysis. The section will include the following requirement in Analytical Manual v3.9 to ensure that the COC entries include each analytical step, "3.6.3. . . A comment on the chain of custody is required for each analysis."

If there are any questions, please contact HFSC Toxicology section at toxicology@hfctx.gov.