



INDIANAPOLIS-MARION COUNTY FORENSIC SERVICES AGENCY

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EVIDENCE SUBMISSION GUIDELINES

LATENT PRINTS

I. LATENT PRINT SUBMISSION

A. INTRODUCTION

- 1. Latent prints (commonly known as fingerprints) are prints that are hidden until a physical or chemical process allows them to become visible.
2. Latent prints are not limited to fingerprints, but also encompass impressions left by other friction skin surfaces such as the palm of a hand and soles of the feet.
3. Although latent means hidden, in practice the term is used to refer to all types of print impressions, including also patent and plastic prints.
4. Patent prints are visible prints caused by the transfer of a matrix (i.e. blood, paint) from the friction skin to a substrate.
5. Plastic prints are visible negative reproductions caused when friction skin is pressed into a soft, pliable material (i.e. caulking, clay).

B. SCOPE OF EVIDENCE – PRINT DEVELOPMENT

- 1. Prints can be developed on a variety of porous, semi-porous, and non-porous surfaces including, but not limited to:

Table with 3 columns: Nonporous, Semi-porous, Porous. Rows list materials like Metals, Plastics, Glass, and Wood.

NOTE: Sections of smooth surface flooring or other surfaces may retain suspected friction skin prints left by bare feet and should be preserved.

- 2. Prints left in blood may be submitted and enhanced with techniques used in the laboratory.
3. Handle items for submission as little as possible. These items should be touched in areas least likely to retain prints, such as rough surfaces, edges or corners.

## B. PRESERVATION OF EVIDENCE (LATENT PRINTS, DNA, TRACE)

1. It is important to protect evidence from careless handling and improper packaging which can compromise any latent prints (notably fingerprints) present, or other evidence associated with the item such as DNA or trace materials.
2. If probative value for DNA exists, proper precautions should be taken to ensure the integrity of potential DNA testing, in addition to protecting latent prints. Many items submitted for latent print processing/examination are swabbed for DNA prior to latent print processing, as a proactive measure, regardless of whether DNA analysis is requested.
3. If swabbing on scene is necessary, ALL applicable items of evidence to be submitted should be swabbed. It is preferred that no items are swabbed prior to submission and left to be done by the laboratory.
4. **Clean disposable gloves (i.e. latex) and masks should be worn when evidence is handled and collected.** Gloves must be worn and changed between each piece of evidence being handled and be worn regardless of DNA value. Furthermore, the evidence should not come into contact with surfaces (directly or indirectly) or be exposed to environments that may lead to DNA contamination. **Improper handling and exposure can lead to compromised DNA results when coupled with very sensitive testing conducted by the laboratory.**
5. Avoid unnecessary handling of items. Although handling evidence with gloved hands should prevent leaving additional prints on an item, gloves may damage prints.

**CAUTION:** It is possible to deposit prints while wearing thin disposable gloves (i.e. latex). Disposable gloves can also leave deposits that may interfere with prints when certain development techniques are used.

6. Examine evidence for any trace materials of value to the case; i.e. blood, hair, fibers). If in doubt about proper handling/processing, contact laboratory personnel before proceeding.
7. Evidence being submitted for latent print examination should be placed in a cardboard box. The IMPD Property Room has boxes specifically designed for packaging handguns and long guns. Sealing in a paper bag, an envelope, or are acceptable ways of securing evidence. Additionally, loosely wrapping in paper (i.e. butcher-block paper) is acceptable to protect large items (such as bicycles or car bumpers), but exposure to the environment through any unsealed spaces in the packaging could cause concern for DNA contamination and potentially impact results wording for DNA testing reports. Packaging can rub against an item of evidence and damage latent prints. Likewise, when a plastic bag contacts a nonporous item, it can damage prints.
8. **Moisture can also damage prints. Because of this, nonporous evidence should never be packaged in plastic.** Paper items may be packaged in plastic, but if the paper is wet, dry it out prior to packaging.

**NOTE:** Tape with exposed adhesive surfaces should be packaged in a box and secured with pins, if possible (with the adhesive side up).

9. Items of evidence for submitted for both forensic document examination and latent print examination should be individually packaged. These items will be handled by the Forensic Documents Section first.

10. If the evidence cannot be removed from the scene for submission, process the evidence with an acceptable print development technique, such as powdering. Photograph the latent print at 1:1 ratio, and with a scale in the image if possible. Then lift the print with a suitable lifter (i.e. clear latent print/box tape; gel lifter) Lifted prints should be placed on a backing which will contrast with the color of powder that was used. **The use of clear backing for print lifts is strongly discouraged.**

### **C. MARKING OF EVIDENCE**

1. All evidence containers should be marked with the submitting agency's name, case number, and item number. **The container must be properly sealed with tamper evident tape (evidence tape) and the date and initials of the person who sealed the evidence must be written so they are partially on the seal and partially on the container.**
2. Latent prints that have been lifted must be marked on the back of the lift card/backing with the agency's name, case number, item number and/or location of collection. The orientation of the print as it originated on any fixed surfaces should also be indicated on the lift card/backing (i.e. up/down; north/south), and then sealed in a marked envelope.

### **D. SUBMISSION OF LATENT PRINT EVIDENCE**

1. Items to be processed for prints should be submitted to the IMPD Property Room, or to the I-MCFSA Evidence Complex (for outside agencies).
2. Lifted or photographed latent prints should be submitted to the IMPD Property Room, or the I-MCFSA Evidence Complex (for outside agencies).
3. In investigations where there are no suspects, recovered prints should be submitted for entering into the Automated Fingerprint Identification System (AFIS).

### **E. COMPARISON PRINTS**

1. When possible, submit suspect information, including the gallery number. If major case prints are needed; please contact the Latent Print Supervisor of the I-MCFSA at (317) 327-3670.
2. Elimination prints will save examination time, as they provide useful information to examiners and allow investigators to eliminate certain individuals as suspects. Submit gallery numbers or inked prints of individuals who may have handled the evidence or scene surfaces, either before or after the incident (i.e. victims, family members, investigators on scene).

### **F. ADDITIONAL INFORMATION**

1. If more than one type of examination is requested on an item of evidence, the request for analysis should indicate which examination is most important to the case. The examiners will then work with each other to conduct all examinations.
2. Evidence which may have been exposed to adverse elements (e.g. heavy dew, rain, or snow) should be identified as such in the request for analysis. This will aid in determining the type of print development techniques to use.
3. If evidence has already undergone processing (NIBIN, powdering items on scene, etc.) they are no longer suitable for further latent print development. For the best results, submit items for latent print processing by the laboratory.

## **G. LIMITATIONS**

1. There are limits to the information that can be obtained from latent print examinations. The identification of a print on an object to a specific individual proves only that the person touched the object at some time. The examiner cannot tell how long a print has been on a surface or under what circumstances it was placed there. It is not possible to determine sex, age, or race from a latent print. Failure to develop a person's prints on evidence does not prove that the person has not touched the evidence as there are many reasons why identifiable prints are not always left behind.

**QUESTIONS:** Should be directed to the Latent Print Supervisor of the I-MCFSA at (317) 327-3670.

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