

Standard for On-Scene Collection and Preservation of Document Evidence



WHAT IS AN AAFS STANDARD FACTSHEET?

The AAFS produces clear, concise, and easy-to-understand factsheets to summarize the contents of technical and professional forensic science standards on the OSAC Registry. They are not intended to provide an interpretation for any portion of a proposed standard.

WHAT IS THE PURPOSE OF THIS PROPOSED STANDARD?

This standard specifies requirements and recommendations for collecting and preserving document evidence and related items during scene investigations.

Document evidence is a broad term that includes any material containing marks, symbols, or signs that can ultimately convey meaning or a message.

It is recommended that this standard be used in conjunction with departmental policies to inform or augment applicable policies.

This standard builds on the foundational guiding principles for scene investigation and reconstruction in [OSAC 2021-N-0015](#).

This OSAC Proposed Standard has been sent to [AAFS Academy Standards Board \(ASB\)](#) for further development and publication. Get involved as a member or by providing public comment.

WHY IS THIS PROPOSED STANDARD IMPORTANT? WHAT ARE ITS BENEFITS?

The methods in this standard are intended to maintain the integrity of document evidence so that reliable, accurate, and relevant results can be obtained.

Proper collection and preservation of document evidence provide a foundation for evidence integrity from the point of collection, through possible forensic examination, and to the presentation of the evidence in the courtroom.

HOW IS THIS PROPOSED STANDARD USED, AND WHAT ARE THE KEY ELEMENTS?

In collaboration with forensic document examiners, scene investigators are responsible for the proper collection and documentation of document evidence. This standard specifically covers the collection of document evidence when the physical characteristics of the document are of interest. It addresses proper collection, handling, and storage, which can preserve the potential evidentiary value of these documents and maximize the capability for forensic document analysis.

The standard also addresses the following:

- Collecting documents for handwriting comparison.
- Collecting the materials and equipment used to produce the questioned documents, such as writing instruments or office equipment.
- Collecting items with suspected indented writing, which may occur when documents are stacked, and imprints are left on the pages underneath.
- Handling and collection of charred documents.
- Handling and collection of wet documents.
- Collection of torn, shredded, or otherwise separated documents for physical fit examination.

