

Date of Submission of Comments: February 1, 2021

Document Number: ASB Std 149

Document Title: Taphonomic Observations in Support of the Postmortem Interval.

#	Section	Type of Comment (E-Editorial, T-Technical)	Comments	Proposed Resolution	Final Resolution
4	Forward	T	replace "determine" with estimate; In assessing decomposition we are estimating the postmortem interval, not determining it. determine: ascertain or establish exactly, typically as a result of research or calculation.	replace "determine" with estimate in line 2	Accept
9	Scope	T/E	The standard substantially details guidelines for documenting findings but not for making assessments or estimating the decaying process.	Remove the first sentence in this section referring to the standard providing requirements for describing and analyzing taphonomic effects on human remains, leave the remaining sentences discussing requirements for reporting and recording.	Reject: Describing and analyzing taphonomic effects is important and it is not just the decaying process.
13	3.1	T	definition is overly specific. "The combination of physical, chemical, biological and cultural processes associated with a deposit in a particular type of environment that may contain human remains." The environment may contain tree roots too, or boot soles.	The combination of physical, chemical, biological, and cultural processes associated with a deposit in a particular environment. Add oxford comma after biological too.	Reject: This definition contains the words "human remains" because this documents deals with human remains. Accept: Oxford comma added after biological.
14	3.3	T	"taphonomy The study of the processes affecting remains after death." I'm not certain where this definition came from, but it is overly simplistic.	Use a better definition, likely one that encompasses so much more than just "remains." There are many available, particularly via Lyman. Or maybe Hagulund and Sorg.	Reject: This is a minimum standard and this simple definition is appropriate for this document.
5	4.1	T	not specified how to document condition	specify how to document condition of remains	Reject: Minimum standards for documentation are included in sections 4.2, 4.3, and 4.6. Another upcoming ASB document will address more detailed requirements for documentation.
15	4.1	T	The environmental context of the remains shall, when possible, be thoroughly documented, both during recovery and in the laboratory. This documentation shall include the environment of the remains, their context, and postmortem modification to soft and hard tissues. These two sentences are circular in logic, specifically about the word "environment."	Needs to be modified as to WHAT documentation is needed about the "environment" (is this soils, chemical samples, pollen collection, visual observations, photographic etc etc). Also, needs editing to not make this statement circular.	Reject: Complete specificity of environmental documentation is outside the scope of this document because each scene is context dependent. General considerations appear in section 4.5.
16	4.1	T	"reconstruction shall be fully documented."	At what level? I see no follow-up in the document as to the detail and level of documentation necessary for reconstruction. In many instances, there are entire SOPs documenting how Reconstruction is documented and carried out. Please expand and detail what this means in the document.	Reject: Laboratory processes such as reconstruction are outside the scope of this document.
17	4.1	T	Skeletal material and soft tissue shall be examined in a systematic manner for the purpose of documenting abnormalities related to the post depositional environment." Does this mean that the FA shouldn't examine the remains for abnormalities related to the depositional environment?	Be more specific with what is being asked for here. Is this about laboratory processes, or is this about documenting staining patterns on remains that happened during the PMI?	Accept with modification: The last sentence was edited to clarify this section.
1	4.1 General	T	The term "skeletal" is used in 4.1 General and thus should be defined.	Add definition for "skeletal" (copied from other approved standards) in Section 3 Terms and Definitions.	Accept: Definition added in section 3.
33	4.2	T	No use of the word "analysis" in the Procedures part of the document, but it is clearly used in the Scope. What "analysis" occurs in the procedure section?	Add what "analysis" is for taphonomy, particularly for effects that are not used in the estimation of PMI.	Accept with modification: Section 4.2.1 was updated for clarity.
18	4.2.2	T	Taphonomic conditions and anomalies shall be assessed in comparison with standard exemplars when possible. There is no mention of documenting the exemplars or references in the reporting section. What good is a comparison if there is no need to report it, or report its source material?	Add information in the Reporting section on documenting exemplars and comparisons. Also, expand this section to include a note that says these must be reported as well. If I need to "reconstruct" the analysis, I should have the knowledge of the exemplar as well.	Accept with modification: "including any exemplars used" was added to the 1st paragraph in section 4.6.
19	4.2.2	T	"microscopic examination should be used for identification as necessary."	Are there any rules or direction about what "microscopic examination" means or will this simply be dismissed as outside the scope of this Standard? One would think that documentation via microscopy would need rules and standards for what images are produced, how measurements are taken, etc. Please expand this section or the documentation section to encompass these concerns.	Reject: Microscopic examination is outside the scope of this document. Also, this document is not requiring this step as it is preceded by a "should"/guideline.
20	4.2.3	T	This section should be under the documentation section.	Move to documentation section or strike. Same paragraph is in the reporting section.	Accept: Section 4.2.3 was deleted. However, the first sentence was moved and is now section 4.3.1.
21	4.2.5 and 4.2.5 (now 4.2.4)	T	These should be under the reporting section.	Move to reporting section.	Reject: The WG is of the opinion this information is better placed in section 4.2 rather than in reporting.

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22	4.3.2 (now 4.3.3)	T	end of sentence, remove "or defects" as this is often used in describing trauma as well.	remove "or defects."	Reject with modification: "defects" was replaced with "alterations".
23	4.4.1	T	"The complete context, including taphonomic indicators shall be used to describe the condition of a body." No one can ever know the "complete" context. Add wiggle room language or remove complete.	add "to the extent possible" at beginning of sentence, or remove "complete"	Accept: "complete" was removed.
2	4.4.1	T	It's a bit unclear if "early decomposition" is an example of what we should report, or should not (the latter, I assume).	I suggest giving an example of what we <i>should</i> report, earlier in the sentence. Like, "Where possible, pertinent decompositional indicators should be recorded (e.g., XYZ), not just a phase or score (e.g., "early decomposition")."	Accept with modification: Second sentence was edited for clarity.
24	4.4.1	T	Should this section contain items needed for documentation as the other sections did?	Add documentation needs.	Reject: Necessary documentation is covered in sections 4.2, 4.3, and 4.6.
25	4.4.2 (this is 4.4.1)	T	"The complete context, including taphonomic indicators shall be used to describe the condition of a body." This contains a "shall" but there are instances where this might not be appropriate, therefore, the shall should be a should, IMO.	Change the shall to a should.	Reject: Describing the "context" in forensic taphonomy is a requirement, therefore use of "shall" is appropriate.
26	4.4.2	E	Globally, look at entire document for use of Oxford comma, per style guide.	Use comma after "physical characteristics" in last sentence	Accept
27	4.4.2	T	"ecological factors, physical characteristics or modifications of the remains." This list is not likely long enough. Should contain "physical environment or depositional environment," as well, among others	add other considerations to this list.	Reject with modification: "among others" was added at the end of this section.
10	4.4.2	T/E	See above recommendation about scope. To that end this section should focus solely on guidelines for reporting.	Remove the first sentence regarding which method that should be used because it does not provide adequate guidance about the basis for using certain methods. Keep the following sentences regarding recording and documentation.	Accept with modification: This sentence was revised by replacing "shall" with "should" to allow for more flexibility.
11	4.4.3	T/E	This standard subsection should only be included if it relates to and is necessary for the recording process and if so, should specify and clarify how and why it is	Remove this requirement unless it is necessary for recording, and if so, clarify that it should only be considered in connection with recording and specify how.	Reject: It is necessary for recording. Any more specificity is outside the scope of this document.
28	4.4.3	T	"Overly precise or insupportable PMI estimates shall not be made." ?Who determines if something is "overly precise"? Seems to me that a court of law or a peer reviewer might have to do that. Change the language here to indicate that consideration is needed.	"All estimates of the PMI should be referenced and supported by scientific observations. Extremely precise estimates should be avoided, unless highly supported by scientific observations"	Accept with modification: Suggested sentence was used but both "shoulds" were replaced with "shalls" as this is a requirement.
3	4.5	T	During the discussion of the multidisciplinary approach, it would be helpful to mention some of the "other disciplines" with whose "recommended collection and preservation strategies" we should be familiar. Otherwise, the statement that we should respect these disciplines' protocols is a bit empty (how can I be familiar with a discipline's recovery strategies if I don't know what the discipline is?).	Add a sentence to the effect of, "These complimentary disciplines may include X, Y, and Z."	Accept: example added.
6	4.5	T	Not every context where it is possible to perform interdisciplinary approaches is it required or even advisable.	replace shall with should in first sentence	Accept
12	4.5	T/E	This subsection is vague and does not make clear whether it is related to or necessary for the recording process	Remove subsection unless it is related to or necessary for the recording process, in which case it needs to concretely specify how and why it is related, and clarify that it only provides guidance as to the recording process, not the analysis itself	Reject: This consideration may or may not be in the reporting.
29	4.5	T	Perhaps there is a need to include examples of what other disciplines might play a role here. There is also a need for how and what you should document to ensure that you get the right info to other disciplines.	expand this section out, particularly for what might be needed for other folks. Sole practitioners might not know all of the options, let alone how to collect things. I don't think adding to this section is "outside" the scope, particularly when this document might be the go-to place for those less familiar with various processes	Accept: example added.
7	4.6	T	As above, not all situations allow for both written documentation and photographic evidence. For example, assessments based off photographs do not include written description of the body condition at the time of discovery (only includes written description of the digital images of the body at the time of discovery, which can be somewhat different than the actual observed condition in person given camera settings, lighting, etc.)	replace shall with should in second sentence	Reject: It is important to include written descriptions and photographs when analyzing taphonomic processes.
30	4.6	T	The Reporting section is problematic. There are no directions on how and where things are reported, who keeps the raw notes/data, how long these things are kept, whether or not it should be digital or hard copy, how things are authenticated, etc. It should indicate the process of identifying the repository of record/agency of record, and that should be decided in advance of closing the process.	This section really needs to be fleshed out appropriately, OR it needs to call to another Standard on "Reporting Requirements" for Anthropology. Since this has no teeth, there is nothing anyone can say if they didn't retain notes, file notes, etc. In general, the reporting section needs work, and I think the WG should examine this in detail. I realize that this is a re-occurring comment, but it can be addressed in each standard, rather than waiting for another standard to be created in 1-3 years.	Reject: An upcoming ASB document has been proposed to address detailed requirements for documentation and reporting.

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31	4.6	T	"f possible, a degree of certainty based on published research shall be stated when applying observations to reconstruct taphonomic processes and to estimate postmortem interval." Where did this come from? There is no mention of degree of certainty anywhere else in this document. IF that is the case, it should be mentioned in the appropriate sections. Also, who has generated those "degrees"?	Might want to move this up into the document and describe how it is done/applied prior to moving it into reporting.	Accept with modification: example added and "degree" was replaced with "level".
32	Annex A	T	I'd add Lyman to the references list, as a baseline source on what "Taphonomy" is	Add Lyman reference. update to recent and relevant literature	Reject: Annex A was deleted in its entirety.
8	Bibilography	T	The bibliography is quite out of date and refers to some documents that have been largely demonstrated to not work well (see Megyesi et al. 2005--both the TBS system for recording decomposition and the equations for estimating PMI)	Moffatt et al tables for estimating PMI; Dabbs et al. on using photographs for estimating PMI; Dabbs et al on interobserver error; Sorg and Haglund's upcoming book on forensic taphonomy; Duertas et al on use of animal proxies; Bytheway et al on testing Megyesi et al models for estimating PMI, etc.	Reject: Annex A was deleted in its entirety.