



Criminalistics Section – 2004

B137 Forensic Taphonomy of Textile Fibers

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Upon completion of this presentation, the participant will have an understanding of how both natural and man-made textile fibers are degraded by the environment.

Textile fibers encountered in the course of forensic investigations may have been subjected to a variety of environmental conditions. They may have been buried with a corpse, exposed to sunlight and precipitation or immersed in streams, tidal estuaries, or the ocean. Environmental conditions may have little or no effect on a textile fiber; on the other hand, the fiber may lose color through bleaching or its morphology may be altered through polymer degradation. In extreme cases, the fiber may be completely destroyed. This presentation will survey the current forensic and archaeological literature on the environmental degradation of natural and man-made fibers. Finally, taphonomic alteration of natural fibers from excavations of Harewood Cemetery (near Charlestown, WV) will be presented.

Taphonomy, Fibers, Degradation