



Questioned Documents Section – 2006

J1 Questioned Documents and the Crime Scene

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After attending this presentation, attendees will understand the importance of the appropriate collection, handling, and preservation of a questioned document (QD) and related evidence. As well, the author will discuss suggested procedures regarding the collection of known standards (non-handwriting) of various materials that may be associated with a QD such as photocopier and inkjet exemplars, paper standards, and writing inks.

This presentation will provide a thorough discussion of pertinent questioned document materials that should be collected at a crime scene. The author will present some adjudicated cases as a learning tool for forensic scientists.

Some of the most infamous modern criminal cases such as the Unabomber, the mailing of anthrax spores, the "DC Sniper Shootings," and the BTK serial killer have all been associated with questioned documents. The focus of an investigation may include letters, envelopes, packages, calendars, diaries, identification cards, financial documents, contracts, wills, and business records. Obviously, there are numerous types of crime scenes that may arise, so the type of evidence collected may vary. In cases such as kidnapping, extortion, and death threats where a questioned document may be left by an unknown subject, a request is often made to immediately conduct a latent fingerprint examination. Many criminals that leave anonymous letters, however, have an awareness of the evidentiary value of fingerprints and typically do not handle a document with their bare hands. Therefore, if a suspect(s) is apprehended, the QD can sometimes be the pivotal link.

The use of printers and copiers is often utilized in crimes because of the widespread availability and ease of use. The author will discuss the types of specimens that may be collected if an office machine is involved such as inkjet and toner cartridges, print samples, and peripheral hardware (e.g. scanners and digital cameras). Indeed, investigators should also be cognizant of comparative examinations that may be conducted on items such as paper, envelopes, inks, and stamps. As well, forensic document examiners should remain attentive to preserving documents for subsequent examinations such as trace evidence and DNA analysis. Other crimes such as counterfeiting and financial fraud will also be presented. Counterfeiting crimes may involve collecting offset lithography materials, original documents from a suspect (e.g. the suspect's drivers license or social security card may have been used as a template to create other fraudulent identifications), and miscellaneous materials such as plastic card stock and laminate.

Questioned Documents, Crime Scene, Threatening Letters