J13 Error Rates - Limitations and Realities

Jane A. Lewis, MFS, Wisconsin State Crime Lab-Milwaukee, 1578 South 11th Street, Milwaukee, WI 53204-2860*

After attending this presentation, attendees will appreciate the compexites of applying error rates to forensic science disciplines.

This presentation will impact the forensic science community by creating an appreciation for difficulties of applying error rates to each forensic science discipline.

How do you define error rate? This is the first question on a forensic science survey and one of the five flexible *Daubert* factors considered in the admission of scientific evidence. The American Academy of Forensic Sciences (AAFS) Section officers were sent a brief

survey exploring error rates – what they are and how they use them. The eleven sections of the AAFS were asked to apply questions about establishing error rates to each forensic specialty area. These eleven AAFS sections include: Criminalistics, Digital & Multimedia Sciences, Engineering Sciences, General, Jurisprudence, Odontology, Pathology/Biology, Physical Anthropology, Psychiatry & Behavioral

Science, Questioned Documents, and Toxicology. The 2010 AAFS Annual Section Program Chair, AAFS President, and several persons
outside the forensic science world were also surveyed. Responses
varied, but none of the AAFS respondents had a personal error rate. AAFS section officers returned 12 of 22 surveys sent out. Several sections refused to participate in the project. Most who responded stated that it was not possible to establish error rates for each examination method used in their profession. The surveys explain the limitations and realities of attempting to apply error rates to a disparate group of forensic scientists.

Error Rate, Forensic Sciences, Forensic Document Examination

 ** Presenting Author*