



Jurisprudence Section – 2011

E19 Using a Faceless Murder Victim to Illustrate Crap Tests, Quackery, and Incompetence in Using or Not Using Forensic Entomology

*Leon G. Higley, PhD**, University of Nebraska, 706 Hardin Hall, Lincoln, NE 68583-0987; *Timothy E. Huntington, PhD*, 175 East Seward Street, Seward, NE 68434; and *Neal H. Haskell, PhD*, 425 Kannal Avenue, Rensselaer, IN 47978

After attending this presentation, attendees will learn what entomological evidence can or must be collected from crime scenes, how it should or shouldn't be analyzed, limitations of evidence and interpretation, and the implications of deficiencies in any of these processes.

This presentation will impact the forensic science community, with emphasis on the legal community in forensic science, by indicating how and when entomological evidence must and must not be used, and how to recognize key limitations of such evidence. Ultimately such understandings will help improve and increase the use of entomological evidence.

The discovery of a faceless, decomposing homicide victim in a ditch provides an ideal example of how entomological evidence should be used in a criminal investigation. Entomological evidence in this example was obtained at the scene by entomologists and was valuable (though not essential) in establishing the cause and time of death. Through an examination of this case, key issues will be explored in obtaining, processing, and analyzing entomological evidence. In particular, what should be known about this process will be illustrated to increase appreciation of the weight (or weightlessness) of entomological evidence. Among the issues the crap test will be considered – methods to immediately identify incompetence in CSIs, experts, (and lawyers) and quackery – methods used by the incompetent to mask their deficiencies. Our underlying theme is that unless non-scientists gain the skills to skeptically evaluate scientific evidence – sort the maggots from

the mealworms – the use of forensic entomology and other areas of forensic science will likely remain tainted by incompetence.

Entomology, Decomposition, Homicide