



A98 The Laboratory Report Project Part 2: Proposed Standards for Forensic Laboratory Reports

Whitney Reed, BS, IUPUI, Forensic Science Program, Indianapolis, IN 46201; Jay A. Siegel, PhD, 8334 Tilly Mill Lane, Indianapolis, IN 46278; and Megan King, BS, IUPUI, Forensic Science Program, Indianapolis, IN 46201*

After attending this presentation, attendees will be able to discuss the proposed criteria for forensic science laboratory reports that are being offered by various organizations, including the American Society for Testing and Materials, the American Bar Association, the American Society of Crime Lab Directors, and specific disciplines within the forensic science community, such as questioned document examiners and firearms/tool marks examiners.

This presentation will impact the forensic science community by presenting the information needed to reach consensus on how scientific lab reports should be compiled.

This presentation is the second of a two-part study of laboratory reports that are issued by forensic science laboratories at the conclusion of their analysis of various types of evidence. The first part of this study was the collection of more than 400 redacted forensic science laboratory reports from members of the American Society of Crime Lab Directors and then content analysis to determine what is actually present in forensic science laboratory reports. This project included reports from several sections of laboratories including drugs, toxicology, DNA, fingerprints, documents, etc. and specimens were solicited from federal, statewide, regional, and local laboratories. The impetus for the study came from the Forensic Science Committee of the National Academy of Sciences that issued its report in 2009. One of the recommendations of the Committee was that forensic scientists adopt a standard laboratory format that presents analytical findings in a rigorous scientific format. Partly as a result of the NAS Report, several organizations have developed models for forensic science laboratory reports. Some of these organizations are in the area of general science, others in the criminal justice system, and still others in forensic science itself. This presentation will relate the major features of all of these organizational recommendations. The goal will be to determine if there is a consensus among organizations as to the content of laboratory reports. The overall study will address the issues of whether there ought to be a single model for all of forensic science, regardless of the type of laboratory report or the jurisdiction of the reporting laboratory, or would it be better to have standard formats for each discipline within forensic science. Whatever standards are ultimately adopted, if any, they must meet the needs of science and criminal justice. A good scientific laboratory report is complete and transparent. It presents all processes and procedures, data, results, conclusions, and limitations including sources and magnitudes of possible error. The current practice in forensic science is for laboratory reports to not contain all of these sections, especially the raw data. Forensic science laboratories feel that this requirement is unduly burdensome, it can be handled by discovery, and all of this detail is not needed, appreciated, or read by attorneys or judges. This project will explore these tradeoffs and possible solutions. The NAS Committee felt strongly that laboratory reports must be scientifically rigorous and complete if forensic science is to be recognized as legitimate science. Discovery is an imperfect means for getting at all of the facts and data present in many forensic science cases.

Laboratory Report, NAS, Model Lab Report