



E26 A Criminal Case Can Turn on a Maggot

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After attending this presentation, attendees will understand the importance of collecting forensic entomological evidence in criminal investigations, its impact to cases due to the lack of the forensic entomological evidence, and how to ensure that forensic entomological evidence is collected.

This presentation will impact the forensic science community by providing case examples of the importance of collecting insect evidence by law enforcement officers for use in prosecuting criminal offenses.

The prosecution of criminal cases involves proving the various elements of criminal statutes. Law enforcement officers are the initial responders to criminal activity and are responsible for the amount and quality of evidence that is collected from the crime scene. In some jurisdictions, prosecuting attorneys are regularly consulted by the law enforcement officers during the processing of the crime scene. This consultation can facilitate the proper collection of necessary evidence, the legality of evidentiary issues, and certain additional avenues of investigation that need to be pursued.

Unfortunately, when communication between law enforcement officers and prosecuting attorneys is lacking, crucial evidence can potentially be lost, thus causing future proof issues at trial. This is especially true with forensic entomological evidence. Forensic entomological evidence, in the form of blow fly eggs, larvae, and adults, is usually only found and available for collection at the initial crime scene and/or autopsy. Insect evidence can provide law enforcement officers and prosecuting attorneys valuable information on time of death, location of death, length of insect infestation, and in some cases identification of the perpetrator. If police officers fail to collect this insect evidence during the first response to the crime scene, the evidence is unlikely to be present days, weeks, or months later. Without this entomological evidence, important elements of the crime may not be established, such as time or location of death in murder cases or time of insect infestation in abuse cases.

There are several reasons why the necessary entomological evidence is not collected. First, individuals in law enforcement may not be aware of the importance of insect evidence and lack the knowledge regarding proper collection techniques for the preservation of specimens. In addition, law enforcement officers and crime scene technicians may not want to take the additional time necessary to collect the "bug" evidence or wait for a forensic entomologist to arrive to assist them in recovery. Finally, those collecting the evidence may feel that the entomological evidence is not important because they have other evidence that will determine the time frame.

In order to ensure proper collection of forensic entomological evidence, police, as well as coroners and medical examiners, need to be informed of the importance of collecting this evidence. Prosecuting attorneys need to be familiar with the information that this evidence can provide for their cases. By being familiar with the answers that can be provided by forensic entomology, law enforcement and prosecuting attorneys can ensure that these answers are not lost by failure to collect and retain the necessary evidence.

Prosecuting attorneys need to be familiar with the elements of a crime that entomological evidence can determine and be able to communicate with law enforcement officers, coroners, and medical examiners to make sure that this important evidence is not lost. Proper collection of essential evidence ensures that the guilty are convicted and the innocent are exonerated.

Criminal Justice, Forensic Entomology, Evidence Collection