



Criminalistics Section - 2015

B44 Scientific and Technical Support of Dangerous Mail Investigations

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After attending this presentation, attendees will understand some of the ways that scientific and technical support has been extended to the law enforcement professionals comprising the United States Postal Inspection Service's Dangerous Mail Investigations (DMI) Program. This program has fundamentals in science, but is staffed and administered by law enforcement personnel, typically without such backgrounds. This model of scientific support may be beneficial for other agencies.

This presentation will impact the forensic science community and various law enforcement and/or "first responder" communities by demonstrating the value of applying the knowledge, skills, and abilities of an experienced forensic chemist, including in ways that are non-traditional.

The law enforcement and "first-responder" communities are often unaware of the myriad ways that scientists can support their mission beyond the obvious examination of evidentiary materials. Similarly, forensic scientists are often precluded from extending their services beyond more traditional roles. It is the position of this presentation that there is great value in reliance upon scientific personnel when matters of scientific importance are encountered.

This study will introduce attendees to the United States Postal Inspection Service's DMI Program, including the events precipitating the creation of the specialized program along with its unique mission. The presentation will include the policies and procedures of the program from the fitness and training requirements for qualified specialists, to threat assessment practices, deployment, and competent/safe use of specialized equipment and instruments. Typical casework will be used to exemplify the manner in which these policies are implemented.

Attendees will learn about the duties and responsibilities established for the Scientific and Technical Advisor (STA) to the DMI Program, the underlying knowledge skills and abilities expected to execute the requirements of the position, and the strong correlation to those qualifications that might be expected of an experienced forensic chemist. The STA is expected to: (1) provide specialized expertise and leadership to evaluate and recommend practices that will optimize the assessment of threats to the United States mail; (2) conduct innovative and complex research; (3) serve as an authoritative source and subject matter expert by liaising between program leadership and the larger scientific and law enforcement communities; (4) plan, coordinate, and conduct training; and, (5) manage a robust quality assurance and safety program. To perform these duties, the STA is expected to possess: (1) the knowledge of forensic science theories, techniques, protocols, and methodologies; (2) the ability to identify and solve complex problems and develop sound recommendations; (3) the ability to communicate orally and in writing, especially with respect to presenting scientific information to a non-scientific audience; (4) the ability to develop and implement a program founded on best practices; (5) the knowledge of proper evidence practices, including the ability to support major field investigations; and, (6) the ability to represent the organization to peer groups, professional organizations, government officials, and industry representatives.

This study will provide examples of scientific and technical work completed in support of the DMI program, demonstrating how the successes of this model may translate to local, state, and federal laboratories and organizations, as well as within private entities.

Collaboration between forensic scientists and law enforcement professionals is prudent when the latter will rely upon complex technical equipment and protocols to conduct their mission. Such collaboration can facilitate the creation or advancement of a stronger program possessing a foundation employing quality assurance concepts and optimized practices. It is recommended that the forensic science community become familiar with the many ways its members can support the law enforcement and/or first responder community. Likewise, it is recommended that those communities become familiar with the abilities of their colleagues in the forensic science community.

Dangerous Mail, Scientific & Technical Advisor, Forensic Chemist