



Questioned Documents - 2017

J2 The History and Future of Forensic Document Standards

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The goal of this presentation is to educate forensic document examiners on the past and future of forensic document standards.

This presentation will impact the forensic science community by educating attendees on the past and future of forensic document standards development. Courts of law are relying more on the use of standards in an expert's examinations; a lack of this knowledge may have an impact on whether or not a practitioner is allowed to testify as an expert witness.

Voluntary consensus standards for forensic document examiners had a beginning in the American Society for Testing and Materials (ASTM), with the publication of the Standard Descriptions of Scope of Work Relating to Forensic Document Examiners in 1972. Since then, there have been twenty additional standards published that directly apply to forensic document examination. The sub-disciplines within forensic document examination for which standards have been drafted and published include handwriting, ink examination, typewriting, alterations, and many more. The standards have been published by ASTM (including ASTM International), the Scientific Working Group for Forensic Document Examination (SWGDOC), and in the future will be published by the Academy Standards Board (ASB) as a part of the effort of the Organization of Scientific Area Committees (OSAC).

SWGDOC drafted a large majority, and updated all of the standards that went to ASTM for vetting and publication. When the E30.02 Questioned Documents subcommittee, under the E30 Forensic Science Committee, decided to no longer publish through ASTM and voted to close the subcommittee, ASTM released (eventually) the copyright on the documents that were under the control of E30.02. At that time, SWGDOC took those documents, removed the ASTM language, and posted those documents to the SWGDOC website, making them free for distribution to anyone with an interest in the standards. These standards can still be found at www.swgdoc.org.

In 2015, the National Institute of Standards and Technology (NIST) created the OSAC, with (currently) 25 subcommittees representing different forensic disciplines – forensic document examination being one of them. The OSAC process for drafting, vetting, and publishing standards, guidelines, and best practices will be presented. This process, depending on the type of document being considered, also includes reviews for Human Factors, Legal Analysis, and Quality Infrastructure. The Forensic Science Standards Board will give the final blessing on documents placed in the OSAC registry and that are intended to be labeled as “standards” under the OSAC process. Those that will be labeled as guidelines and best practices need only be approved at the Physics/Pattern Scientific Area Committee level.

Additionally, the American Academy of Forensic Sciences (AAFS) created their own standards development organization, the Academy Standards Board (ASB). The Forensic Document Examination subcommittee at OSAC has decided to publish through the ASB, primarily as the standards will still be available at no cost to stakeholders. The ASB uses a Consensus Body process to vet a proposed draft standard. Once this vetting process is completed the standard will be published as a national standard. The ASB is accredited by the American National Standards Institute (ANSI).

OSAC, ASB, Questioned Document

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