



Workshops - 2017

W1 Behind the Curtain: Understanding the Basic Science and Testimony of Latent Prints

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After attending this presentation, attendees will be well-positioned to critically evaluate latent print reports and testimony. Prosecutors will be more aware of changing trends in testimony and will better understand how to prep their expert witnesses to make sure they aren't falling into "old school" traps and are well prepared to discuss the relevant literature. Defense attorneys will be able to spot unsupported statements and effectively challenge them in court. Judges will gain a basic understanding of the modern scientific research detailing the strengths and limitations of latent print comparisons, which will allow them to be more effective gatekeepers. All legal professionals will be equipped to spot the difference between the "old school" or "dogma" expert and the "transparent" expert and will be able to react accordingly.

This presentation will impact the forensic science community by assisting the legal community to better understand the basic scientific principles behind friction ridge comparisons. This workshop will provide the legal community with the tools to critically evaluate friction ridge testimony, which will in turn allow them to better advocate for the science, challenge the science, or fulfill a gatekeeping role, as their positions within the legal system dictate. These skills will improve the application of friction ridge comparison science in the legal system by helping to ensure that it is presented responsibly and used appropriately, increasing its value to the legal system.

Judges and attorneys have an important responsibility in cases involving forensic science evidence. While most judges and attorneys do not have scientific training, they nonetheless have the task of assessing forensic evidence for reliability. Attorneys have the additional responsibility of effectively challenging forensic evidence when appropriate. In recent years, there has been a growing spotlight on the idea of "junk science" in the courtroom and a growing pressure on legal professionals to better understand the science that is being presented. The prevalence of forensic evidence in criminal cases coupled with the pace of research and reform in the forensic community will cause this pressure to increase in the future.

The basics of forensic science disciplines to a legal audience will be explained in addition to tips on how legal professionals can evaluate the reliability of forensic evidence in criminal cases will be provided. An overview of the latent print discipline will be provided with a discussion of what latent print examiners do in their work and the foundational science behind latent print comparison. Reporting and testimony will also be presented detailing the traditional ways latent print examiners have expressed their conclusions, which parts are inappropriate, and why. It will also discuss the ways in which latent print testimony is shifting in the post-NAS environment. This discussion will be supplemented with discussion of some landmark studies in the discipline and how legal professionals can use these studies during litigation. What is valid and what is not in the discipline will be highlighted, providing legal professionals with some of the necessary tools and road maps to assess forensic evidence and litigate questionable forensic evidence in criminal cases.

Come take a peek behind the curtain into the science of latent print examinations.

Latent Prints, Testimony, Gatekeeping

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