



E43 The American Board of Forensic Taphonomy (ABFTaph): A Multidisciplinary Approach to Decomposition

Amanda L. Roe, PhD*, College of Saint Mary, 7000 Mercy Road, Omaha, NE 68106; Leon G. Higley, PhD, 7320 Raven Circle, Lincoln, NE 68506; Tal Simmons, PhD, Virginia Commonwealth University, Dept of Forensic Science, 1015 Floyd Avenue, Richmond, VA 23284; and Neal H. Haskell, PhD, 425 Kannal Avenue, Rensselaer, IN 47978

After attending this presentation, attendees will have a better understanding of forensic taphonomy, the ABFTaph, and the benefits of joining the ABFTaph.

This presentation will impact the forensic science community by introducing an inclusive organization that helps bring the smaller forensic science disciplines together, by recognizing the need for a multidisciplinary approach to research, and by providing, in the interest of the public and the advancement of the science, a program of certification, procedures, best practices, and protocols in forensic taphonomy.

Forensic taphonomy “... refers to the use of taphonomic models, approaches, and analyses in forensic contexts to estimate the time since death, reconstruct the circumstances before and after deposition, and discriminate the products of human behavior from those created by the earth’s biological, physical, chemical, and geological subsystems.”¹ This includes, but is not limited to, the forensic disciplines of physical anthropology, botany, climatology, entomology, geology, pathology, and soil science.

Because there is a need to identify forensic scientists qualified to provide essential professional services for the judicial and executive branches of government and because many of the disciplines listed above have a small number of practitioners without parent organizations available for stating and verifying their competence or their scientific standards, we have established a multidisciplinary board called the ABFTaph. This is a non-profit, incorporated professional board which establishes, enhances, and revises as necessary standards of qualification for those who practice forensic taphonomy, and to certify as qualified specialists those applicants who comply with the requirements of the Board. Certification is based upon the candidate’s personal and professional record of education, training, experience, and achievement, as well as the results of formal examinations. There are two examinations: a general exam for entry into the organization, and a discipline-specific exam to demonstrate competence in an individual’s field.

The membership tiers are based on experience and include many of the same levels as the American Academy of Forensic Sciences, including a student category as a means to educate new generations of forensic scientists in an inclusive organization that is focused on the teamwork generally involved in forensic science research and cases.

Additionally, to maintain the integrity of the organization, the Board has requirements for members to provide copies of all case reports (after adjudication of associated case) and will maintain an open database of these reports with post-hoc review as a requirement for re-certification.

Reference(s):

1. Haglund W.D., Sorg M.H. Method and Theory of Forensic Taphonomic Research. In: *Forensic Taphonomy: The Postmortem Fate of Human Remains*. Edited by W.D. Haglund and M.H. Sorg (Boca Raton: CRC Press, 1997), 3.

Taphonomy, Decomposition, Forensic Science