



J7 A Methodology for the Removal of Adhesives

Kevin P. Kulbacki, MSFS, Internal Revenue Service, National Forensic Laboratory, Chicago, IL 60607*

Learning Overview: After attending this presentation, attendees will understand a basic methodology for the removal of adhesives, such as packaging tape.

Impact on the Forensic Science Community: This presentation will impact the forensic science community by providing a case study for when the removal of an adhesive substance may be required. Additionally, this presentation will include a basic methodology for conducting the removal.

Forensic document examiners occasionally conduct examinations on documents that have adhesive products, such as tape. This presentation arises from casework in which the evidence consisted of makeshift address labels. The makeshift address labels were consistent with cut-out sections that were subsequently taped onto the envelope. During the investigation, sheets of paper with an assortment of addresses were recovered with sections cut out, consistent with address labels. Research was undertaken to determine the reliability of using un-du® Sticker, Tape and Label Remover to remove tape from envelopes without damaging the underlying paper labels to allow for subsequent fracture match examinations.

Test samples were designed recreating the circumstances surrounding the evidence in question. Initial testing was conducted under a fume hood using the shovel-like tool that is built into the un-du® bottle. Following the included directions, a small amount of un-du® was applied to the built-in tool near the corner of the tape. The tool was then used to scrape underneath the tape. While following this procedure, it was determined that the bottle would continue to drip more solution than what was needed, thereby leading to saturation of the document. Additionally, it was determined that if an excess of un-du® solution was applied, it would possibly stain the document.

The methodology was then refined to remove the use of the built-in tool to prevent saturation of the document. Under the modified methodology, a spoonula was used to apply the un-du® solution at a slower pace and in a more refined manner. Using this method, it was possible to apply smaller amounts of the un-du® solution directly underneath the tape as it was being removed. Through careful application of this methodology, it was possible not only to separate the tape from the envelope, but also to separate the makeshift label from the tape at the same time.

It was determined that under controlled circumstances, un-du® was effective at allowing the removal of tape with little-to-no staining of the documents in question.

Methodology, Removal, Adhesives