



Questioned Documents—2020

J8 Characteristics Observed in Impressions Produced by Signature Stamps

Jan Seaman Kelly, BA, Forensic Dynamics LLC, Las Vegas, NV 89147*

Learning Overview: After attending this presentation, attendees will be aware of the various materials used for stamp dies and the characteristics observed in the impression of a signature stamp.

Impact on the Forensic Science Community: This presentation will impact the forensic science community by educating attendees of the materials used for the dies of facsimile signature stamps. Having an understanding of the characteristics observed in an impression may assist the examiner during the examination in determining the type(s) of rubber stamp(s) that could have produced the signature stamp impression.

The definition of signature has changed as it was limited to a handwritten name or mark made by the individual onto a document as proof of identity and intent. The legal requirement that a signature had to be handwritten was changed when facsimile signature stamps began to be used in business. With the development of the computer, electronic and digital signatures are heavily relied upon to complete business transactions. The impact of digital technology has impacted the manner in which individuals sign their signature on personal and business documents. Even though this has impacted the number of facsimile signature stamps being used, the forensic document examiner may encounter a case involving a facsimile signature stamp as this remains a viable option to sign one's name to a document.

Facsimile signature stamps are used to sign a myriad of documents, including business or personal letters, checks, invoices, legal documents, certificates, etc. Signature stamps are easy to use and guarantee a perfect impression of the signature every time. The use of a facsimile stamp signature on a document implies the same intent and legality as if it was an original inked signature manually produced by the individual. The advantage of using a facsimile stamp instead of manually signing the signature is one of convenience. The disadvantage of using facsimile stamps is the stamp can be stolen, duplicated, and used for criminal activities.

The examination of a signature stamp impression or a facsimile signature stamp is within the scope of forensic document examination. The dies of facsimile signature stamps include laserable rubber, photopolymer, and flat die. Water-based stamp ink is primarily used for rubber and photopolymer dies while flat die stamps use oil-based ink. Characteristics observed in the signature stamp impression can be clues as to the type of die used to produce the impression. For example, laserable rubber and photopolymer dies are raised and can leave an outline or "squeegee" appearance on the edge of each letter in the signature while the flat die stamp will not leave an outline.

In modern business, one acceptable method of signing a document is the facsimile signature stamp. This presentation will discuss the types of die materials used and the related characteristics and defects that can be present in the stamp signature impression.

Forensic Document Examination, Signature Stamp, Stamp Die Material