



INDIANAPOLIS-MARION COUNTY FORENSIC SERVICES AGENCY

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Evidence Submission Guideline #13

LATENT PRINTS

In many instances, an entire prosecution case will rest on a latent print identification. Without latent print identifications, many criminal cases would never reach the prosecution level. The Latent Print Section is staffed by experienced forensic scientists who have substantial backgrounds in the identification field. Latent Print personnel are qualified to appear in court and provide expert testimony in matters of latent print examinations and processing techniques.

A. Preservation of Evidence

1. It is of the utmost importance to protect latent print evidence from careless handling and improper packaging which can damage any latent prints which may be present and render them completely useless.
2. Latent prints can be developed on a variety of porous and non-porous surfaces. When articles of evidentiary value are to be submitted for latent print processing, they should be touched as little as possible. These articles should be touched in areas least likely to retain identifiable latent prints, such as where the surface is of rough texture or on the edges or corners.
3. While gloves or a handkerchief may be used when picking up items of evidence, any unnecessary contact should be avoided. Although this method of handling evidence should prevent leaving additional prints on an item, the gloves or cloth used may destroy prints originally present unless great care is exercised.

CAUTION — It is possible to deposit latent prints while wearing latex gloves. Latex gloves can also leave deposits that can interfere with latent prints when certain development techniques are used.

4. Evidence being submitted for fingerprint examination should be placed in a cardboard box and fastened down securely to prevent shifting or contact with the inside of the container. The IMPD Property Room has boxes specifically designed for packaging handguns and long guns. Sealing in a paper bag or an envelope or loosely wrapping in paper are acceptable ways of securing evidence. However, it should be understood that these types of packaging can rub against an item of evidence and damage latent prints. Likewise, when a plastic bag comes in contact with a nonporous item, it can destroy or remove the latent print residue from the item. Moisture can also cause damage or destroy latent prints. Because of this, nonporous evidence to be processed for latent prints should **NEVER** be packaged in plastic. (However, paper items can be packaged in plastic, but if the paper is wet, dry it out and package it in paper.)

NOTE: Tape with exposed adhesive surfaces should be packaged in a box and secured with pins, if possible (with adhesive side up).

5. Items of evidence that need to be examined by the Forensic Documents Unit and for latent prints should be placed in individual packages. Evidence that is submitted to the laboratory for latent print examination and may possibly be examined by the Forensic Documents Unit at a later date should first be examined by the Forensic Documents Unit.
6. If the evidence bearing latent print(s) cannot be removed from the scene for submission to the laboratory, process the evidence with an acceptable technique. Photograph the latent print at 1:1 or with a scale in the picture, and then lift the latent print with a suitable lifter. Lifted prints should be placed on a backer which will contrast with the color of powder that was used. **The use of clear backed fingerprint lifts is strongly discouraged.**

B. Marking of Evidence

1. All evidence containers should be marked with the contributing agency's name, case number, and item number. The container must be properly sealed and the initials of the person who sealed the evidence must be written so they are partially on the seal and partially on the container.
2. Latent prints that have been lifted must be marked on the back of the lifter and sealed in a marked envelope.

C. Submission of Latent Print Evidence

1. Items to be processed for latent prints should be submitted in person by outside agencies or to the IMPD Property Room.
2. Lifted or photographed latent prints should be submitted in person by outside agencies or to the IMPD Property Room.
3. In investigations where there are no suspects, any fingerprints recovered should be submitted for entering into the Automated Fingerprint Identification System (AFIS).

D. Comparison Prints

1. If any suspects are known to the investigator, please submit suspect information, with gallery number. If major case prints are needed; please contact the Latent Print Supervisor of the I-MCFSA at (317) 327-3670.
2. Elimination prints will save examination time. For elimination purposes, submit gallery numbers if possible, or submit inked prints of any individuals who may have legitimately handled the evidence, either before or after the crime was committed. Include inked prints of any investigators who may have carelessly touched the evidence. This should permit the elimination of any latent prints which were made by such individuals. If a more complete set is needed, the examiner will contact the investigator.

E. Explanation of Results

The wording of results may vary slightly from one examiner to another. The following are samples of results and what each result means:

1. No latent prints were developed....
This means there was nothing developed on the evidence which could be identified as having been made by friction ridge skin.
2. No latent (and/or patent) prints suitable for comparison purposes were developed (or found).....
This means prints on the evidence were either smeared; too faint; fragmentary; and/or of such poor quality that no comparison could be made.

3. Latent (and/or patent) prints suitable for comparison were developed (or found),.....
This means that the examiner believes the prints show enough ridge detail to warrant a comparison.
4. The print was insufficient...
This means that the examiner did not find enough ridge detail in the print upon which to make an identification.
5. The print was not identified, or No identification was made....
This is not an elimination of the print. It only means no identification was made to the known inked prints as submitted. This could be because the known inked prints were of poor quality or because the latent print is from an area of the hand not recorded on a fingerprint card. This type of result will usually be accompanied by a request for additional known inked prints including major case prints.
6. The print was eliminated...
This means that the examiner has determined that the latent print and the known inked prints **were not** made by the same individual.
7. The print was identified as having been made by....
This means that the examiner has determined that the latent print and the known inked print **were** made by the same individual and is prepared to testify to his/her result in court.

F. **Additional Information Needed**

1. Many times, evidence submitted for latent print examination will also need other examinations performed on it (e.g. Firearms, DNA, or Forensic Documents). If more than one examination is requested on an item of evidence, the Request for Examination should indicate which examination is most important to the case. The examiners will then work with each other to conduct all examinations.
2. Submitted evidence which may have been exposed to adverse elements (e.g. heavy dew, rain, or snow) should be identified on the Request for Examination. This is very important as it will aid the examiner in determining what type of procedure is used in processing the evidence for prints.

There are limits on the information that can be obtained from latent print examinations. The identification of a print on an object to a specific individual proves only that the person touched the object at some time. The examiner cannot tell how long a print has been on a surface or under what circumstances it was placed there. It is not possible to determine sex, age, or race from a latent print. Failure to develop a person's prints on evidence does not prove that the person has not touched the evidence as there are many reasons why identifiable prints are not always left behind.

Questions should be directed to the Latent Print Supervisor of the I-MCFSA at (317) 327-3670.

Evidence Submission Guideline #13 adapted from the Indiana State Police Laboratory Physical Evidence Bulletins.