



Document #101

**Limited Examination Considerations for Latent Print Sections
(Latent)
Position Statement**

Random Sampling

Random sampling programs have been in place in other forensic disciplines for some time. Random sampling methods involve selecting a portion of case items or samples from a larger population in order to infer the composition of that population. While random sampling is appropriate in some forensic disciplines, it is the position of SWGFAST that random sampling does not apply to latent friction ridge examinations because of the following factors:

1. Due to the accidental and chance reproductions of friction ridge skin on evidentiary items, there is no reliable method to predetermine which suitable items will bear friction ridge impressions. All suitable crime related specimens should be processed.
2. Given numerous latent friction ridge impressions, it is not possible to predict which impressions will be suitable for identification purposes without conducting analyses of all the impressions.

Limited Examinations

Most agencies implement some form of limited examinations, (e.g., in latent Automated Fingerprint Identification System AFIS searches, reviewing between 5 and 20 candidates versus examining the top 99 candidates). However, in some circumstances agencies may consider further limited examinations as a backlog reduction mechanism, or a method to increase case throughput, or for effective resource usage. These considerations are provided to increase the workflow of friction ridge examinations while having the least negative impact on the probative value of the examination. Crime type may be a consideration for the implementation of these strategies. An agency performing limited examinations should document its policy in writing. Examples of potential limited examination techniques (in no particular order) include:

1. Change agency submission guidelines to, for example, requiring the submitter to separate drug packaging prior to submission for latent print examination. This can save laboratory non-examination time.
2. Prioritize cases (i.e., base case prioritization on staffing levels or backlog status).
3. Develop, recover, and retain all suitable latent prints; however, conclude the manual comparisons once each named suspect has been identified on the surface/item.
4. Process and examine impressions from probative items first and stop when a suspect is identified.

Document #101 Limited Examination Considerations for Latent Print Sections (Latent) – Position Statement Ver. 1.0	Date of First Issue 09/11/12	Current Issue Date 09/11/12 Web Posting Date 11/24/12
Date of Last Review N/A	Date of Next Review 09-2017	Appendix present/Letter No

5. If a subject has been identified through AFIS, manually compare only the remaining AFIS quality prints to that subject. Do not compare non-AFIS quality prints unless specifically requested to do so.
6. Conduct AFIS image searches first using auto-extraction and only proceed to feature searches using manual encoding if there are no identifications from the image searches.
7. Examine only AFIS candidates that score above a threshold as defined by the agency.
8. Restrict the AFIS list to fewer candidates.
9. Restrict which databases are searched, for example, using a regional restriction.
10. Select optimal processing techniques instead of conducting sequential processing.
11. Conduct limited processing of certain items that have a low success rate, such as cartridge cases¹.
12. Communicate with relevant stakeholder(s) regarding case status to determine if the examination is still required.
13. Consult with relevant stakeholder(s) to determine the extent or order of the examinations.
14. An agency planning to adopt a limited examination policy should notify contributors of the policy. Additionally, limited examinations shall be documented in the case report, and when present, will specifically include information that there were suitable latent prints that were not compared.
15. Any limited examination approach has the potential to adversely affect the outcome of the case. It is up to the agency to weigh risk-benefit factors in deciding whether to implement a limited examination policy.

¹ Pratt, Angela, "Fingerprints and Firearms", Journal of Forensic Identification, 62(3), May/June 2012, pp. 234-242.

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