



Article Title: Managing Latent-Print Errors

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Article's Subject Matter:

Recognizing errors in friction ridge identification and elimination, the potential factors contributing to errors, and managing both the errors and the factors that cause them.

Key Points in Article

- Fingerprint identification differs from many lab functions in that results rely on humans for the end result, not machines
- Errors consist not only of “false identifications”, but also “false negatives”, and inappropriate “inconclusives”. Despite the fact that most agencies believe “false negatives” are the most common error made, generally only identifications are verified
- Approaches for reviewing all conclusions could include
 - Reviewing all conclusions – this takes approximately 25% more time in the writer’s experience, and gives the examiner immediate feedback
 - Reviewing all conclusions on selected cases (either randomly selected or selected by crime type)
 - Reviewing conclusions by performing random case audits – the downside of this being that there is a delay between making an error and discovering it
- False Identifications: Formal corrective action should be in place to analyze the factors that lead to a false identification. This should not center only on the analyst, but also on any supervisory or organizational issues. It is suggested that if a false identification is made, the examiner does not perform verifications of other examiners’ case work for a period of 30 days and a proficiency test be passed prior to returning to performing verifications. If repeated false identifications occur, consequences should be escalated.
- False Negatives: Successful tracking of false negatives can potentially provide feedback about training issues or management of caseload by supervisors
- Errors in the process should be expected, and focusing blame on the examiner alone without examining the entire system may not be addressing the cause of the error.

Fallacies and or Issues

- This article is written by someone managing a fingerprint lab in the United States, which does not employ the practice implemented by most Canadian agencies of removing individuals from fingerprint identification work if they make a false identification. This makes the perspective on options for corrective action somewhat different for those Canadian agencies operating under those guidelines.