Introduction to RCFLs

INTRODUCTION

Digital forensics is the application of science and engineering to the recovery of digital evidence in a legally acceptable method. Digital Forensics Examiners use digital investigation and analysis techniques to determine potential legal evidence by applying their skills on a variety of electronic devices, software programs, different operating systems, varying hard drive sizes, and technologies.

A Regional Computer Forensics Laboratory (RCFL) is a digital forensics laboratory and training center devoted to the examination of digital evidence in support of criminal investigations and to the detection and prevention of terrorist acts. The first RCFL was established in San Diego, California in 1999, and began as a cooperative effort between the FBI and other federal, state, and local law enforcement agencies to address digital evidence. The RCFL Program is based on this model of partnership between the FBI and other law enforcement agencies at the federal, state, and local levels operating within a geographic area.

THE RCFL NETWORK

In addition to the San Diego RCFL, RCFLs are operating in Albuquerque, New Mexico; Boston, Massachusetts; Buffalo, New York; Centennial, Colorado; Chicago, Illinois; Dallas, Texas; Hamilton, New Jersey; Huntsville, Alabama; Houston, Texas; Kansas City, Missouri; Louisville, Kentucky; Menlo Park, California; Orange, California; Philadelphia, Pennsylvania; Portland, Oregon; and, Salt Lake City, Utah.

KEY GOALS

The key goals of the RCFL Program are to—

- Provide timely, professional and technically advanced digital forensic services to the law enforcement agencies in an RCFL's service area.
- Fully utilize applied science and engineering capabilities to support digital forensic examinations.
- Increase the confidence of investigators, prosecutors, and judges in the digital forensics examination discipline through standardized training and forensic protocols.
- Provide responsive and flexible services in support of diverse investigative programs.
- Meet legal and administrative requirements of diverse judicial systems.

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REQUESTING DIGITAL FORENSICS SUPPORT

Each RCFL evaluates requests for direct technical support on a case-by-case basis and provides services (regardless of agency) based upon established priorities. RCFL staff members may travel to crime scenes or participate in executing search warrants.

STAFFING

An RCFL is equipped and staffed to recover evidence from original electronic equipment or backups of computer data. The RCFL can also acquire evidence from a crime scene or search site. By doing so, evidence can be removed and brought to the RCFL for further examination. A typical RCFL consists of a Director; 10-12 Examiners; and an administrative support person.

FORENSICS RESPONSIBILITIES

The primary forensics responsibilities of an RCFL are to—

- Conduct a comprehensive examination of digital evidence
- Provide a complete and timely report to the contributor
- Provide testimony as needed
- Act as a regional focal point for digital evidence issues.

OPERATIONAL SUPPORT RESPONSIBILITIES

The RCFLs provide operational support in the following ways—

- Providing advice on wording for search warrants to recover digital evidence
- Gathering intelligence in preparation for writing a warrant
- Sharing on-site technical assistance with investigators executing the warrant
- Providing advice for seizure of digital evidence or acquiring copies of data at the search warrant site.

For more information, contact the National Program Office:

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