

Physical Evidence Bulletin

QUESTIONED DOCUMENTS

Introduction

The Bureau of Forensic Services (BFS) provides analytical support to law enforcement agencies through the examination of Questioned Documents evidence. This Physical Evidence Bulletin (PEB) is a guideline intended for law enforcement agencies to follow in order to properly sample, preserve, and submit Questioned Documents Evidence to BFS Laboratories. Physical Evidence bulletins are not intended to be used in lieu of training in the collection of evidence.

If the collection or preservation of document evidence is beyond the technical skills, knowledge, or resources available to the scene investigator, BFS should be contacted for consultation or assistance.

Types of Examinations:

Handwriting, signatures, printing
Non-destructive ink examinations
Impression evidence, indented writing
Alterations, obliterations, restoration
Paper examinations
Computer generated documents
Security documents

Types of Cases:

Homicides
Bank Robberies
Anonymous threats, threats to politicians
Real estate fraud, Grant Deeds, Wills, Trusts
Suspicious suicides
Medical malpractice
Fraudulent documents and ID cards

Evidence Collection, Packaging, and Submission

Safety

Personal protective equipment should be worn when handling documents believed to be contaminated with biological fluids.

Collection

- Whenever possible, the original of the questioned document(s) should be collected. If copies must be submitted, please try to submit a first-generation copy.
- Handle questioned documents carefully to preserve latent fingerprints and preserve the documents for possible further forensic testing.
- Document evidence shall be protected from alteration. When collecting document evidence, do not mark the document itself, or mark the package while it contains the document in attempts to preserve indentations that may be on the document. This will also help prevent the smudging of pencil or ink that may be present on the document.
- For special cases involving water-soaked documents, charred documents, torn or shredded documents, and unusual substrates, please contact the laboratory for further instruction and assistance.



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Evidence Packaging and Submission

- Questioned and known documents should be packaged separately.
- All evidence must be submitted with a completed evidence submission form, the BFS-1.
- Care should be taken in the handling and packaging of the evidence to prevent damage and to protect the items for further testing purposes.
- Once packaged, add a tape seal with an initial and date across the seal.
- Evidence may then be shipped via FedEx or delivered to the laboratory in person and by appointment only.

Collection of Known Writings (Specimens and Exemplars)

- Known writings can be obtained in the form of collected specimens or exemplars. Collected specimen writings may include receipts, checks, business records, correspondence, applications, identification cards, diaries, and others. Exemplars are taken for the sole purpose of comparison. If exemplars are taken from a subject, instructions should be dictated to the subject and the writing in question should be duplicated if possible. Multiple exemplars should be taken in efforts to prevent a subject from disguising their writing.

Contact Information

To obtain further information regarding the collection, packaging, and submittal of evidence please contact:

Questioned Documents Laboratory
California Department of Justice
Bureau of Forensic Services
Sacramento, CA 95820
916-210-4400

To locate the most current Physical Evidence Bulletins please go to:

<https://oag.ca.gov/bfs/peb>