

Unknown Deceased

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1 INTRODUCTION

- A. The document covers techniques associated with processing human remains to obtain friction ridge print records and actions taken to examine postmortem records.
- B. Laboratory resources, technological changes, and examiner discretion determine which processing procedures are appropriate and/or acceptable depending on the circumstances.
- C. Postmortem prints obtained from human remains may be compared with antemortem exemplars, shared with other agencies, and/or searched in the Next Generation Identification System for the purpose of verifying or establishing identity or casework comparisons.

2 SCOPE

- A. These procedures apply to unknown deceased examinations when evidence (e.g., cards, digital images, or body parts) is submitted to the FBI Laboratory or an FBI Laboratory product (e.g., FBI Laboratory Report, Summary Sheet) will be issued for the results.
- B. Due to the nature of the requests, all other deceased identification support will adhere to the applicable sections of relevant technical documents (e.g., *Examining Friction Ridge Prints* (FRD-500), *Verification and Blind Verification* (FRD-501)), but will follow procedures and documentation requirements of the requesting agency or organization.

3 LIMITATIONS

None

4 EQUIPMENT

- Acetate sheets
- Acetone
- Adhesive Materials/stickers/lifts
- Ammonium Hydroxide/Sodium Bicarbonate Rehydrating Mixture (98% Water, 2% Ammonium Hydroxide, 25g/L Sodium Bicarbonate)
- Boiling Pots (or hot plate and suitable container)
- Casting Material (preferably white)
- Camera (e.g., Bureau Cell Phone or digital single reflex)
- Cutting equipment (saws, shears, scalpels)
- Digital Capture Device and associated software
- Digital Imaging Systems
- Dishwashing Liquid
- Dental Picks
- Duct Seal
- Embalming Chemicals (conditioner, preservative, restorative)

- Equipment providing adequate lighting
- Fingerprint or Foam Brushes
- Fingerprint/Palm Print/Footprint Cards/Strips
- Fingerprint Ink
- Fingerprint Powder
- Hair Dryer or similar heat generating equipment
- Isopropyl Alcohol (wipes or solution)
- Magnifiers
- Microscopes/Macroscopes
- Next Generation Identification System workstation
- Paper towels or Tech Wipes
- Ridge Counters (or dissecting needles)
- Scale or measurable item
- Sharps Container (for syringes and scalpels)
- Sodium Hydroxide Solution (1% to 3%)
- Syringes
- Tissue Builder

5 OBTAINING PRINTS FROM HUMAN REMAINS

- A. When personnel process human remains for the purpose of recording friction ridge skin, the following should be followed:
 1. Clean and assess the remains.
 2. Recondition compromised friction skin, as appropriate, moving from the least destructive process to the most destructive process.
 3. Record or capture prints from remains.
- B. Any actions that would drastically change the remains or could be misinterpreted as a wound (e.g., removal of digits, removal of clothing, or cutting tendons) will require permission from the contributor.
 1. Any removed items or parts (e.g., skin, digits) should be retained with the original remains and returned with the remaining evidence.

5.1 Detached and Disassociated Digits

- A. When a hand or foot is received intact and the digits need to be detached, personnel will remove the digits and place each digit in a separate container.
 1. Each container will be labeled with the digit number and the Laboratory number, as applicable.
 2. Digits should be removed only when necessary for examination and with permission.
- B. When digits are received disassociated, personnel will place each digit in a separate container labeled with the digit number (if known) and the Laboratory number, as applicable.

5.2 Storage of Human Remains

- A. Human remains will be stored per FBI Laboratory Operations Manual (LAB-200) practices.
 - 1. Human remains will be stored in a refrigerator, freezer, or stainless-steel hood in a biohazard examination room, as applicable.
 - 2. The evidence will be properly sealed unless reconditioning or other processing techniques are being performed.
 - 3. Evidence undergoing reconditioning (or associated containers) will be labeled with the Laboratory number and personnel contact information.

5.3 Clean and Assess Remains

- A. Personnel will clean and assess the remains prior to reconditioning or recording prints, as follows:
 - 1. Use care when handling remains, especially charred remains, as the skin may be fragile and easily damaged.
 - 2. Gently clean the remains to remove contaminants with a soft toothbrush, sponge and warm, soapy water, or other cleaning solutions (e.g., isopropyl alcohol).
 - 3. Mild or severe rigor may require manipulation of the joints to loosen rigor.
 - i. Personnel may need to forcefully straighten or flatten the remains.
 - ii. Personnel may also cut the tendons in order to relax the remains, as appropriate and with permission.
 - 4. Examine the human remains for damage to the friction skin and use reconditioning techniques, as applicable.

5.4 Reconditioning Techniques

5.4.1 Tissue Builder

- A. Personnel may use the following procedure:
 - 1. Ensure the skin is intact.
 - 2. With a syringe, inject tissue builder into the end joint of the finger by passing the needle through the first joint or medial phalange.
 - 3. Other areas of the friction ridge skin may be processed with tissue builder in a manner to best recondition and preserve the friction ridge skin.

5.4.2 Boiling Technique

- A. The boiling technique may be used in conjunction with other reconditioning technique(s).
- B. Personnel will use the following procedure:
 - 1. Use caution when applying to the epidermis as it may blister.
 - 2. Dip the remains into boiling water for approximately five to ten seconds.
 - 3. Remove the remains from the boiling water and examine the condition of the friction ridge detail.

4. Repeat as necessary, but no more than three times due to increased chance of destroying the friction ridge skin.
5. If skin has abrasion trauma, personnel may indirectly apply the hot water to the friction ridge skin, such as with a sponge, to reduce the chance of additional trauma.

5.4.3 Rehydration

- A. The individual may soak the mummified remains in one of the following rehydration solutions:
 - o Ammonium Hydroxide/Sodium Bicarbonate Rehydrating Mixture
 - o Sodium Hydroxide Solution
 - o Dishwasher Liquid (may be diluted slightly with warm water)
- B. The time taken for rehydration can vary from hours to weeks, depending on the extent of the dehydration and type of rehydration solution.
- C. Personnel will employ caution when using rehydration techniques as they may be destructive to remains depending on condition and amount of exposure (e.g., sodium hydroxide solution).
- D. To remove wrinkles after rehydration and restore the remains to the approximate natural size/shape, personnel should try to stretch the skin, or attempt the boiling technique where applicable.
 1. Injecting tissue builder may assist in removing wrinkles and reshaping the skin.

5.5 Conditions of Friction Ridge Skin and Applicable Reconditioning Techniques

5.5.1 Macerated Human Remains

- A. Maceration involves damage to the skin through prolonged exposure to moisture.
- B. Maceration may cause swelling and broadening of the friction ridges, wrinkling of the skin, and separation of the epidermis (outer skin) from the dermis (inner skin) (i.e., gloved skin).
- C. Personnel may use the following techniques when reconditioning macerated friction ridge skin:
 1. Pinch or stretch the skin to remove wrinkles.
 2. If the skin is intact, use tissue builder ([See Section 5.4.1](#)).
 3. Use the boiling technique ([See Section 5.4.2](#)).
 4. If gloving or partial gloving has occurred, refer to [Section 5.9.1](#) for procedures.

5.5.2 Desiccated Human Remains

- A. Desiccated or mummified remains are extremely dehydrated which often results in severe wrinkling and shrinkage.
- B. Personnel may use the following procedures when reconditioning desiccated friction ridge skin:

1. Soak the remains using one of the rehydration techniques ([See Section 5.4.3](#)).
2. Use tissue builder after rehydration technique to reshape skin to natural size and shape.
3. If soaking does not soften skin, cast the remains with casting material or photograph the fingers close up, with a scale, and label the photos as to the finger number or palm.
4. If friction ridge detail is not visible or the skin has become saturated, use the boiling technique after rehydration ([See Section 5.4.2](#))

5.5.3 Burned or Charred Human Remains

- A. The thermal modification of human remains often results in brittle friction ridge skin that can be further damaged through excessive handling.
- B. In this condition, the human remains will usually exhibit clenched hands, which often protects the friction ridge detail on the fingers and interdigital area of the palm.
- C. Personnel may use the following procedures when reconditioning burned or charred friction ridge skin:
 1. Avoid forcing the fingers or toes to open.
 2. Cut the tendon on the inside of the fingers or toes to gently straighten.
 - i. If necessary and permitted to, remove the fingers or toes from the hand or foot for processing.
 3. Carefully remove hardened or partially loose skin by twisting or cutting.
 4. Removed skin should be gently cleaned with warm water or isopropyl alcohol, which should soften skin.
 5. Photography is recommended but not required to capture the friction ridges after the skin is cleaned and before any potential damage occurs with other recording methods.
 6. Remove damaged epidermal skin to allow access to the dermal layer ([See Section 5.9.2](#)).
 7. Depending on the condition of the degloved skin, personnel may print the underside of the epidermis.
 - i. It should be noted that the resulting record will be in reverse position and may be in reverse color.
 8. As a last resort, use the boiling technique ([See Section 5.4.2](#)).
 9. A dental pick can assist with loosening the epidermis without cutting the ridges.

5.6 Drying Techniques

- A. Prior to recording prints from the skin, personnel must ensure the skin is dry.
- B. Depending on the condition of the remains, personnel may use the listed drying techniques as follows:
 1. Blot the remains using low lint absorbent wipes or cloth towels.
 2. Apply isopropyl alcohol to the remains and blot with low lint absorbent wipes or cloth towels.

3. Use a blow dryer on low heat.

5.7 Methods of Recording Postmortem Prints

Prior to recording friction ridge detail, personnel will ensure skin is dry and clean ([See Section 5.6](#)).

5.7.1 Digital Scanning Device

- A. Images of friction ridge skin may be captured digitally using a scanning device or software (e.g., ARES software).
- B. The friction ridges will be captured by placing or rolling the finger directly on the device to digitally record the ridges.
- C. Direct captures are in correct position and may be in reverse color.

5.7.2 Lifting Casting, and Inked Records

Captured prints should be in correct position and in correct color.

5.7.2.1 Lifting and Inked Records

- A. The recommended analog method involves the use of black powder and white adhesive lifters, which can be commercial products or any type of product with a sufficient adhesive to lift the print without damaging the skin.
- B. Personnel will process each area of friction ridge skin separately as follows:
 1. Prepare an adhesive lifter to the approximate size of the area of friction ridge skin being recorded.
 2. Lightly coat the ridges with the powder using a camel or squirrel hair fingerprint brush (or equivalent) or a foam brush, as appropriate.
 3. Place the area of friction ridge skin coated with powder on an adhesive lifter.
 4. Duct seal or equivalent may be used to assist with the even capture of the print.
 5. Affix the recorded impression to the back of a transparent fingerprint card or other transparent material and label the finger numbers/palm/foot if necessary.
 - i. A transparent fingerprint card can be created by photocopying a standard fingerprint card onto transparency film.
- C. Alternatively, ink and a traditional card can be used to record the friction ridges.

5.7.2.2 Casting

- A. Prepared casting materials can be applied to the friction ridges and allowed to harden.
- B. Powder or ink may be applied prior to casting to improve contrast.

5.7.3 Photographic Capture of Friction Ridges

- A. Recordings of friction ridge skin may be captured photographically.
 1. Direct captures of friction ridge skin will be in reverse position and may be in reverse color.

- B. Proper selection of lighting schemes or the use of oblique lighting may enhance the friction ridge detail.
- C. Ensure to include a scale or other measurable item in the image.
- D. Personnel have the discretion to capture images of friction ridges before and/or after techniques are applied.
- E. Images should be labeled as to the finger number or palm at the time of capture if not documented in the image.

5.8 Requirements for Recording Human Remains

- A. When processing submitted hands, fingers, feet or any human remains containing friction ridge skin, the following procedures must be followed:
 - 1. Inventory the totality of items received and record in the case notes (e.g., left hand with all fingers attached or right hand with digits #1 and #3 missing and two disassociated fingers).
 - 2. Record all attempted activities or processing techniques used to obtain friction ridge prints (even those that were not successful) and record the results from those attempts.
 - 3. Record appropriate information on the physical postmortem print record(s) ([Section 5.8.1](#)) or have this information associated with digital print records after capture.
 - 4. Unless the individual is identified, an attempt must be made to record all friction ridge skin detail on the hands, to include palms.
 - 5. Digital copies of all recorded friction ridge prints deemed suitable for capture (with the exception of any exploratory or test lifts, casts or other materials) must be retained in the FBI Laboratory file.
 - i. Personnel will refer to *Digital Images* (FRD-400) for guidance.
 - 6. After digital copies are made, the examiner will return physical postmortem print record(s) to the contributor as secondary evidence.
- B. Personnel may record friction ridge skin on feet, as dictated by the circumstances.
 - 1. These will be handled in the same manner as hands.
- C. All physical postmortem records obtained directly from human remains will be treated as biohazard material.

5.8.1 Required Information for Postmortem Records

- A. Each resulting postmortem record captured by personnel in the Friction Ridge Discipline will contain the following information:
 - 1. Available biographical or physical information of the deceased.
 - 2. Acknowledgement (e.g., signature) of individual(s) recording prints.
 - 3. Date the prints were recorded.
 - 4. Any additional information deemed necessary (e.g., Medical Examiner number, dermal print).
 - 5. Laboratory number.
 - 6. The source of each postmortem print(s) (e.g., finger number), if known.
 - 7. Notations if any parts (i.e., fingers or palms) are missing, damaged, or unable to be printed.

5.9 Additional Deceased Processing Considerations

5.9.1 Gloved Skin

- A. If gloving has occurred and the epidermis has separated completely from the dermis, personnel should print both the dermis and epidermis to ensure they are from the same individual, especially in situations with multiple casualties.
- B. Partial gloving occurs when the epidermis has not completely separated from the dermis and the epidermis should be carefully removed (utilizing scissors, dental picks, or scalpels) to facilitate printing.
- C. Detached skin may be retained in original container with the associated part or be placed in a separate appropriately labeled container (origin of skin (e.g., digit number), if known, and include Laboratory number or remains number, as applicable).
- D. When printing gloved skin, personnel should use the following recording techniques:
 - 1. Lifting or casting ([See Section 5.7.2](#)).
 - 2. Ink and card strips ([See Section 5.7.2](#)).
 - 3. Photography ([See Section 5.7.3](#)).
 - 4. Digital scanner ([See Section 5.7.1](#)).
- E. Personnel may place the detached epidermis over the personnel's gloved finger or hand to assist in recording the ridge detail.
- F. Recording the underside of the epidermis is also an option depending on quality.
 - 1. The resulting prints will be in reverse position and may be in reverse color.

5.9.2 Dermal Skin

- A. In certain circumstances, such as when the epidermis is damaged or lost or mass casualty situations, the dermal skin may be recorded.
- B. All reconditioning techniques may be used on dermal skin ([See Section 5.4](#)).
- C. The resulting prints may have:
 - 1. a double row of dermal papillae,
 - 2. single rows created by two semi-fused rows of dermal papillae, or
 - 3. a combination of double rows and single fused rows, all of which represent a single epidermal ridge.

5.10 Disposition of Human Remains

- A. Human remains are not to be destroyed, even when requested by the contributor.
- B. Personnel will:
 - 1. Ensure biohazard labels are on evidence container(s).
 - 2. Ensure the remains are in leak proof primary and secondary containers.
 - 3. Return the remains to the contributing agency.

6 CONDUCTING EXAMINATIONS ON UNKNOWN DECEASED FRICTION RIDGE DETAIL

6.1 Examination of Captured or Submitted Postmortem Prints

- A. All physical postmortem records (e.g., lifts, cards, casts) obtained directly from human remains will be treated as biohazard material.
- B. Per the *Digital Images* document, all submitted digital files must be retained.
- C. For submitted non-digital records, a digital copy of all submitted friction ridge prints deemed suitable for comparison must be retained in the FBI Laboratory file.
- D. If an identification is effected to an antemortem or non-duplicate postmortem record, a legible reproduction of the record(s) used to effect the identification must be retained in the FBI Laboratory file.
- E. When conducting examinations on non-original submitted unknown deceased prints, personnel will proceed with the expectation that the information provided is a true and accurate representation of the original, unless otherwise indicated.

6.2 Associated and Disassociated Portions or Records

- A. If intact remains are received or the friction ridge print records are contained on a single media (e.g., a fingerprint card or a single digital image), they are assumed to be associated to a single individual unless otherwise indicated.
- B. In the event that records are contained across multiple media (e.g., multiple cards or multiple digital images via email) or non-intact human remains are received, the recordings or remains are considered disassociated unless the friction ridge prints were captured in the laboratory, remains were separated in the laboratory and/or documentation exists to indicate the submitted records or remains are associated.
- C. Wherever possible, the examiner should inter-compare records to ensure prints across multiple media are connected.

6.2.1 Attempting to Identify Disassociated Portions or Records

- A. An attempt must be made to identify all disassociated portions or records.
- B. If multiple disassociated portions or records are examined, an attempt must be made to identify at least one print from each portion or record.

6.3 Assessment and Examination of Records

- A. All unknown deceased prints are treated as standard intentionally recorded prints per *Examining Friction Ridge Prints* (FRD-500).
- B. For cases where no potential antemortem identity is provided by the contributor, the examiner should assess for suitability for automated search only, and the FBI Laboratory file will show which prints were searched in the Next Generation Identification System.
- C. If manual comparisons against an antemortem record are required, the prints will be examined per the applicable sections in the *Examining Friction Ridge Prints* document.
- D. For all examinations, the examiner should consider whether the prints are in reverse position and/or reverse color.

1. Examiner can reference sections in this document for potential guidance on typical outcomes for specific capture methods.

6.4 Searching Captured or Submitted Postmortem Prints

- A. The examiner will refer to the *Next Generation Identification System (FRD-600)* for guidance on conducting searches and reference the following sections for specific procedures for all unknown deceased prints to be searched in the Next Generation Identification System.
- B. Prints must be as close to actual size as possible.
 1. The use of the Next Generation Identification System Ridge Count Tool to calibrate deceased prints is best practice, especially for macerated or desiccated skin ([See Section 5.5](#)).

6.4.1 Ten Print Record Search(es)

- A. The examiner will conduct a Ten Print search of the recordings in the Next Generation Identification System criminal and civil files and may search the Special Population Cognizant file when appropriate.
- B. If an antemortem record is identified, the verification process will be completed and the examiner will cease searches.
- C. If a postmortem record from the Criminal Justice Information Services Division files is identified, the examiner will do the following:
 1. If the postmortem record is an exact copy of the captured or submitted record, the examiner will record the match in their case notes and no verification is required.
 - i. Searches will continue.
 2. If the postmortem record is a different recording of the same individual recorded on the captured or submitted record, the prints will be identified and the verification process will be completed.
 - i. Searches will continue.

6.4.2 Searches of a Single Friction Ridge Print(s)

- A. If no identification is effected to an antemortem record, the examiner will conduct searches of the single friction ridge print(s) as follows with all Next Generation Identification System quality individual print recordings until all such recordings are searched or an identification is effected with antemortem prints.
 1. Both the criminal and civil files will be searched. Other files may be searched as the case warrants.
 2. The examiner will search against all ten fingers for each fingerprint search.
 3. In the case of multiple recordings of the same finger, the examiner will ensure all areas of the end joint of the finger are searched within the system.
 4. Palm prints, if submitted or captured, will be searched in the system.
 5. Captured or submitted postmortem prints searched as single friction ridge prints will not be added to the Unsolved Latent File.

- i. Exceptions may be granted by the Next Generation Identification System Program Manager.
 - B. If an antemortem print is identified:
 - 1. The examiner will identify the print in the Next Generation Identification System and retain the screenshot.
 - 2. If the submitted recordings are associated, only 1 finger/palm needs to be identified, the verification process will be completed, and the examiner will cease searches.
 - 3. If the submitted recordings are disassociated, all portions will be identified, the verification process will be completed, and the examiner will cease searches.
 - 4. Any outstanding searches will be addressed as written in the *Next Generation Identification System* document.
 - C. If a postmortem print is identified:
 - 1. If the postmortem record is from the Criminal Justice Information Services Division files and is an exact copy of the captured or submitted record, the examiner will record the match in their case notes and no verification is required.
 - i. The remaining candidates will be compared and searches will continue.
 - 2. The first print that is identified to a non-duplicate record must be marked as identified in the Next Generation Identification System and the screenshot retained. The verification process will be completed for the identification.
 - i. Comparisons will continue until the required number of unique candidates are addressed and searches will continue.
 - 3. For additional identifications to the same Universal Control Number, the examiner may choose “No Decision” or leave the result blank so the search can be closed.
 - i. The remaining candidates will be compared and searches will continue.
 - ii. If the examiner chooses instead to identify the Universal Control Number, they must retain the Next Generation Identification System screenshot.
 - a. Additional verifications are not necessary.
 - b. The remaining candidates must still be compared.

6.4.3 Searching Macerated or Desiccated Recorded Prints

- A. In some cases, the friction skin will expand or shrink to a point that the abnormal size of the recorded prints will affect the search.
- B. Macerated and gloved skin is typically larger than the normal size while desiccated and charred skin is typically smaller.

6.4.4 Sharing Unknown Deceased Prints

- A. Captured or submitted postmortem records may be shared with other agencies, through the Next Generation Identification System Program Manager or designee, as applicable.
- B. The examiner will refer to the *Next Generation Identification System* document for guidance.

7 SAFETY

- A. All human remains should be treated as infectious material and universal precautions should be exercised.
- B. The following safety procedures will be followed as applicable:
 - 1. Conduct work in a Biohazard Examination Room or area.
 - 2. Utilize universal precautions for control measures.
 - 3. Use barrier protection at all times (gloves, masks, eye wear, disposable lab coat/apron).
 - 4. Always remove protective barriers prior to leaving a Biohazard Examination Room or area and place disposable barriers in a biohazard disposal container.
 - 5. Use double gloves when there may be hand contact with blood or other potentially infectious materials.
 - 6. Change gloves when contaminated, torn, punctured, or when their ability to function as a barrier is compromised.
 - 7. Wear goggles or glasses with face shields or full face shields to protect from splashes, sprays, spatters, droplets of blood, or other potentially infectious materials.
 - 8. Use a disposable lab coat and/or apron for splash protection or replace lab coats after use.
 - 9. Wash hands after removal of gloves or other personal protective equipment.
 - 10. Place contaminated needles/sharps in appropriate puncture-resistant container.
 - 11. Reduce the use and handling of needles and sharp instruments as much as possible.
 - 12. Avoid bending, recapping, removing, or otherwise handling contaminated needles or other sharps.
 - 13. If necessary, accomplish recapping or needle removal through the use of a mechanical device or a one-handed technique.
 - 14. Use disposable needles whenever possible.
 - 15. Minimize spills and splatters.
 - 16. Decontaminate all surfaces and devices after use (10% bleach solution, alcohol, or other disinfectant cleaning solution).
 - 17. Wash surfaces and devices with water after decontamination.
 - 18. Use biohazard labels as required.
 - 19. Use leak proof primary and secondary containers during collection, handling, processing, storage, transport, or shipping of biohazard material.
 - 20. Dispose of infectious waste in a biohazard bag.

21. Maintain the biohazard bag in a rigid container.
22. Refer to the FBI Laboratory Safety Manual for guidance on safety polices and chemical disposal.
23. Any questions will be referred to the Health and Safety Group.

8 REVISION HISTORY

Revision	Issued	Changes
10	09/15/2022	Merged Revision 9 of <i>Unknown Deceased</i> (updated) and Revision 2 of <i>Standard Operating Procedures for Processing Human Remains</i> (reformatted and updated).
11	06/03/2024	<p>Multiple sections moved around document for better flow with minor updates.</p> <p>Section 1-B – removed caveat</p> <p>Section 1-C – added sharing</p> <p>Section 2 – modified to scope of document</p> <p>Section 4 – list updated</p> <p>Section 5-B – limited to laboratory.</p> <p>Section 5.1 – removed redundancy</p> <p>Section 5.4.3-A – remove option</p> <p>Section 5.4.3-D – added option</p> <p>Section 5.5.2-B – added option</p> <p>Section 5.5.3-C – added option</p> <p>Section 5.6 – remove option</p> <p>Section 5.7.2.1 – added labeling</p> <p>Section 5.7.2.2 – added “prior to casting”</p> <p>Section 5.7.3-E – added image labeling</p> <p>Section 5.8-A – removed option to dispose of physical prints</p> <p>Section 6.3-B – generalized.</p> <p>Section 6.4-B – removed manual search requirement</p> <p>Section 6.4.1 – search mandatory</p> <p>Section 6.4.3 – made tool best practice and moved to Section 6.4</p> <p>Section 7 and Section 8 - removed</p>