

# **Questioned Documents Unit (QDU) Evidence Handling Procedures and Examinations Using Forensic Advantage (FA)**

## **1 Scope**

These procedures apply to all personnel in the Questioned Documents Unit (QDU) who receive, transfer, store, return and/or examine evidence using Forensic Advantage (FA).

## **2 Security of Evidence Keys**

A duplicate of each evidence locker access key will be provided to the unit chief for inclusion into the unit security cabinet. The unit chief will designate an individual to serve as the QDU key custodian. Each entry to the cabinet is recorded in the security cabinet key log and maintained by the key custodian.

## **3 Transfers of Evidence**

**3.1** All transfers of evidence will be conducted in accordance with the *FBI Laboratory Practices for Transferring and Storing Evidence* and the *FBI Laboratory Practices for Handling Drug and Valuable Evidence*.

**3.2** In instances when multiple QDU personnel are assisting with or conducting examinations on the same evidence, but evidence is not being transferred, a separate list of those individuals will be maintained by the assigned examiner. This list will be maintained in the case file.

**3.3** All evidence transferred within the FBI Laboratory and out of the QDU will be properly sealed unless exigent circumstances exist (e.g., immediate cases). In these instances, transfers will be hand-to-hand, and a proper seal is not required within the FBI Laboratory. All transfers outside of the FBI Laboratory, the evidence will be under proper seal.

## **4 Inventory of Evidence**

**4.1** For evidence received using FA, the *FBI Laboratory Practices for Assigning Cases and Conducting Examinations* and the *FBI Laboratory Practices for Processing a Submission and Evidence Breakdown* will be followed.

**4.2** Evidence item(s) will be labeled with the item identifier, laboratory number, and the examiner's initials whenever the item(s) lends itself to marking.

**4.3** The following types of evidence do not lend themselves to some or all of the required markings:

- **Redacted**
- Items requiring other forensic examinations, such as latent print examinations
- Items requiring indented writing examinations
- Ransom notes
- Items that may be returned to the subject
- Items covered in biological matter
- Charred or brittle items
- Legal documents, such as passports, identification cards, and certificates
- Historical items
- Valuable items, such as artwork
- Other items in which markings would be considered destructive

**4.4** When it is not possible to place some or all of the required markings on the evidence, the primary container/packaging will contain the laboratory number and other required identifiers.

**4.4.1** Anyone writing on outer packaging containing evidence should exercise caution and ensure no extraneous indentations are placed onto the evidence.

## **5 General Evidence Handling Considerations**

**5.1** All QDU personnel will take appropriate measures to ensure the integrity of the evidence for future examinations in other forensic disciplines and safeguard the evidence against contamination, loss, or deleterious changes.

**5.2** If DNA or trace evidence are possible future examinations, QDU personnel should refer to the *QDU Procedures for the Initial Assessment of Documentary Evidence*.

**5.2.1** For the majority of cases involving DNA exams, the evidence will be transferred to the DNA unit before QDU personnel take possession. In the few instances where this does not occur, great care must be taken as to not contaminate the evidence with the analyst's DNA.

**5.2.1.1** A clean disposable surface (e.g., brown paper, Kimwipe or paper equivalent) must be placed down on any surface where the evidence will be handled, as appropriate.

**5.2.1.2** QDU personnel will wear gloves, a mask, and a lab coat to prevent their DNA from being transferred to the evidence, if the evidence is examined in the QDU prior to DNA exams.

**5.2.1.3** The analyst will clean the scanner with alcohol wipes before use to prevent contamination, if the evidence is scanned prior to DNA exams. The scanner will be cleaned after use, as needed.

**5.2.2** If an analyst observes trace evidence (e.g., hair, fiber), care must be taken to preserve this evidence and the examiner should be immediately notified.

**5.3** For evidence that will be examined by the latent print discipline, nitrile gloves must be worn at all times. To reduce the possibility of leaving fingerprints, two sets of gloves should be worn if the nitrile glove fits too tightly. Care must be taken as to not wipe the gloves across the evidence, as this will disturb the surface fibers of the document, possibly removing any indentations that may be present.

**5.3.1** If the evidence is composed of a hard surface, (e.g., plastic, metal) handling of the evidence should be minimized. This is done to prevent the latent prints possibly present on the surface from being removed.

**5.3.2** If an analyst handles latent evidence without gloves, they must immediately inform the pool examiner or assigned examiner.

**5.4** Analysts should consult with the pool examiner or assigned examiner for any pertinent information or special instructions.

**5.5** Care must be taken as to not tear the evidence or adhere it to any surface, possibly causing damage.

**5.5.1** If an adhesive material is on the evidence, a barrier sheet may be used to prevent sticking. The analyst will consult with the pool examiner or assigned examiner before proceeding with this method.

**5.5.2** If a piece of the evidence contains an adhesive material that inhibits the analyst's ability to scan or conduct indented writing examinations, the analyst must consult with the pool examiner or assigned examiner before using a material such as Undu<sup>®</sup> to remove the adhesive.

**5.5.3** If evidence needs to be altered (excluding splitting the sides of an envelope or removing spiral rings from notebooks for ESDA purposes), the pool examiner or assigned examiner must contact the contributor to obtain consent for the alteration. The contributor's consent or disapproval will be recorded on the Case Communication Log in FA. If, and after, the proper permission is received, the examiner will be the one to alter the evidence, recording the alteration in his/her notes or on the Case Communication Log in FA.

**5.5.3.1** An analyst must never cut or tear a piece of evidence on his/her own. This task must be completed by the pool examiner or assigned examiner.

**5.6** Especially fragile evidence such as charred or liquid-soaked documents must be handled with great care. In most situations, the pool examiner or assigned examiner will have attempted to protect and preserve the charred or soaked evidence before it is transferred to an analyst.

**5.6.1** The analyst should follow any special instructions from the pool examiner or assigned examiner regarding the protection of the evidence during the scanning and/or Electrostatic Detection Apparatus (ESDA) process.

**5.7** In instances where evidence in an analyst's possession has gotten wet, the analyst must immediately inform the pool examiner or assigned examiner and take steps to dry the evidence thoroughly.

**5.7.1** The evidence should not be placed into any plastic document holder or bag, as this may damage the document further and promote mold growth. The evidence should be placed in a paper envelope after it has dried.

**5.8** Machine printed material should not be placed in plastic document holders or bags due to the tendency for the medium to transfer to the plastic if pressure or heat is applied. Printed documents should be placed inside paper envelopes for proper storage and protection. If documents are observed to be stored improperly, the analyst should immediately consult the pool examiner or assigned examiner.

**5.9** All biohazard evidence will be examined in the biohazard room using appropriate personal protective equipment (PPE).

**5.9.1** All surfaces which come in contact with biohazard evidence (where feasible) will be properly cleaned after use using a 10 percent bleach solution (prepared that day or by manufacturers).

**5.10** Evidence containing known chemicals that may be harmful will be worked in an area equipped to handle such substances (e.g., chemical fume hood), and the assigned examiner will wear appropriate PPE.

## **6 Examination of Evidence**

**6.1** For cases received using FA, the *FBI Laboratory Practices for Assigning Cases and Conducting Examinations* will be followed.

**6.2** All assigned examiners in the QDU will assess submitted evidence and conduct all examinations deemed necessary, in accordance with the *QDU Standard Operating Procedures Manual*. In addition, each assigned examiner will take appropriate measures to ensure the integrity of the evidence for future examinations in other forensic disciplines and safeguard against contamination or loss.

**6.2.1** At a minimum, a visual inspection of the submitted items is required. Based upon contributor request(s) and a preliminary visual inspection, the assigned examiner will determine and document in the examination records the appropriate examinations to be conducted on the

submitted items. For comparison of an unknown to a known, the procedure requires the evaluation of the unknown item(s) to identify characteristics suitable for comparisons.

**6.2.1.1** Magnification, proper lighting, or other equipment may be used as needed during the initial visual inspection.

**6.3** An association within the QDU will be defined as follows - An observation that two or more elements have significant aspects in common indicating they may be of a related/common origin at some point in time.

**6.4** Refer to the *QDU Case Records and Review for Cases in Forensic Advantage (FA)* for procedures on conducting technical and administrative reviews in FA.

**6.5** If an examiner/analyst elects to digitally process an image in casework which enhances or changes its appearance, the examiner/analyst may refer to the user's guide and/or other resources associated with the software used. In addition, the examiner/analyst will maintain a record of the software being used and the processing steps performed to the image (e.g., Photoshop- adjusted levels and brightness). This record may be written, printed, or kept in digital format with the processed image. The record will be maintained in the *Laboratory Division Supporting Documentation Envelope (7-251) digital 1A* or provided to the contributor as secondary evidence.

**6.5.1** Requirements for Photoshop processing are as follows:

- The original image will remain unaltered.
- A working copy of the original image will be created and used for digital processing to preserve the integrity of the original image.
- Digital image processing must not misrepresent nor compromise the integrity of the information contained in the original image.

**6.5.2** Questioned document cases are dynamic in nature and may require the use of all available Photoshop processing/tools. However, the primary processing/tools used in casework typically include, but are not limited to:

- Image enhancements (contrast, brightness, etc.)
- Filters
- Levels
- Color channels
- Dodge/Burn
- File format conversion (e.g., TIFF to JPEG)

**6.6** Electronic images, information submitted via e-mail, facsimile, or Sentinel for QDU examinations will be handled in accordance with the *FBI Laboratory Practices for Processing a Single Unit Submission (SUS)*, *FBI Laboratory Practices for Preparing, Reviewing, and Issuing Laboratory Reports and Retaining Records*, *FBI Laboratory Practices for Transferring and Storing Evidence*, *FBI Laboratory Practices for Processing a Submission and Evidence*

## *Breakdown and the FBI Laboratory Practices for Assigning Cases and Conducting Examinations.*

**6.7** All cases being processed by a pool examiner, assigned examiner, and/or assigned analyst and those being technically reviewed are considered under active examination. In addition, analysis or comparison of case evidence at least once every sixty days will constitute active examination. Evidence that is not under active examination will be properly sealed and stored.

## **7 Secondary Evidence**

**7.1** A *Secondary Evidence Inventory* log will be completed in FA as a batch report and uploaded into the Case Object Repository in FA when electrostatic lifts, photographs/electronic images of indentations, lifts, casts, and/or test impressions of footwear/tire and other pattern impression evidence (new evidence created in Laboratory) are returned to the contributor. In addition, exemplars (new evidence created in Laboratory) taken for future comparison purposes will be treated as secondary evidence. Discs containing uncompressed image files may be treated as secondary evidence or included in the *Laboratory Division Supporting Documentation Envelope* (7-251) or digital 1A. Secondary evidence will be sealed and labeled in accordance with the evidence policies of the FBI Laboratory.

**7.2** Each type of secondary evidence will be added as a separate item in FA. The secondary evidence item description will include the discipline, the number of pieces of secondary evidence, and the type of secondary evidence.

Item 5	Questioned Documents Secondary Evidence (2 ESDA lifts)
Item 6	Questioned Documents Secondary Evidence (3 photographs)
Item 7	Shoe Prints/Tire Treads Secondary Evidence (Twenty footwear test impressions)
Item 8	Shoe Prints/Tire Treads Secondary Evidence (Ten tire test impressions)

**Figure 1:** Examples of naming different types of QDU secondary evidence.

## **8 Safety**

Standard precautions for the handling of chemical and biological materials should be followed. Examiners/analysts may refer to the *FBI Laboratory Safety Manual* for guidance. Chemical and biological materials that are hazardous or potentially hazardous will be maintained and examined in specifically designated areas within the QDU space.

## **9 References**

*FBI Laboratory Safety Manual*

*FBI Laboratory Operations Manual*

*FBI Laboratory Quality Assurance Manual*

*QDU Standard Operating Procedures Manual*

*QDU Quality Assurance Manual*

Rev. #	Issue Date	History
3	09/26/19	Section 5.4 added “pool” “or assigned examiner.” Section 5.5.1 added “pool” “or assigned examiner” Section 5.5.2 added “pool” “or assigned examiner” Section 5.5.3 added “excluding” “or removing spiral rings from notebooks for ESDA purposes” “pool examiner or assigned examiner.” Section 5.3.3.1 added “This task must be completed by the pool examiner or assigned examiner.” Section 5.6 added “pool” “or assigned examiner” Section 5.6.1 added “pool” “or assigned examiner” Section 5.7 added “pool” “or assigned examiner.” Section 5.8 added “pool” “or assigned examiner.” Section 6.2 added “assigned” and “assigned.” Section 6.2.1 added “assigned” “For comparison of an unknown to a known, the procedure requires the evaluation of the unknown item(s) to identify characteristics suitable for comparisons.” Section 6.3 added “/common” “at some point in time.” Section 6.7 deleted “the QDU Case Processing Center (CPC)” and added “a pool examiner, assigned examiner, and/or assigned technician/analyst”
4	04/15/21	In section 3.2 changed “examiners/analysts” to “personnel” and replaced “/” with “with or”. Split the fourth bullet in section 4.3 into two bullets and removing “or other”. In section 5.1 replaced “examiners and analysts” with “QDU personnel”. In section 5.2 replaced “the examiner” with “QDU personnel” and in 5.2.1 replaced “the QDU analyst” with “QDU personnel” and removed the “s” off the word “takes”. In section 5.2.1.1 capitalized the “K” in “kimwipe” because it is a brand name. In section 5.2.1.2 changed “The analyst” to “QDU personnel” and “his/her” to “their”. In section 5.2.1.3, removed “in order”. In section 5.3 the second sentence was added, and “indented image” was changed to “indentations”. In section 5.3.1 “two sets of gloves should be worn: cotton gloves with nitrile gloves over them.” was replaced with “handling of the evidence should be minimized”. In section 5.3.2 replaced “he/she” with “they” and added “pool examiner or assigned”. In section 5.5.3, moved comma from after “altered” to after parenthical reference. In section 5.5.2 replaced “he/she” with “the analyst”, and in section 5.6 replaced “water” with “liquid”. In section 5.9.1, added “by”. In section 5.10 replaced “a trained” with “the assigned”. Changed “imaging” to “image” in the third bullet of section 6.5.1. Removed 5 <sup>th</sup> bullet of section 6.5.2. Updated section 6.5 to more clearly describe requirement. Replaced “/” with a comma and removed “database searches and other” from section 6.6. Removed “technician/” from section 6.7. Added commas, removed “and/or” and “as well as” and added “/or” in section 7.1. Also replaced “DVD(s)/CD(s)” with “Discs” and “can” with “may” in section 7.1. In section 7.2 added “the” before discipline and removed “/category of testing”, replaced “with” with “the”, inserted



“of pieces of secondary evidence,” and added “the” and “of secondary evidence”. Also added “s” to “Example” in “Figure 1” description and updated the Item 7 and Item 8 examples from “Footwear” and “Tires” to “Shoe Prints/Tire Treads”.

**Redacted - Signatures on File**

**Approval**

Questioned Documents  
Unit Chief

Date: 04/14/2021

Questioned Documents  
Technical Leader

Date: 04/14/2021

Footwear/Tire Tread  
Technical Leader

Date: 04/14/2021

**QA Approval**

Quality Manager

Date: 04/14/2021