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Standard Specifications for Preparation of Laboratory Analysis Requests in Sexual Assault Investigations¹

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INTRODUCTION

The meaningful analysis of physical evidence recovered in sexual assault investigations requires not only careful attention to the preservation of easily damaged or degraded biological materials but also the transmittal of a clear description and explanation of that evidence for the examining scientists/analysts/criminalists. This description should include the source of, and relationships between, different evidence items and is sometimes referred to as a “case synopsis.” The more information the analysts have at their disposal concerning the circumstances of the assault and the relationship(s) of the victim(s) and suspect(s), the more successful their efforts will be in resolving questions in the investigation. Failure to adequately document and report this information in the request for scientific analysis could lead to the application of useless tests of the evidence that may destroy materials better used in other more meaningful examinations.

1. Scope

1.1 These specifications describe the basic elements of a request for the scientific examination of physical evidence collected in the investigation of a sexual assault. These specifications are designed to be used in conjunction with other specifications, guides, and practices associated with sexual assault examinations that are listed in Section 2.

1.2 These specifications outline considerations that will facilitate the analysis of sexual assault evidence by a potentially large group of forensic experts. These experts can include, but are not limited to, serologists, toxicologists, pathologists, odontologists, latent print examiners, firearm and toolmark examiners, and trace materials analysts. The success of their combined work generally requires a clear understanding of the issues and relationships involved in the case.

2. Referenced Documents

2.1 ASTM Standards:²

E1843 Guide for Sexual Assault Investigation, Examination,

and Evidence Collection

3. Terminology

3.1 *Definitions*—For definitions of terms used in these specifications, see the *Compilation of ASTM Standard Definitions* (1990).

4. Summary of Practice

4.1 Requests for laboratory analysis should be supported by sufficient documentation to allow the laboratory scientist(s) to understand the conditions surrounding the assault and the relationship(s) between different items of evidence.

4.2 These specifications are to be used in conjunction with Guide E1843.

5. Significance and Use

5.1 These specifications are designed to ensure that evidence associated with a sexual assault investigation is handled and analyzed in the most useful manner and without wasting evidentiary materials and analytical time or resources, or both.

6. Procedure

6.1 The request for scientific examination of sexual assault evidence should include a completed medical examiner or SANE evaluation form, in accordance with Guide E1843. It should also include a complete investigative review as described as follows. All of the information described may not be available in a specific case or at the time of an initial request for analysis, but it should be forwarded to the examining forensic laboratory in writing as soon as the information is developed.

¹ These specifications are under the jurisdiction of ASTM Committee E30 on Forensic Sciences and are the direct responsibility of Subcommittee E30.01 on Criminalistics.

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² For referenced ASTM standards, visit the ASTM website, www.astm.org, or contact ASTM Customer Service at service@astm.org. For *Annual Book of ASTM Standards* volume information, refer to the standard's Document Summary page on the ASTM website.