



CALIFORNIA DEPARTMENT OF JUSTICE  
BUREAU OF FORENSIC SERVICES  
**PHYSICAL EVIDENCE BULLETIN**



**LATENT PRINT SECTION**

In many instances, an entire prosecution case will rest on a positive latent print identification. Without print identifications, many criminal cases would never reach the prosecution level. The Latent Print Section is staffed by experienced Latent Print Analysts who have substantial background in the identification field. All are qualified to appear in court and provide expert testimony in matters of latent print examinations. In addition, latent print analysts will provide field assistance in the investigation of major cases or where trained identification officers are not available to the local agency.

BFS latent print examiners use state of the art scientific methods to locate fingerprints on crime scene evidence. In addition to the classical black powder dusting methods, cyanoacrylate fuming, fluorescent dyes, high intensity lasers, and other chemicals are used to develop prints on difficult surfaces such as paper, plastic, styrofoam, and duct tape. Sophisticated digital equipment is used to enhance the image quality of marginal latent prints and to document the evidence.

**A. SUBMISSION OF LATENT PRINT EVIDENCE:**

Latent print examinations and comparisons are conducted by Latent Print Analysts, not by criminalists. For this reason all packages shipped to the Bureau containing latent evidence only, should be marked "Attention: Latent Print Section".

**B. MARKING OF EVIDENCE:**

1. All evidence packaging should be marked, sealed, and signed in such a manner to detect any breaking of the seal, just as with any other type of physical evidence.
2. Lifted, developed latent imprints should also be marked or sealed in marked envelopes.
3. When photographs are taken of developed latent impressions, some type of identifying mark should be placed near the print and this mark should also be photographed, so that it will show on the negative. If a 1:1 fingerprint camera is not used, a ruler or some other item should be included in the photograph to show the amount of magnification.

**C. PRESERVATION OF EVIDENCE:**

1. In all cases it is of the utmost importance to prevent contamination of latent print evidence by subsequent handling which can damage those prints already present.
2. Most fingerprints submitted will be on paper, glass, metal, or other smooth surfaced objects. When articles, which may contain latent fingerprints, must be picked up, they should always be touched as little as possible, and then only in areas least likely to retain identifiable latent imprints, such as where the surface is very rough.

3. While gloves or a handkerchief may be used to pick up items of evidence, any unnecessary contact should be avoided. Although this method of handling exhibits will prevent leaving additional prints on the articles, the gloves or cloth used may destroy prints originally present unless great care is exercised.
4. Large articles containing latent impressions such as glass, metal articles, and firearms should be placed on wood or heavy cardboard and fastened down firmly with string or wire to prevent shifting and contact with other objects in transit. Where such evidence is to be submitted frequently, a peg board should be obtained on which wooden pegs can be moved as desired to surround exhibits and keep them from moving. Bottles and glass can be placed vertically on a board and placed in the bottom of a box. The base of the bottle can be surrounded with nails to hold it in place and the mouth can be either inserted through a hole in a piece of cardboard or held in position with a wooden board nailed to the lid of the container.
5. Papers and documents containing latent prints should be placed individually in manila envelopes or plastic containers. Such containers can be placed between two sheets of stiff cardboard and wrapped or placed in a box for mailing.
6. If the object containing the fingerprints cannot be removed or submitted to the latent print section, dust the prints with suitable developing powers and lift with latent lifting tape. Lifted prints can be placed on black or white cards for contrast or on transparent backing material.

**D. COMPARISON PRINTS:**

1. If any suspects are known to the investigator, submit clear rolled fingerprints and palm impressions of such individuals (see PEB 16). If these cannot be obtained, advise the latent print section of the full name, CII or booking number if possible, and the description of the suspect. Although a file of palm impressions is not maintained in the Department, this information will permit a search of the DOJ files for a fingerprint record of the suspect. If his fingerprints are on file they can be used for preliminary comparisons with any latent imprints developed. If there are no known suspects to the investigator, submit to the Automated Latent Print Section (ALPS).
2. Submit fingerprint cards on any other individual who may legitimately have handled the objects to be examined whether before or after the crime was committed. Include fingerprint cards of any investigators who may have accidentally touched the exhibits. This will permit the rapid elimination of any latent impressions found which were made by such individuals.

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