

GUIDELINES FOR FORENSIC LABORATORY MANAGEMENT PRACTICES

INTRODUCTION

The American Society of Crime Laboratory Directors is a professional organization of managers and supervisors employed in forensic laboratories. We are the holders of a public trust because a portion of the vital affairs of other people has been placed into our hands by virtue of the role of our laboratories in the criminal justice system. The typical users of forensic laboratory services are not in a position to judge the quality of our work product or management for themselves. They must rely on the expertise of individual professional practitioners and the standard of practice maintained by the profession as a whole.

The purpose of this document is to provide guidelines for the conduct of managers and supervisors of forensic laboratories so as to safeguard the integrity and objectives of the profession. These are not immutable laws nor are they all inclusive. Instead, they represent general standards which each manager and supervisor should strive to meet.

Laboratory managers must exercise individual judgment in complying with the general guidelines in this document. The guiding principle should be that the end does not justify the means; the means must always be in keeping with the law and with good scientific practice.

Adopted 1987, Revised 1994

RESPONSIBILITY TO THE EMPLOYER

Employers rarely have the ability to judge the quality and productivity of their forensic laboratory. Therefore, the employer relies upon the forensic manager to develop and maintain an efficient, high quality forensic laboratory.

MANAGERIAL COMPETENCE

Laboratory managers should display competence in direction of such activities as long range planning, management of change, group decision making, and sound fiscal practices. The role(s) and responsibilities of laboratory members must be clearly defined.

INTEGRITY

Laboratory managers must be honest and truthful with their peers, supervisors and subordinates. They must also be trustworthy and honest when representing their laboratories to outside organizations.

QUALITY

Laboratory managers are responsible for implementing quality assurance procedures which effectively monitor and verify the quality of the work product of their laboratories.

EFFICIENCY

Laboratory managers should ensure that laboratory services are provided in a manner which maximizes organizational efficiency and ensures an economical expenditure of resources and personnel.

PRODUCTIVITY

Laboratory managers should establish reasonable goals for the production of casework in a timely fashion. Highest priority should be given to cases which have a potentially productive outcome and which could, if successfully concluded, have an effective impact on the enforcement or adjudication process.

MEETING ORGANIZATIONAL EXPECTATIONS

Laboratory managers must implement and enforce the policies and rules of their employers and should establish internal procedures designed to meet the needs of their organizations.

HEALTH AND SAFETY

Laboratory managers are responsible for planning and maintaining systems that reasonably assure safety in the laboratory. Such systems should include mechanisms for input by members of the laboratory, maintenance of records of injuries and routine safety inspections.

SECURITY

Laboratory managers are responsible for planning and maintaining the security of the laboratory. Security measures should include control of access both during and after normal business hours.

MANAGEMENT INFORMATION SYSTEMS

Laboratory managers are responsible for developing management information systems. These systems should provide information that assists managers and the parent organization in decision making processes.

RESPONSIBILITY TO THE EMPLOYEE

Laboratory managers understand that the quality of the work generated by a laboratory is directly related to the performance of the staff. To that end the laboratory manager has important responsibilities to obtain the best performance from the laboratory's employees.

QUALIFICATIONS

Laboratory managers must hire employees of sufficient academic qualifications or experience to provide them with the fundamental scientific principles for work in a forensic laboratory. The laboratory manager must be assured that employees are honest, forthright and ethical in their personal and professional life.

TRAINING

Laboratory managers are obligated to provide training in the principles of forensic science. Training must include handling and preserving the integrity of physical evidence. Before casework is done, specific training within that functional area shall be provided. Laboratory managers must be assured that the employee fully understands the principles, applications and limitations of methods, procedures and equipment they use before beginning case work.

MAINTAINING EMPLOYEE'S COMPETENCY

Laboratory managers must monitor the skills of employees on a continuing basis through the use of proficiency testing, report review and evaluation of testimony.

STAFF DEVELOPMENT

Laboratory managers should foster the development of the staff for greater job responsibility by supporting internal and external training, providing sufficient library resources to permit employees to keep abreast of changing and emerging trends in forensic science, and encouraging them to do so.

ENVIRONMENT

Laboratory managers are obligated to provide a safe and functional work environment with adequate space to support all the work activities of the employee. Facilities must be adequate so that evidence under the laboratory's control is protected from contamination, tampering or theft.

COMMUNICATION

Laboratory managers should take steps to ensure that the employees understand and support the objectives and values of the laboratory. Pathways of communication should exist within the organization so that the ideas of the employees are considered when policies and procedures of the laboratory are developed or revised. Communication should include staff meetings as well as written and oral dialogue.

SUPERVISION

Laboratory managers must provide staff with adequate supervisory review to ensure the quality of the work product. Supervisors must be held accountable for the performance of their staff and the enforcement of clear and enforceable organizational and ethical standards. Employees should be held to realistic performance goals which take into account reasonable workload standards. Supervisors should ensure that employees are not unduly pressured to perform substandard work through case load pressure or unnecessary outside influence. The laboratory should have in place a performance evaluation process.

FISCAL

Laboratory managers should strive to provide adequate budgetary support. Laboratory managers should provide employees with appropriate, safe, well maintained and calibrated equipment to permit them to perform their job functions at maximum efficiency.

RESPONSIBILITY TO THE PUBLIC

Laboratory managers hold a unique role in the balance of scientific principles, requirements of the criminal justice system and the effects on the lives of individuals. The decisions and judgments that are made in the laboratory must fairly represent all interests with which they have been entrusted. Users of forensic laboratory services must rely on the reputation of the laboratory, the abilities of its analysts and the standards of the profession.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

Laboratory managers and employees of forensic laboratories must avoid any activity, interest or association that interferes or appears to interfere with their independent exercise of professional judgment.

RESPONSE TO PUBLIC NEEDS

Forensic laboratories should be responsive to public input and consider the impact of actions and case priorities on the public.

PROFESSIONAL STAFFING

Forensic laboratories must hire and retain qualified personnel who have the integrity necessary to the practice of forensic science. Verification of academic, work experience and professional association credentials is essential.

RECOMMENDATIONS AND REFERENCES

Professional recommendations of laboratories and/or analysts should be given only when there is knowledge and an endorsement of the quality of the work and the competence of the laboratory/analyst. Referrals of clients to other professional colleagues carry a lesser degree of endorsement and are appropriate when a laboratory is unable to perform the work requested.

LEGAL COMPLIANCE

Laboratory managers shall establish operational procedures in order to meet constitutional and statutory requirements as well as principles of sound scientific practice.

FISCAL RESPONSIBILITY

Public laboratories should be managed to minimize waste and promote cost effectiveness. Strict inventory controls and equipment maintenance schedules should be followed.

ACCOUNTABILITY

Laboratory managers must be accountable for decisions and actions. These decisions and actions should be supported by appropriate documentation and be open to legitimate scrutiny.

DISCLOSURE AND DISCOVERY

Laboratory records must be open for reasonable access when legitimate requests are made by officers of the court. When release of information is authorized by management, all employees must avoid misrepresentations and/or obstructions.

WORK QUALITY

A quality assurance program must be established. Laboratory managers and supervisors must accept responsibility for evidence integrity and security; validated, reliable methods; casework documentation and reporting; case review; testimony monitoring; and proficiency testing.

RESPONSIBILITY TO THE PROFESSION

Laboratory managers face the challenge of promoting professionalism through the objective assessment of individual ability and overall work quality in forensic sciences. Another challenge is dissemination of information in a profession where change is the norm.

ACCREDITATION

The Laboratory Accreditation Board (ASCLD/LAB) provides managers with objective standards by which the quality of work produced in forensic laboratories can be judged. Participation in such a program is important to demonstrate to the public and to users of laboratory services the laboratory's concern for and commitment to quality.

PEER CERTIFICATION

Laboratory managers should support peer certification programs which promote professionalism and provide objective standards that help judge the quality of an employee's work. Meaningful information on strengths and weaknesses of an individual, based on an impartial examination and other factors considered to be important by peers, will add to an employee's abilities and confidence. This results in a more complete professional.

PEER ORGANIZATIONS

Laboratory managers should participate in professional organizations. They should encourage employee participation in professional societies and technical working groups which promote the timely exchange of information among peers. These societies prove their worth to forensic science, benefiting both the employee and employer, through basic training as well as continuing education opportunities. Personal contacts with other agencies and laboratories with similar interests are also beneficial for professional growth.

RESEARCH

When resources permit, laboratory managers should support research in forensic laboratories. Research and thorough, systematic study of special problems are needed to help advance the frontiers of applied science. Interaction and cooperation with college and university faculty and students can be extremely beneficial to forensic science. These researchers also gain satisfaction knowing their work can tremendously impact the effectiveness of a forensic laboratory.

ETHICS

Professional ethics provide the basis for the examination of evidence and the reporting of analytical results by blending the scientific principles and the statutory requirements into guidelines for professional behavior. Laboratory managers must strive to ensure that forensic science is conducted in accordance with sound scientific principles and within the framework of the statutory requirements to which forensic professionals are responsible.