



Standard Practice for Reporting Incidents that May Involve Criminal or Civil Litigation¹

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1. Scope

1.1 This practice covers guidelines for the collection and preservation of information and physical evidence and the preparation of a documentation report relative to any incident(s) involving personal injury, property damage, commercial loss, or criminal acts which may reasonably be expected to be the subject of litigation.

1.2 The approach outlined is recommended as good professional practice even though the facts and issues of each situation require specific consideration, and may involve matters not expressly dealt with herein. Not every portion of this document may be applicable to every incident or investigation. It is up to the individual preparing the report to apply the appropriate recommended procedures in this guide to a particular incident or investigation. In addition, it is recognized that time and resource limitations or existing policies may limit the degree to which the recommendations in this document will be applied in a given investigation. The responsibility of the individual preparing the report (or anyone who handles or examines evidence) for evidence preservation, and the scope of that responsibility varies based on such factors as the jurisdiction, the status of the individual as a public official or private sector investigator, indications of criminal conduct, and applicable laws and regulations.

1.2.1 This practice does not apply to laboratory analysis reports.

1.2.2 If compliance with this standard is claimed, justifications for any deviations from this standard must be documented.

2. Referenced Documents

2.1 ASTM Standards:²

¹ This practice is under the jurisdiction of ASTM Committee E30 on Forensic Sciences and is the direct responsibility of Subcommittee E30.11 on Interdisciplinary Forensic Science Standards.

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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.

E620 Practice for Reporting Opinions of Scientific or Technical Experts

E1459 Guide for Physical Evidence Labeling and Related Documentation

3. Significance and Use

3.1 This practice is intended to provide a complete written account of the case at hand in such a fashion as to allow another individual to interpret the particulars of the incident.

3.2 This practice is suggested for documenting transitory conditions and data that may change shortly after an incident and be lost forever if not properly and promptly documented.

3.3 The primary use of this practice is to preserve pertinent information for use by technical experts and other technical personnel who may be called upon to reconstruct the events surrounding the incident.

4. General

4.1 The report described in this practice may be prepared by any person(s) in a formal capacity. Persons investigating in a formal capacity include but may not be limited to international, federal, state and local officials, employers, owners, insurance personnel, and other technical experts.

4.2 The data documented by the report shall be factual and should not contain opinions, hypotheses, judgments, or conclusions, nor should this report fix blame. For guidance on reporting opinions, refer to Practice E620.

5. Content

5.1 An incident report should contain the following:

5.1.1 Detailed chronological narrative of what occurred before, during, and immediately after the incident; including any associated personal injury, property damage, commercial loss, or suspected criminal activity. The sources of information shall be identified.

5.1.2 Photographs which accurately and fairly identify and depict the scene, the items, or systems involved in the incident, and the post-incident conditions. Photographs should be taken from many directions and should include overall site views, overall item and system views, intermediate views, and close-up views.

5.1.2.1 Appropriate dimensional reference scales should be used for close-up views.

5.1.3 Identification of items, vehicles, or systems involved in the incident. This may include manufacturer, model number, serial number, and date of manufacture.

5.1.4 Identification of the persons involved in, and all known witnesses to, the incident. If possible, witness statements should be obtained. Identification should include the full name, current address and information on how they may be contacted.

5.1.5 Description of the condition of the items or systems involved in the incident and any apparent alterations.

5.1.6 Information relative to all evidence either removed from the incident scene or intentionally left in place at the incident scene in order to protect and preserve its “as found” condition.

5.1.6.1 Name and address of all known persons who removed the evidence, and the person(s) who took custody of the evidence and information on how they may be contacted.

5.1.6.2 Detailed description of the evidence, including sketches or photographs where appropriate.

5.1.6.3 Photographs, sketches, and written descriptions, or any combination thereof, of both the location of the evidence

before removal and any identification marks placed on evidence for traceability.

5.1.6.4 Date(s) removed.

5.1.6.5 Description of steps taken to prevent deterioration or damage of the evidence.

5.1.7 Any additional information considered by the writer to be pertinent.

5.1.7.1 Follow appropriate evidence handling procedures to ensure complete chain of custody (see Guide **E1459**).

5.1.8 Signature and information relative to how the writer(s) may be contacted, date and time of the incident(s), the name of the writer’s employer, the date and time of the investigation, and the dates of all reports.

6. Custody

6.1 While an incident report is the property of the entity the writer(s) represent(s), the custodian shall preserve the report for potential future distribution, use, and reference, as governed by legal requirements.

7. Keywords

7.1 evidence collection and preservation; forensic engineers; forensic sciences

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