



Australian Government

MSL975026 Perform physical examination of forensic samples

Release: 1

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Modification History

Release 1. Supersedes and is equivalent to MSL975026A Perform physical examination of forensic samples

Application

This unit of competency covers the ability to perform physical examination and testing of samples that may be used as forensic evidence. Competency includes the ability to establish client needs for routine and non-routine forensic samples, select suitable techniques and methods and modify them if required, obtain valid and reliable data, and report test results. Personnel are required to recognise atypical test data/results, troubleshoot common analytical procedure and equipment problems and ensure all testing and reporting meets judicial requirements.

This unit of competency is applicable to technical officers working in all industry sectors and government agencies, such as chemical, food, forensic, medical and environmental laboratories. The term forensic is used to describe tests which may have legal implications, such as testing paint scrapings to verify claims for insurance companies or examining passports for forgery and tampering.

Examination of forensic physical samples is non-routine and may require the development of new or modified methods. The testing requires a high degree of analytical skill and knowledge and practical experience to perform the analysis and interpret the results. Physical forensic samples (i.e. of non-living origin) include fingerprints, tyre marks, footprints, building materials, soil samples, glass particles, paint scrapings, documents and textile fibres.

All operations and analytical methods must comply with relevant standards, appropriate procedures and/or workplace requirements. Although a supervisor may not always be present, the technical officer will follow standard operating procedures (SOPs) that clearly describe the scope of permitted practice, including varying workplace/test procedures and communicating results to people outside the laboratory.

While no specific licensing or certification requirements apply to this unit at the time of publication, laboratory operations are governed by relevant legislation, regulations and/or external accreditation requirements. Local requirements should be checked.

Pre-requisite Unit

Nil

Competency Field

Testing

Unit Sector

Elements and Performance Criteria

Elements describe the essential outcomes.		Performance criteria describe the performance needed to demonstrate achievement of the element.	
1	Establish client needs and schedule analysis	1.1	Obtain evidential material/samples following accepted chain of custody procedures
		1.2	Record sample description, compare with specification and record and report discrepancies and evaluate to determine if further samples are required
		1.3	Evaluate samples and select appropriate laboratory procedure from accepted standard forensic techniques and validated scientific methods
		1.4	Identify the possible need to modify workplace techniques or methods, for example, to ensure recovery of sample materials
		1.5	Seek advice from supervisor about any proposed variations and document all approved changes according to the workplace quality system and judicial requirements
		1.6	Schedule analysis using workplace procedures
2	Prepare samples and standards	2.1	Obtain a representative analytical portion of the sample to examine or test
		2.2	Prepare sample and store remaining sample in accordance with testing requirements
		2.3	Prepare validation checks and/or calibration standards for analytical portions

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| 3 | Perform analysis | 3.1 | Perform laboratory examination in accordance with validated technique or method on standards, validation checks and samples |
| | | 3.2 | Conduct sufficient testing to obtain reliable data |
| | | 3.3 | Perform tests in appropriate timeframes and at appropriate cost |
| | | 3.4 | Troubleshoot technique or method problems which have led to atypical data or results |
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| 4 | Process and analyse data | 4.1 | Confirm data is the result of valid measurements |
| | | 4.2 | Perform any required calculations and ensure results are consistent with standards or estimations and expectations |
| | | 4.3 | Record results with the appropriate accuracy, precision, uncertainty and units |
| | | 4.4 | Draw conclusions from examination of results according to accepted forensic practices and documented requirements |
| | | 4.5 | Review laboratory methodology and test results |
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| 5 | Maintain a safe work environment | 5.1 | Identify risks, hazards, safety equipment and control measures associated with sample handling, preparation and analytical method |
| | | 5.2 | Use personal protective equipment (PPE) and safety procedures specified for test method and materials to be tested |
| | | 5.3 | Minimise the generation of waste and environmental impacts |
| | | 5.4 | Ensure the safe disposal of laboratory waste |
| | | 5.5 | Clean, care for and store equipment and consumables in accordance with workplace procedures |

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| 6 | Maintain laboratory records and report results | 6.1 | Enter approved data and results into laboratory information management system (LIMS) according to workplace quality system and judicial requirements |
| | | 6.2 | Maintain equipment logs in accordance with workplace procedures |
| | | 6.3 | Maintain security, integrity and traceability of samples and documentation |
| | | 6.4 | Prepare reports for presentation of evidence and communicate results to appropriate personnel |

Foundation Skills

This section describes those language, literacy, numeracy and employment skills that are essential to performance.

Foundation skills essential to performance are explicit in the performance criteria of this unit of competency.

Range of Conditions

This field allows for different work environments and conditions that may affect performance. Essential operating conditions that may be present (depending on the work situation, needs of the candidate, accessibility of the item, and local industry and regional contexts) are included.

Standards, codes, procedures and/or workplace requirements

Standards, codes, procedures and/or workplace requirements include the latest version of one or more of:

- Australian and international standards covering the requirements for the competence of testing and calibration laboratories, laboratory design and construction, physical containment levels and facility types, laboratory safety, and quality and environmental management
- national work health and safety (WHS) standards and codes of practice, and national measurement regulations and guidelines
- Australian and international standards and guidelines covering specialised forensic tests, accuracy of measurement methods and results, expression of uncertainty and quantifying uncertainty
- specific codes, guidelines, procedures and methods, such as the Australian code of good manufacturing practice for medicinal products (GMP), and principles of good laboratory practice (GLP)
- workplace documents, such as judicial protocols; SOPs; quality and equipment manuals; data quality procedures; calibration and maintenance schedules; material safety data sheets (MSDS) and safety procedures; material and product specifications; laboratory schedules; workplace recording and reporting procedures; waste minimisation and safe disposal procedures; cleaning, hygiene and personal hygiene requirements; stock records and inventory
- forensic sampling procedures (labelling, preparation, storage, transport and disposal)
- physical examination techniques and test procedures (validated and authorised)

Samples

Samples include, but are not limited to, one or more of:

- fingerprints
- firearms and tool marks
- ammunition
- ballistics
- vehicles
- documents and handwriting

Physical tests and

Physical tests and examinations include, but are not limited to, one

examination	or more of: • precise measurement of position, orientation and dimensions (e.g. particle size) • mass, density and specific gravity (e.g. compaction) • thermal tests (e.g. combustion properties) • optical tests (e.g. colour matching) • acoustic tests (e.g. loudness) • electrical tests (e.g. insulation) • magnetic tests (e.g. intrinsic induction)
Validation checks and/or calibration standards	Validation checks and/or calibration standards include, but are not limited to, one or more of: • positive and known positive controls • negative controls (e.g. substrate blanks) • recovery check controls • certified reference materials
Selecting appropriate testing procedures	Selecting appropriate testing procedures includes, but is not limited to, consideration of one or more of: • range, reliability and validity of available techniques and methods • physical characteristics of the evidence • availability of further samples • available resources • time and cost constraints • selection of non-destructive techniques where possible or appropriate • minimisation of sample size for destructive techniques • sequence of forensic techniques • need for possible further analysis by other forensic disciplines
Reviewing laboratory methodology and test results	Reviewing laboratory methodology and test results includes, but is not limited to, one or more of: • assessing the methodology for appropriate application to evidence • assessing chain of custody and sample handling to ensure integrity • assessing testing procedures for compliance with quality system and judicial requirements

- evaluating interpretation of test results for validity

Safety procedures

Safety procedures include, but are not limited to, one or more of:

- ensuring access to service shut-off points
- recognising and observing hazard warnings and safety signs
- labelling of samples and hazardous materials
- handling and storage of hazardous materials and equipment in accordance with labelling, MSDS and manufacturer instructions
- following established manual handling procedures
- identifying and reporting operating problems or equipment malfunctions
- cleaning and decontaminating equipment and work areas regularly using workplace procedures
- using PPE, such as gloves, safety glasses, coveralls and gowns
- use of fume hoods, direct extraction of vapours and gases
- minimising exposure to radiation ionising, such as lasers, electromagnetic and UV radiation
- reporting abnormal emissions, discharges and airborne contaminants, such as noise, light, solids, liquids, water/wastewater, gases, smoke, vapour, fumes, odour and particulates, to appropriate personnel

WHS and environmental management requirements

WHS and environmental management requirements include:

- complying with WHS and environmental management requirements at all times, which may be imposed through state/territory or federal legislation. These requirements must not be compromised at any time
- applying standard precautions relating to the potentially hazardous nature of samples
- accessing and applying current industry understanding of infection control issued by the National Health and Medical Research Council (NHMRC) and State and Territory Departments of Health, where relevant

Unit Mapping Information

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Links

MSA Training Package Implementation Guides - <http://mskills.org.au/training-packages/info/>