

HANDLING AND PACKING OF DOCUMENTS.

Careless and improper handling of a document which is submitted for technical examination of the laboratory will seriously affect or diminish the value of the evidence it possesses, as to its authorship or the possibility of proving that forgery has been committed. The document written in ink or pencil on ordinary paper has limited life and also suffers ^{appreciable} damage every time it is handled. A simple act like removing and replacing a letter in its envelope repeatedly can cause considerable deterioration. A few precautions have all to be taken to preserve the document in the same condition as when it was discovered, when it is delivered to the laboratory for certain examination.

The following rules of "do's and 'Don'ts" can be observed by an investigating officer:-

'Do's'

- (1) The disputed documents should be taken to the laboratory at the earliest opportunity.
- (2) Keep the documents unfolded in a protective envelope, which is sufficiently large
- (3) Documents should be stored in dry place away from excessive heat and strong light.

'Don'ts'

- (1) Document should not be frequently handled or carried in a pocket for a long time.
- (2) Documents should not be cut down or trimmed or in any manner mutilated.

(4) Documents should not be folded or unfolded unnecessarily and never a new fold should be introduced.

(5) Documents should not be touched with any type of eraser or adhesive tapes and avoid dusting for fingerprints before consulting an expert.

(6) Documents should not be punched or pinned but paper clips can be used at times.

(7) Tracings of documents should never be resorted to.

(8) Photography is the safe method for purposes of recording.

The most useful and effective, protective covering is a transparent plastic envelope which is commercially and easily available. The paper being an excellent absorbent of oil and water it is considerably affected by perspiration and due to the destructive effects of constant handlings. The advantage of keeping the documents unfolded in transparent envelopes of ample size is that it can be examined by witnesses and others who have to refer to them and at the same time protected from dirt, ^{cler}wear and stains. As an alternative a large heavy manila envelope or a folder can be used reducing the chance of damage. Once a document becomes disputed and important it should be properly stored, or filed. Very moist and humid atmosphere, excessive heat and strong light *are likely* accelerate the harmful effects of ageing and

conditions the documents should be protected from abnormally bad storage conditions. Repeated handling of a document can actually wear it out. In this way the paper becomes dirty and stained. Folds are deepened and and finally broken by opening and refolding again and again. This will affect the result of the technical examination in the laboratory. The common examples such as pencil writings and carbon copies of typewriting are subject to smearing and obliteration by undue careless handling. An investigating officer without thinking may fold the disputed document and place it unprotected in his pocket. A few days in his pocket with other contents frequently being changed can almost wear out the document. The heat of the body and the perspiration and rubbing against the pocket linings cause considerable deterioration. In such cases a photographic copy of the document will serve as a good substitute without exposing the original document to any damage.

Certain problems require that the document receive greater than normal care. If the document is suspected of containing erasures or traces of impressed writings even moderate handling may further obliterate the erased writings, may stain the surface so as to hinder the restoration, may destroy some of the minute indentations upon which the decipherment of the erased or impressed writing is dependant.

identification and this practice should be kept to absolute minimum and in a back corner where they do not interfere with any elements which could possibly be the subject of examination. It is a common practice that documents whether they are standards or disputed when they are submitted to the laboratory through courts the seal or rubber stamp of the court is affixed on the writings of the documents which are yet to be examined in the laboratory. If the writing is limited it is completely obliterated by the careless method of sealing, and the evidence is lost. Defacing of the documents should be avoided. It is often found whenever anonymous letters or disputed extended matter are sent along with some suspect's writings for comparison, that similar words and letters are circled or underlined on the original document in order to call attention to them. This kind of marking may not only weaken the value of the document as legal evidence but also occasionally damage the physical evidence contained in it.

New folds should be avoided as they hinder certain technical examination. These folds make it difficult to prepare oblique light photography or such type of examinations. The document should not be tied together by making holes using a punch or using pins, as such methods of tagging will cause sometimes considerable damage to certain pieces of writings or even if they

Charred documents of their fragile nature must be handled as little as possible. Even transporting them to the laboratory requires extraordinary care. Whenever possible the charred documents should be moved in the container in which they are found. When it is transferred to another container^{it} should be done by an experienced person. The charred mass should be moved by first insinuating a sheet of stiff paper and drawing the paper and its burden on to a stiff sheet of card-board. The whole should then be transferred to a box and protected in this way it can be taken to the laboratory without any kind of disturbance. No attempt should be made to unfold the burnt papers or curled sheets. Decipherment of a charred document which has been shattered into small fragments is impossible.

If a document is torn to pieces it should be kept in a shallow box, and reconstructing the document should be done in the laboratory. Wet or stained documents should be dried in shade and then transmitted to the laboratory.

In most of the homicide cases letters purported to have been written by the deceased to his/her nearest kin are being sent to the laboratory to locate its author. Invariably these letters are fabricated by the accused to delay investigation. The accused himself

There were instances in which the accused had sent complaints to police as if from the deceased implicating some other persons who were planning to do away with him. Under all these circumstances it is essential to locate the author of such letters and petitions. The problem of identifying the handwriting can to a great extent ^{be} solved by sending proper and sufficient quantity of standard writings and signatures. Writings and signatures are identified by comparison method of the personal handwriting characteristics. These writings characteristics are liable to be influenced due to lot of factors. The passage of time, writing instruments and materials, deliberate changes introduced by the writer, physical and mental condition may affect the handwriting and signatures. Unless proper standard writings and signatures ^{are} submitted, the expert may not be able to make a thorough study. Specimen writings or signatures written near to the date of disputed writings & signature in sufficient quantity should be procured and sent along with dictated specimens, preferably on similar paper using similar writing instrument.

The documents should be sent to the laboratory at the earliest opportunity as the chance of damage is less and sometimes certain new facts may come out of the technical examination.

Documents submitted for examination should

marks for the writings and signatures can be given without damaging or interfering with the questioned writings. Different identifying marks may be given to different sets of standard writings. The specific points on which an opinion is sought should be clearly indicated.