



NATIONAL COMMISSION ON FORENSIC SCIENCE



Terminology

Type of Work Product: Views Document

Recommendation

It is the view of the National Commission on Forensic Science (NCFS) that, for purposes of their work products, the terms *forensic science* and *forensic science service provider* will be defined as follows:

FORENSIC SCIENCE - The application of scientific practices to the recognition, collection, analysis, and interpretation of physical evidence for criminal and civil law or regulatory purposes.¹

FORENSIC SCIENCE SERVICE PROVIDER - A person or entity that (1) applies scientific practices to recognizing, collecting, analyzing or interpreting physical evidence and (2) issues test results, provides reports, or provides interpretations, conclusions, or opinions through testimony with respect to such evidence.

Background

As a way to foster meaningful discussion and avoid misunderstanding, terms relevant to the work of the NCFS must be clear and understood by all. Much of the work of the NCFS centers on recommendations pertaining to people and groups dealing with topics and subject matter. These people, groups, topics and subject matter must be readily understood to facilitate clear understanding of the recommendations and any future action regarding them.

The process of defining terms began with identifying those terms that are sometimes nebulous, but often possess multiple interpretations. Once identified, these terms were discussed as they relate to possible use by the NCFS, but more importantly, as they should be defined for the entire forensic profession and others that interact with it.

The following are points noted and considered for each definition:

FORENSIC SCIENCE

This universal definition is rooted from notable sources that include forensic science professional organizations and well-known forensic science accrediting bodies. The principles of science lay at the foundation of the work performed, though not all activities in forensic science rely exclusively on laboratory experimentation and analysis. It is, however, the application of those principles, stated as “practices” in the definition, that lay the foundation for the activities related

¹ This definition is inclusive of digital evidence and the medical-legal community.

to work performed in the forensic sciences. It was also agreed that the spectrum of forensic science reliance went beyond criminal applications in the law and, accordingly, included a nexus to civil law and regulatory matters.

FORENSIC SCIENCE SERVICE PROVIDER

This universal definition is inclusive of both persons and entities, both of whom are capable of and responsible for providing forensic science services. There is intentionally no reference to the frequency of the qualifying activities. The definition was left broadened by design with the intent of narrowing the scope of coverage depending on how it is applied in later recommendations by this Commission.

Recommended Implementation Strategy

All NCFS subcommittees will adopt these definitions, cite them as footnotes in their work products, and take the scope of the definitions into account when developing their own implementation strategies relating to policy or directive recommendations.