


FORENSIC SCIENCE DIVISION


Labyrinth – Quarterly Newsletter

December 2023



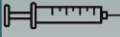
Biology

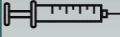
 The Biology Section requires reference standards for casework, especially the victim's. For autopsies performed at the Billings morgue, FTA cards will be given to the agency for this purpose.

 Please review our Submission Policy on our website under Evidence Collection Resources.


 A report is required with all DNA requests.


Chemistry


 Please see the next page for changes to the Montana State Crime Lab's syringe policy.

 When submitting clandestine laboratory evidence, the evidence needs to be hand delivered and be accompanied by both a completed memorandum of understanding and submission form (both can be found on our website). Please also provide a copy of the agency report and evidence log.


Evidence


 Package and seal items separately as much as possible to avoid contamination, and list each item as such on the sub form.

 Seal all items of evidence using red evidence tape, a heat seal, or approved self-adhesive seals, and initial and date the seals.


 If submitting flash drives or discs containing photographs, treat them as evidence. They must be properly packaged and listed on the submission form.

Firearms


 Please see the next page for information about our new Virtual Comparison Microscope!


 If you have a shooting case with no firearms recovered, submit whatever bullets, cartridge cases, or other firearms evidence have been recovered to the laboratory. We may be able to generate a list of possible weapons or compare the evidence to other shooting scene evidence.


Latent Prints

 When photographing latent impressions, please include a scale. The impression should be entirely in focus, fill the frame, and have adequate lighting. Images that are blurry, out of focus, or taken from too far away can hinder LP analysis. Photos should be placed on a disc or thumb drive and treated as evidence for lab submittal. For more information, please see the Latent Print Collection Resources tab on the MT DOJ Forensic Science Division website, or contact the laboratory.

Toxicology


 In October, four toxicologists attended the annual Society of Forensic Toxicologists conference in Denver. This conference is a great opportunity to participate in continuing education, learn about new instrumentation and scientific research, and share ideas from around the world.


 2024 BTS Recertification paperwork needs to be submitted to the lab by 12/22. The Breath Alcohol unit can help with questions.


 Welcome to Amy Howls, the new Toxicology Technician!


Miscellaneous

We have sadly said goodbye to the following Crime Lab employees. You will all be missed, but we wish you the best of luck on your new adventures!

 Joe Pasternak, Biology Supervisor, has left after 18 years at the lab.

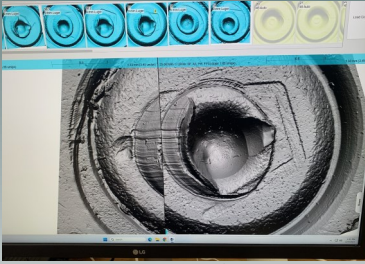
 Heather Krell, Autopsy Assistant, has left after 8 years at the lab.

 Samantha Hoyt, Evidence Tech, has left after two years at the lab.

 Joel Smith, IT Wizard, who was borrowed from JITSD for three years.

Labyrinth - continued

Virtual Comparison Microscope



Comparing cartridge cases

The Firearms Section recently validated a Virtual Comparison Microscope (VCM) that allows us to capture digital images of fired cartridge cases. This will allow us to compare those cartridge cases to other submitted cases and test fires in the future, as needed, to help connect shooting cases. As we are seeing more and more repeat offenders and related shooting events, this technology will certainly help. Instead of having agencies re-submit firearms and evidence, those images can be reloaded and compared at any time. Feel free to call the section if you have questions about the new technology and how it might help us to best serve your agency.



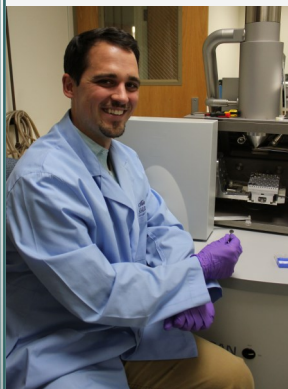
Forensic Scientist Doug Lancon using the VCM

Syringe Policy Update

Due to continued abuse of the previous syringe policy, syringes are now being considered residues by the Montana State Crime Lab. As such, syringes will not be analyzed if weighable quantities exist in other evidence items. A letter from the County Attorney's office will not be required, nor honored. When a case consists of only residue items, additional residue items will be analyzed until at least one controlled substance is identified. Please contact Chemistry Section Supervisor Misty Icard at (406)255-1104 or MIcard@mt.gov with any questions regarding this new policy. The policy change took place on October 24, 2023.

Employee Spotlight

Shockingly, our Employee of the Quarter for the third quarter is Travis Doria! Originally from the East Coast, Travis wonders how long he has to live here to be considered a Montanan. He attended West Virginia University, where he soon figured out that he was bad at Latent Print analysis, so he got into drug chemistry analysis. To say that Travis is full of B.S. would be an understatement - he earned a B.S. in Forensic Investigative Science and a B.S. in Chemistry. He worked for the West Virginia State Police Crime Lab before joining the Montana State Crime Lab in 2014. Travis' crowning achievement is that he is the longest lasting male in the Chemistry Section at the Crime Lab. In his free time, he and his wife raise first generation Montanans. He also enjoys riding motorcycles, working out, and having opinions.



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Please take the survey on our website.

