

## Standard for Examination of Documents for Indentations



### WHAT IS AN AAFS STANDARD FACTSHEET?

The AAFS produces clear, concise, and easy-to-understand factsheets to summarize the contents of technical and professional forensic science standards on the OSAC Registry. They are not intended to provide an interpretation for any portion of a published standard.

### WHAT IS THE PURPOSE OF THIS STANDARD?

This standard summarizes commonly accepted techniques, technologies, and procedures used by forensic document examiners for the examination, visualization, recording, and evaluation of indentations on documents.

Indentations made through the act of handwriting or action of a mechanical device can occur when markings are impressed from one substrate to another, typically paper products. Indentations are not always visible to the unaided eye but can often be visualized by a variety of techniques.

### WHY IS THIS STANDARD IMPORTANT? WHAT ARE ITS BENEFITS?

The results of indentation examination have the potential to aid an investigation by:

- a) developing graphic representations of indentations;
- b) associating one document with another, or to an individual;
- c) providing dating information;
- d) determining production sequence;
- e) providing other information regarding the source, production, or history of a document or other item.

The standard promotes document examinations being conducted prior to any chemical or destructive process and discusses the need to coordinate document examinations with other forensic disciplines.



### HOW IS THIS STANDARD USED, AND WHAT ARE THE KEY ELEMENTS?

Any forensic science practitioner with appropriate training in forensic document examination can use the techniques in this standard to visualize paper fiber disturbances (e.g., those caused by pressure from a writing instrument, erasures, paper tears, or dynamic contact with other items). These techniques may also be appropriate for examinations of other types of indentations on paper, including those caused by fasteners, transport rollers, and postal processing.

The standard promotes the use of both optical and electrostatic methods when examining documents for indentations, as some indentations might not be visualized with only a single method. It allows for flexibility in the number and nature of the examinations performed based on the item submitted, the relevant questions, forensic science service provider policies, and the examiner's professional judgement. The techniques included in this standard may not cover all aspects of examinations of unusual or uncommon substrates, or other variables involved in the creation or handling of the document prior to submission to an FSSP.

This standard includes requirements for documentation of the examinations performed and the relevant observations as well as, the information to be included in a report.