

BOOK REVIEW

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A Review of *Forensic Science Handbook*

REFERENCE: Saferstein, R., Ed., *Forensic Science Handbook*, Prentice-Hall, Englewood Cliffs, NJ, 1982, 725 pages, no price listed.

There are many books in my technical library but few are worth the cost, at least to those dealing with one or another of the disciplines within forensic science. Most are replete with errors, both of omission as well as commission; a vast majority are written by persons with dubious credentials and performance.

This book, however, must be considered to be a current classic. The editor has brought together an excellent aggregate of forensic scientists. The opening chapter sets the scene for proper perspective of subsequent authors; he places the work area as the laboratory and the arena as the courtroom. Ultimately, no one is a competent forensic scientist until and unless he or she can "aid the trier of fact in the search for the truth."

Each of the chapters following is well written with a proper balance between theory and practice. It is most useful to have references and bibliographies; also, the references are as current as one can expect.

The chapters on hair examination and biochemical markers in body fluids are particularly well done. Refreshing and long needed are the chapters on glass analysis and paint and soil comparisons.

The authors are to be commended in general for dealing with certain techniques that have been given undeserved weight. An example is the use of density gradient columns for soil comparisons. Certainly this comparative density technique is useful in the same way that a color comparison is useful—if the color of two soils or the density distributions are grossly different, it is imprudent and wasteful of time to continue. Should they be indistinguishable, the soil examiner must be capable of continuing on to more sophisticated and discriminating tests or analyses.

If there is a failing, it is the incompleteness in one area—firearms and firearms discharge residue. There is no chapter on firearms but this may be explicable by the unspoken separation between forensic scientists in general and firearms examiners in particular. In my opinion, this is unfortunate, because both groups have much to offer each other. The chapter on gunshot residues deals admirably with those sought on the hands of persons suspected of discharging a weapon. But the treatment of residues on clothing and tissue, and range determinations, was dispatched in a short paragraph or two. Again, this may be related to the fact that this aspect of firearms discharge residue investigation is handled most often by firearms examiners.

This handbook can be used in teaching graduate students in the forensic sciences; it will be a valuable reference in the laboratory; and I expect to see it displayed, if not utilized, at the defense counsel's table.

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