

## BOOK REVIEW

Leo Uzych, J.D., M.P.H.

# Review of: Scientific Evidence and Expert Testimony Handbook

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**REFERENCE:** Becker RF. *Scientific Evidence and Expert Testimony Handbook*, Charles C Thomas, Springfield, Illinois, 1997, 233 pp., \$42.95.

Forensic Science lies at the interface of law and science. It is a hybrid area in which competent practitioners must be willing and able to work effectually with a professionally-challenging admixture of nebulous legal terms of art and technologic-related questions. The many bricks of scholarship embedded in author Becker's *Scientific Evidence and Expert Testimony Handbook* are capably constructed into a sturdy bridge of knowledge and understanding, admirably linking the two normally-disparate worlds of law and science.

The book is configured into 12 chapters, proffering a panoramic view of pivotal concerns in the expansive field of forensic science, including: DNA evidence, fingerprints, firearms, drugs, and blood. Although individual practitioners in the realm of forensic science may have a professional interest in particular issues beyond the ken of this book, the highly practical focus and value of Becker's masterful work is undoubted. The book's practical orientation is revealed, for example, by numerous and quite lengthy, series of hypothetical questions and answers for the courtroom examination of various types of expert witnesses, such as: serologists, forensic scientists, DNA experts, forensic chemists, police officers, forensic

engineers, psychiatrists, and fingerprint identification professionals. Plainly, the book is targeted to professionals who fight in the trenches in court battles involving scientific evidence and expert testimony; and it certainly would be of professional value to the foregoing types of experts, and to the lawyers who examine, and cross examine, them.

The author is a trial lawyer and criminal investigator who does not, however, have formal educational training as a scientist. Although Becker employs a refreshingly forthright writing style, and shows the ability to explain technical material in an understandable, informative manner, his handbook, frankly, is more an adumbration, rather than a precise sketching, of the contours of forensic science. Moreover, a reading of the book certainly does not constitute an adequate substitute for highly-focused, painstaking study of cases and statutes pertinent to the adjudication of a particular case involving forensic science in a particular legal jurisdiction.

Withal, Becker's book is a fine contribution to the literature in the field of forensic science. Substantial difficulties may be encountered in the courtroom in the important, and difficult, process of translating the technical language of experts into a form understandable to laypersons. This book is a powerful weapon in the battle to mitigate such difficulties.