

**MID-ATLANTIC ASSOCIATION OF FORENSIC SCIENTISTS**  
**CODE OF ETHICS**

(Revision as of May 19, 2005)

- 1.1 This code is intended to provide guidelines for members of the Mid-Atlantic Association of Forensic Scientists, Inc., hereinafter referred to as MAAFS, in the performance of their professional duties. It is realized that not every situation can be covered, and this Code is neither intended to be all inconclusive nor to be a strict set of rules. It is designed to provide a basis for proper and ethical conduct in performing scientific examination and analysis, the reporting of the results to involved parties and providing testimony as an expert witness in a court of law.
  - 1.1.1 For the purposes of describing the areas covered by this Code, Forensic Science is considered to include the examination and/or analysis of physical evidence regardless of its source or type; the results of which are reported for the purpose of adding information to the judicial process.
  - 1.1.2 Forensic Scientists examine and perform scientific analyses on physical evidence; interpret and/or evaluate their findings arriving at opinions and conclusions; report and/or testify on these opinions and conclusions accurately and truthfully. The members' education and/or training must be sufficient to be able to perform these duties proficiently. It is expected that all members of the Association will approach the discipline in this manner, to the best of their abilities and within the framework of the Code. Serious violations of this Code will be regarded as inconsistent with acceptance into, or continuation of, membership in the Association.
  - 1.1.3 In all professional actions, it is the responsibility of all members to conduct themselves in a manner that is above reproach even if particular situations are not covered by this Code. In addition, all members' personal conduct should be on such a level that it does not cast doubt upon their reliability or integrity.
- 1.2 Conduct and Responsibilities of Members Relating Specifically to MAAFS.
  - 1.2.1 Members shall not solicit or accept any gift in any form under circumstances in which it might be inferred that the gift was intended as a reward to influence them while acting in an official capacity for MAAFS.
  - 1.2.2 Members shall not improperly disclose confidential information regarding other members or the activities of MAAFS.
  - 1.2.3 Members shall not attempt to use their membership to obtain unjustified benefits, privileges, or exemptions for themselves or others.
  - 1.2.4 Members shall not make unauthorized public statements representing MAAFS are specifically forbidden.
  - 1.2.5 Members shall bring violations of the Code of Ethics to the attention of the Board and/or Ethics Committee. This shall be deemed both ethical and proper.
- 1.3 General Conduct of Members.
  - 1.3.1 Members must be aware of personal limitations in training or experience.
  - 1.3.2 Members shall not intentionally misrepresent training, experience, or areas of expertise.
  - 1.3.3 Members will make a thorough examination of evidence, applying a sufficient number of tests to reach conclusions, according to laboratory policy.
  - 1.3.4 Members must use generally accepted methods for analysis is desirable, however, this is not meant to discourage individual initiative when circumstances warrant.

- 1.3.5 Members should issue technically correct statements in all written or oral reports, testimony and public addresses. The interpretation of results shall not contain ambiguous or inaccurate claims.
  - 1.3.6 It is essential for members to clearly differentiate between scientific results and expert opinion.
  - 1.3.7 Members are responsible for the application of scientific fact and the correct interpretation of data from the evidence under consideration. In this regard, members must present results in an impartial manner not withholding information that would be unfavorable to either side. It is recognized that the members' testimony is often governed by the rules of evidence and/or the adversarial practice within a particular jurisdiction.
  - 1.3.8 As expert witnesses, members will make every effort to give clear presentations before judges or juries. The use of intentionally ambiguous or misleading language with the purpose of confusing an issue is unethical.
  - 1.3.9 The open sharing of information concerning new techniques and developments in the field of forensic science is encouraged.
- 1.4 Ethics Relating to Examination and Analyses.
- 1.4.1 Members shall draw conclusions only after thorough examination of the evidence, avoiding preconceived notions.
  - 1.4.2 All procedures and protocol used in the analysis and/or examination of evidence shall be open for review by the scientific community. Members are responsible for the diligent scrutiny and validation of scientific procedure in accordance with laboratory policy.
  - 1.4.3 Proper scientific method requires reliable materials. Standards or reagents of questionable quality shall not be used.
  - 1.4.4 Tests may be conducted on evidentiary materials that may be limited in some way, but these limitations must be kept in mind when forming conclusions.
  - 1.4.5 Examinations and analyses are to be as complete as possible considering the sample size and available methods. Additional tests, which add nothing of significance, shall not to be utilized for the purpose of giving an opinion more weight.
  - 1.4.6 All members should keep abreast of new techniques, but unproven techniques shall not be used without thorough investigation. Methods proven inaccurate or unreliable shall not be used.
  - 1.4.7 Wherever appropriate, controls and standards are to be utilized to conduct examinations and analyses.
  - 1.4.8 Examinations and/or analyses that are beyond the scope of an individual's experience should be reviewed by another who has adequate knowledge in the area, in accordance with laboratory policy.
- 1.5 Ethics Relating to Opinions and Conclusions.
- 1.5.1 Conclusions formed and opinions rendered are to be based on generally accepted tests and procedures. New and/or experimental techniques may be used to add information, but, they are not to be used as the primary basis for a conclusion until proven scientifically sound.
  - 1.5.2 Opinions are to be stated so as to be clear in their meaning. Wording should not be such that inferences are drawn which are not valid, or that slant the opinion in a particular direction.

- 1.5.3 Conclusions should be based on the information drawn from the evidence itself, not on extraneous information from other sources. Opinions stated in a scientific report should have a similar basis.
  - 1.5.4 Sound scientific procedures require that an individual neither form conclusions nor render opinions which are beyond his area of expertise. This is not intended to discourage exploration into new areas, but statement of opinions are to be based on adequate knowledge.
- 1.6 Ethics Relating to Testimony.
- 1.6.1 An expert witness is defined as one who has greater knowledge and experience in a particular field than the average individual. As such, he is qualified to state opinions pertaining to that field in a court of law. In addition, expert opinions stated on matters relating to Forensic Science are generally based on factual information obtained by a scientific process.
  - 1.6.2 The expert witness should provide testimony clearly identifying which opinions are based upon personally conducted testing and those based primarily on knowledge and experience. Any opinions based on case information not directly generated by the expert should be clearly stated.
  - 1.6.3 No statement should be made which might create an impression, or cause the lay person to draw a conclusion that is not warranted by the results of tests conducted.
  - 1.6.4 If a question is put to the expert with the requirement that they should give a simple answer (i.e., yes or no), but it requires qualifications to avoid misleading the judge or jury, the expert should so state before answering the question.
  - 1.6.5 All explanations and testimony should utilize terminology such that it is easily understood by the court and/or jury.
  - 1.6.6 All questions asked should be answered in a clear, straightforward manner. The witness must refuse to extend himself beyond his area of expertise.
  - 1.6.7 All exhibits used to demonstrate the results obtained from examinations and analyses are to be prepared according to accepted procedures. They are to be presented so as to be informative, but not misleading.
- 1.7 Ethics Relating to General Matters.
- 1.7.1 It is appropriate that a reasonable fee be charged for private examination and analysis. This fee shall be based on the amount of work done, not the results obtained or a contingency basis.
  - 1.7.2 It is ethical to re-examine work done by another. However, it is considered proper to insist on information as to the type of previous work so as to determine if significant changes in condition of the material might have occurred. If there is a conflict of results, every effort should be made to resolve this prior to trial.
  - 1.7.3 Providing information for proper questioning of an expert to reveal incompetent testimony is ethical. The purpose shall not be to harass the witness or to thwart justice.
- 1.8 Responsibilities Toward Improvement of the Profession.
- 1.8.1 Proper conduct involves more than merely refraining from a list of “don’t’s” or strictly adhering to a narrow list of “do’s.” Members and prospective members of the Association are encouraged to work toward their own professional improvement and also improvement in the field of Forensic Sciences.

- 1.8.2 Members have a responsibility to keep himself up to date, and to bring new ideas, problems encountered, and other pertinent information to the attention of others. This includes apparent flaws in existing or new procedures.
  - 1.8.3 Professional reporting of significant events is proper, but this should not be for the promotion of personal publicity. This particularly applies to accomplishments in specific cases.
  - 1.8.4 Members are bound by this code of Ethics to bring to the attention of the Association, any breach of ethics they have observed or have knowledge of in an effort to improve the reputation and integrity of the profession.
- 1.9 Amendments to the Code of Ethics.
- 1.9.1. Deadline. A proposed amendment shall be submitted in writing to the President at least ninety (90) days prior to an annual business meeting.
  - 1.9.2. Publication. A proposed amendment shall be distributed to members via the Association's website or by mail at least thirty (30) days prior to the next business meeting at which the vote is to occur.
  - 1.9.3. Approval. Amendments to the Code of Ethics shall require approval by two-thirds (2/3) majority of the voting members present at the Annual Business Meeting.
  - 1.9.4. Changes. After a proposed amendment has been published, changes which alter the substance of the amendment may be made only by unanimous vote of those present and voting.