

# Code of Ethics

## Technical and Scientific Working Group for Fire and Explosions

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### Preface

This Code of Ethics (Code) is a guide to the ethical conduct of members of the Technical and Scientific Working Group for Fire and Explosions (T/SWGFEX). T/SWGFEX members are members of various professions, including forensic scientists, members of the laboratory community, engineers, fire and explosion investigators, and the legal profession. Each T/SWGFEX member should follow the practices, procedures, and codes of conduct that his or her own profession generally recognizes as consistent with a high level of professional ethics. While not all inclusive, this Code represents general standards that all should strive to meet. Serious or repeated infractions of this Code or of the professional code of ethics or code of conduct governing members of T/SWGFEX in their professions may be inconsistent with membership in T/SWGFEX as provided by the Bylaws, Standard Operating Procedures, or Committee Membership Guide.

This Code defines the core values and outlines the expected conduct of members of T/SWGFEX. This Code is designed to promote integrity among T/SWGFEX members, and to increase public confidence in the quality of scene investigation, forensic laboratory services, and litigation in fire and explosion matters. The goal is to create a culture of ethical behavior and professional responsibility that serves the interests of justice.

This Code was adapted from ethics guidelines already developed and adopted by forensic organizations such as the American Society of Crime Laboratory Directors, American Society of Crime Laboratory Directors /Laboratory Accreditation Board, American Board of Criminalistics, American Academy of Forensic Science and regional professional forensic organizations, sometimes verbatim.

It should be remembered that those who discredit themselves, discredit us all.

### Core Values

- To advance education and the use of science in fire and explosion investigations and serve the interests of justice in a manner consistent with the highest level of ethics in one's profession.
- To conduct your activities in a manner that reflects competency, impartiality, integrity, respect, and quality.

- To accept responsibility for your words, decisions, opinions, and actions, taking immediate steps to rectify any conduct that violates this Code.

## **Conduct Guidelines**

1. Accurately represent your education, training, experience, and area or areas of expertise.
2. Be independent, impartial, and objective. Carry out the duties of your profession in such a manner so as to earn the confidence of the public.
3. Items of potential evidentiary value (including evidence that cannot be removed from a fire or explosion scene, documents, and recordings) must be treated with the care and control necessary to ensure integrity and avoid adulteration, loss, unnecessary consumption, or spoliation. In the event that destruction, disposal, or removal is authorized or necessary, you should engage in such acts only after the evidence has been properly recorded and the record has been verified as to accuracy and completeness.
4. Use appropriate controls and standards when conducting examinations and analyses.
5. Do not employ techniques and methods that are known by you or the relevant professional community to be inaccurate or unreliable.
6. Make and retain thorough, contemporaneous, clear and accurate records of all examinations and tests or other investigations conducted.
7. You must support any conclusions you draw or opinions that you form by sufficiently detailed records to allow meaningful review and assessment of the conclusions by an independent person competent in the field.
8. Reports are prepared in which facts, opinions and interpretations are clearly distinguishable, and which clearly describe any limitations on the methods, interpretations, associations, and opinions presented.
9. Where test results are inconclusive or indefinite, any conclusions drawn shall be fully explained.
10. A full, complete, unbiased and impartial disclosure of your findings must be made. Present accurate and complete data in reports, testimony, publications, and oral presentations.
11. Testify to results obtained and conclusions reached only when confident that the opinions are based on good scientifically based principles and methods. Make it clear in your evidence (whether in written reports or oral testimony) what aspects of your evidence are matters of fact as contrasted with the aspects of your evidence that are matters of opinion.

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12. Testify in a clear, straightforward manner and refuse to extend beyond your field of competence. Phrase testimony in such a manner so that results are not misinterpreted.
13. Do not accept or participate in any casework on a contingency fee basis or in which exists any personal or financial conflict of interest or an appearance of such a conflict.
14. Your motives, methods, and actions shall at all times be above reproach and consistent with practices, procedures, and codes of conduct that your own profession generally recognizes as consistent with a high level of professional ethics.
15. It is not inconsistent with this Code for you to report, to the extent permitted by law, any known or potential ethics violation committed by another member of T/SWGFEX.
16. Upon implementation of this Code, as a new or existing member of T/SWGFEX, you will be asked to read this Code and submit to the Executive Committee your signed acknowledgement that you have read and understood this Code.

## Information and Resources

The materials from which the concepts embodied in this Code of Ethics have been drawn include:

- a. ASCLD/LAB Guiding Principles of Professional Responsibility for Crime Laboratories and Forensic Scientists. [http://www.asclclab.org/about\\_us/guidingprinciples.html](http://www.asclclab.org/about_us/guidingprinciples.html)
- b. ASCLD Guidelines for Forensic Laboratory Management Practices. <http://asclclab.org/files/library/labmgtguide.pdf>.
- c. ASCLD Code of Ethics. <http://asclclab.org/files/library/Code%20of%20Ethics.pdf>
- d. American Academy of Forensic Sciences Code of Ethics and Conduct. [www.aafs.org](http://www.aafs.org).
- e. The Code of Ethics of the California Association of Criminalistics. [www.cacnews.org](http://www.cacnews.org).
- f. The Code of Ethics of the Midwestern Association of Forensic Scientists, Incorporated. [www.mafs.net](http://www.mafs.net).
- g. Proposed Code of Ethics of the Northwest Association of Forensic Scientists. <http://www.nwafs.org/Documents/Code%20of%20Ethics.pdf>
- h. American Board of Criminalistics Rules of Professional Conduct. <http://www.criminalistics.com/ethics.cfm>

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## **Member Acknowledgement**

The Executive Board will publish and distribute a Code of Ethics Acknowledgment Form. All T/SWGFEX members will be required to acknowledge that they have read and understood this Code of Ethics and agree to abide by its provisions by completing and returning the Code of Ethics Acknowledgment Form to the Chair of the Membership Committee or such other person as designated by the Executive Board.

This Code of Ethics was passed by the membership of T/SWGFEX at a meeting held Phoenix, Arizona on Sunday, 08/18/2013.