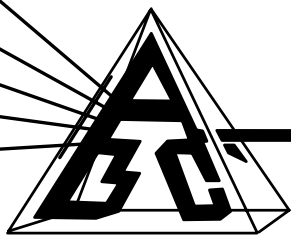


Official Publication  
of the American Board  
of Criminalistics

P.O. Box 1123  
Wausau, WI 54402-  
1123

Registrar e-mail:  
abcereg@dwave.net

Web Site:



# Certification News

Volume 10 Issue 1 Summer 2003

“Professional Competency Certification in Criminalistics”

## PRESIDENT’S MESSAGE

**The reason Criminalists are not routinely asked if they are certified is because the person asking the expert qualification questions does not know to ask the ‘Are You Certified?’ question. Previous ABC Newsletters have asked you to pass the information on to your fellow Criminalist but in this Newsletter is a section I would like you to pass on to the attorney calling you to testify.**

### **REMINDER**

When adding your certification accomplishment to your signature block, the ABC encourages you to use

**D- ABC for Diplomate**

**F-ABC for Fellow**

**S-ABC for Technical Specialist**

Let these marks of distinction bring you recognition for the effort you put into meeting the certification challenge.

### **Look for the ABC Booth at a Meeting Near You**

The ABC will have a more pronounced presence at professional gatherings.

The ABC booth, making its first appearance at the Atlanta AAFS meeting, will be prominently displayed at most of the regional and national meetings. Stop by, get free ABC signature items, and show your support for the ABC certification process.

## **American Board of Criminalistics Mission Statement**

To raise the level of competence in Forensic Science through peer based certification and promotion of professional development.

The American Board of Criminalistics is dedicated to the highest quality standards and programs for certification of scientists involved in the administration of justice.

# The ABC Membership Directory

It is anticipated that the next ABC Membership Director will be distributed on CD. One printed, paper copy will be available to members at no cost, by request from the registrar.

To keep the Directory current – notify the registrar if your information changes.

Although it is still under construction, the list of certified members will be part of the newly designed web site. If you would like to have your name, address or phone number excluded from the site, please contact the registrar.

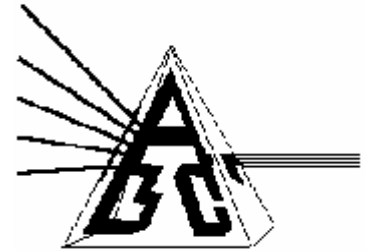
## ABC Web Site

The ABC web site at [www.criminalistics.com](http://www.criminalistics.com) is being improved and updated. Check out the changes and report your opinions back to the Board of Directors or the webmaster.

## ABC Shirt Order Form

White short sleeve  
Polo shirt  
W/ ABC logo  
100% cotton

\$27 plus \$3 shipping and handling  
No exchanges or refunds



**American Board  
of Criminalistics**

M	L	XL	Price	Total
			\$30.00 each	

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Mail this form with a check payable to  
the ABC to:

American Board of Criminalistics  
P.O. Box 1123  
Wausau, WI 54402-1123

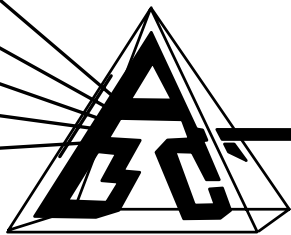
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Web Site:

# SPECIAL EDITION INSERT



# Certification

Volume 10 Issue 1 Summer 2003

# News

“Professional Competency Certification in Criminalistics”

## CERTIFICATION INFORMATION FOR ATTORNEYS

**One important question that should be asked of your witness:**  
Is your expert ABC Certified?

The American Board of Criminalists (ABC) is a non-profit corporation managed by representatives of professional organization of forensic scientists. Currently, the following regional and national organizations are member organizations of the ABC:

- California Association of Criminalists (CAC)
- Mid-Atlantic Association of Forensic Scientists (MAAFS)
- Midwestern Association of Forensic Scientists (MAFS)
- Northeastern Association of Forensic Scientists (MEAFS)
- Southern Association of Forensic Scientists (SAFS)
- American Academy of Forensic Sciences-Criminalistics Section (AAFS)
- American Society for Testing and Materials-Committee E-30 on Forensic Sciences (ASTM)
- American Society of Crime Laboratory Directors (ASCLD)

### Who does the ABC Certify?

The American Board of Criminalistics (ABC) Certification is a voluntary process designed and developed by practicing criminalists by which a practitioner is recognized as having attained the professional qualifications necessary to practice in one or more disciplines of Criminalistics.

The ABC's program for professional certification of criminalists is available to individuals currently engaged in the professional practice of Criminalistics. Individuals eligible for ABC Certification hold a professional position as a criminalist in a recognized forensic science laboratory or have a full-time professional consulting practice in criminalistics. Certified individuals have demonstrated a commitment to the field by such activities as publication, membership in professional organizations, undergraduate or graduate education, teaching, or other such activities recognized by the ABC.

### What types of Certification is Available through the ABC?

The American Board of Criminalistics offers a certificate of professional competency in Criminalistics, as well as further certification in the specialty disciplines of forensic biology (molecular), drug analysis, fire debris analysis and trace evidence examination.

### What are the levels of Certification?

**Diplomate** – A practicing Criminalist who has two years experience, completed the application process, passed the General Knowledge Examination (GKE), and who participates in professional development activities.

**Fellow** – A diplomate who has passed a Specialty Examination and who annually completes at least one proficiency test in that specialty.

**Technical Specialist** – A practicing Criminalist who has two years experience in a Specialty area, passed the Technical Specialty Exam in that specialty area, who annually completes at least one proficiency test in that specialty and who participates in professional development activities.

**Affiliate** – A “Certification eligible” individual who has completed all of the requirements to become a Diplomate, with the exception of the two-year full-time experience requirement. Affiliate status is temporary, with a five-year window of opportunity during which the participant must complete the two-year full-time experience requirement.

### **What is the GKE?**

The GKE set the standard for the knowledge, skills and abilities necessary to examine evidence within the context of an entire case. Criminalists are often the only scientist associated with an investigation, and must have sufficient knowledge and experience to make appropriate recommendations to investigators and attorneys. Although practitioners frequently only address limited questions, the work that they do may affect other questions asked or the work done by other practitioners.

The broad knowledge demonstrated by passing the GKE provides a solid foundation upon which practitioners develop specialized understand and skills. This is analogous to the approach taken with all science (i.e., B.S before PhD. Or physician before surgeon). This foundation of knowledge is needed for a thorough analysis of evidence because the examiner is aware of what other tests might be performed, their limitations or requirements, and how his/her action or inaction can affect the total forensic investigation. The forensic scientist can therefore maximize evidentiary value and avoid compromising or contaminating samples.

The ABC program supports the philosophy that forensic scientists must have this broad understanding of many aspects of forensic science.

### **How does certification help the judicial system?**

ABC certification can assist the trier of fact in evaluating an examiner’s qualifications certification demonstrates the individual’s achievement to a professional standard. The ABC Certified individual has successfully passed tests of the knowledge, skills, and abilities associated with the criminalistics profession developed by an independent agency. ABC certification demonstrates individual achievement of a professional standard regardless of the Accreditation achievements of the laboratory.

While certification alone does not guarantee individual competence, it does demonstrate an individual’s achievement of a level of professional competence that is recognized by their peers. The personal growth that comes from meeting this challenge demonstrates commitment to professional development in a substantive way.

We are all aware of organizations that – for a fee – provide a certificate that implies a special status or recognizes a level of education and experience. A legitimate certification program must go beyond a simple review of education and experience. It must challenge applicants to demonstrate a sufficient knowledge of the profession by defining the boundaries of this basic knowledge and developing fair tests to allow applicants to demonstrate this knowledge.

ABC certification fulfills the forensic science community’s obligation to:

- establish professional levels of knowledge, skills, and abilities;
- define a mechanism for achieving those levels;
- recognize those who have demonstrated attainment of those levels;
- provide guidelines for the development of educational curricula;
- demonstrate professional qualification to users such a lawyers, investigators, and citizens;
- promote growth within the profession.

## **PROGRAM DEVELOPMENT**

**How is the ABC qualified to issue certification in the field of Criminalistics?**

In the development of the General Knowledge Examination (GKE) and Specialty Examination, the American Board of Criminalistics has relied on input from virtually all professional organization involved in Criminalistics throughout the world. Representatives from CAC, NEAFS, MAAFS, MAFS, SAFS, AAFS, ASTM, ASCLD, and representatives of foreign organization helped build and continue to provide critical input into the ABC program. Experts in creating fair and effective tests have reviewed ABC examinations. The examinations continue to undergo modification and improvement.

The ABC program is based in a large part on work done by the California Association of Criminalists (CAC), which built this program on a foundation laid by the Criminalistics Certification Study Committee (CCSC). From 1975 to 1979, more than twenty-five individuals from all over the United States participated in the CCSC. When no certification program was implemented by the CCSC, the CAC developed its own certification examination, a precursor of the General Knowledge Exam. The ABC was incorporated in 1989 to respond to a need perceived by many Criminalists for a national certification program. Since incorporation, many Criminalists have served on the ABC Board and Examinations Committees, and almost two hundred forensic scientists have served on Peer Groups and Examination or Proficiency Committees. These individuals have been drawn from a cross section of working Criminalists, supervisors, and laboratory directors from government and private laboratories in the US, Canada, and the UK. Each participant brought his or her own view of certification to create the program now offered by the ABC.

### **What is the reasoning behind the structure of this program?**

The ABC Board of Directors is following a certification approach used by many professions such as the legal, medical, industrial hygiene, nursing and accounting professions. This approach to the certification process is based on four concepts:

- No single examination can be a total measure of an individual's ability to do the work; examinations measure knowledge and reasoning.
- A general understanding of the field is needed before specializing.
- Knowledge measured on an examination only reflects the individual's understanding at that point in time. Continuing professional education is necessary.
- Practical exercises, such as those provided by proficiency tests, help to measure a practitioner's ability to successfully apply knowledge.

## **ATTAINING CERTIFICATION**

### **What are the requirements for certification?**

Applicants must possess a minimum of an earned Baccalaureate degree in a natural science or an appropriately related field. Applicants must also have at least two years full-time experience in a forensic science laboratory and be employed in a professional capacity engaged in the examination of physical evidence, interpretation of data, and/or technical consultation for litigation purposes. In addition, all applicants must agree to abide by the ABC rules of professional conduct, and submit two references who can attest to the qualifications and integrity of the applicant. An applicant may qualify for Affiliate status prior to attaining the minimum two years of full-time experience.

## **MAINTAINING CERTIFICATION**

### **How long is certification valid?**

The Diplomate certificate expires five years from its date of issue. The Fellow certificate expires five years from the date of issue of the Diplomate certificate, or when proficiency tests are not successfully completed and submitted. The Technical Specialist certificate expires five years from its date of issue or when proficiency tests are not successfully completed and submitted. Diplomates, Fellows and Technical Specialists are encouraged to maintain certification by accumulating points earned through continuing education, publication, and participation in professional organizations. Fellows and Technical Specialists must successfully complete one external proficiency test in their specialty each calendar year. It is necessary to document one proficiency test within one year of (before or after) sitting for the specialty examination in order to attain Fellow status. It is necessary to document one proficiency test within one year before sitting for the Technical Specialist examination.

# Observations from the Registrar

## Recertification Forms

The ABC provides Recertification Forms ABC 600, 601 and 603 in the winter mailing, which is delivered by bulk mail normally in the month of January. In 2003 it was delivered in the month of February. Using bulk mailing saves about the ABC about \$2.50 per certificate holder, however, it is not without delivery problems. Each year we attempt to remove or lessen those issues that cause the winter mailing not to arrive at your destination on schedule. In any year, if you do not receive the recertification forms by the middle of February, please notify the Registrar.

Affiliates must file recertification paperwork just like the Diplomates and Technical Specialists. The reason is that the five year recertification period starts for Affiliates the July after they pass the GKE. Because Affiliates have three years in which to start their full-time experience if they wait until the end of the three year grace period they have only two years in which to acquire their 50 recertification points. The reason they also pay the maintenance fees is because like certificates holders it costs the ABC to track their status and provide them with our mailings.

Having our certificate holders provide the ABC with an original and two copies of the recertification paperwork to the Registrar has resulted in a great savings of time and resources. A great big **THANK YOU** goes to our certificate holders for doing such an outstanding job of complying with this request.

## Recertification

In 2003 nearly a third of our certificate holders came up for recertification in January or July. Of those 220 individuals, approximately 180 will recertify. Reasons for not recertifying are left the field, retired, the ABC lost contact with them, or they have not been filing recertification paperwork and/or paying maintenance fees. For those individuals in good standing who notify the ABC they are no longer maintaining their certification, we provide the summer, winter and special mailings, as long as we have a current address. Those that are less concerned with their status, we no longer provide any services. Former certificate holders are asked to refrain from using the ABC certification in their credentials.

Once a mailing comes back to the ABC because of an address failure, we stop sending mailings to that individual. Although a small portion of the certificate holders do not have current addresses with the ABC, we continually search for them. We find it curious that certificate holders would not provide the ABC with their current address. At first we thought it had to do with address changes being sent to the AAFS instead, but the AAFS has been very good about forwarding information that was sent to them in error to the ABC.

## Biochemistry Specialty Examination

The ABC has decided to sunset this module of the Forensic Biology Specialty Examination. It has been five years since anyone has sat for this module and the number of Biochemistry Fellows has dwindled from a high of twenty-two down to ten. The ABC will still support the current Biochemistry Fellows as long as proficiency testing is available in this area. However, due to the lack of interest, the written examination will no longer be available after December 31, 2005. Anyone still considering sitting for this examination must do so by that date.

## Proficiency Testing Form ABC701

For the last couple of years the ABC has been requiring Fellows and Technical Specialists to submit **ABC Form 701** to verify successful participation in a proficiency test. It is important that a separate ABC Form 701 be submitted for each Fellow certificate or Technical Specialist certificate held. It is greatly appreciated that each Fellow and Technical specialist has submitted a copy of ABC Form 701 also.

Several individuals have provided additional proficiency testing paperwork with their ABC Form 701's. This information is neither required nor requested. Later in the calendar year the ABC will review the submitted ABC Form 701's and select on a random basis about 20% for a more in depth review. At that time the ABC will determine what additional information and paperwork we require. Any information sent before this request is simply a waste of your time and a storage problem for the ABC.

## ABC BOARD OF DIRECTORS

<b>President</b>	<i>Jennifer Mihalovich</i> - CAC Oakland Police Department Crime Lab 510/238-3386 jsmihalovich@oaklandnet.com
<b>Vice President</b>	<i>Gregory B. Matheson</i> - CAC At Large Los Angeles Police Dept. Crime Laboratory 213/847-0043 GBM1@aol.com
<b>Secretary</b>	<i>Lynn Henson</i> - SAFS At Large US Army Criminal Investigation Lab 404/469-7265 hensonl@usacil-acirs.army.mil
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<b>Members:</b>	<i>Susan Blankenship</i> - MAAFS Hagerstown Police Department 301/739-8577 ext. 231 susanb@hagerstownpd.org  <i>John Ballantyne</i> - AAFS, Criminalistics Section University of Central Florida 407/823-0163 jballant@pegasus.cc.ucf.edu  <i>David Petersen</i> – ASCLD Minnesota BCA Laboratory 651/642-0700 David.B.Petersen@state.mn.us  <i>Lawrence Presley</i> - ASTM E-30 National Medical services 215/657-4900 lawrence.presley@nmslab.com  <i>Michael Healy</i> - SAFS Manatee County Crime Laboratory 941/747-3011 x2280 mike.healy@co.manatee.fl.us  <i>Bharat Lakhkar</i> - NEAFS Westchester County Forensic Lab 914/231-1630 Bnl@westchestergov.com
<b>At Large</b>	<i>Linda Jankowski</i> - MAAFS At-Large New Jersey State Police

**Public:** *Victor Weedn*  
Carnegie Mellon University  
414/268-6250 [vweedn@andrew.cmu.edu](mailto:vweedn@andrew.cmu.edu)

**Counsel** *Thomas Kubic*  
516/261-2117

### Examinations Committee (Standing)

**Chair** *Peter Barnett* - CAC  
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**Vice Chair** *Mary Rhodes Holt* - SAFS  
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205/933-6621 adfsbh@mindspring.com

**Secretary** *Albert Lyter* - MAAFS  
Federal Forensic Associates  
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**Members** *Reta Newman* - AAFS Criminalistics Section  
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**Certification News** is the official publication of the American Board of  
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Address questions or comments to:

Greg Matheson, editor  
c/o Los Angeles Police Department Criminalistics Laboratory  
555 Ramirez St. Sp 270 Los Angeles, CA 90012  
Phone 213.847.0043

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555 Ramirez St. Sp 270 Los Angeles, CA 90012 — Phone 213.847.0043 — FAX 213.847.0040 e-mail: GBM1@aol.com

## ABC Committees

### Credentials (Standing)

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Bharat Lakhkar  
Dan Bergman  
Greg Matheson

### Proficiency Administration Committee (Standing)

Del Price  
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William Wilson III

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### Certificates (Special)

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### Continuing Education (Special)

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Mary Holt  
Registrar  
Various – Board of  
Directors, Examination  
Committee

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Carol Hunter  
Sue Ballou

# ABC CALENDAR

PLEASE POST ON YOUR LABORATORY BULLETIN BOARD

<b>Date/Deadline</b>	<b>Event</b>	<b>For More Information, Contact:</b>
October 2003 Deadline August, 2003	All ABC Exams, CAC Meeting San Diego, California	Greg Matheson 213/847-0043
October 18-24, 2003 Deadline August 18, 2003	All ABC Exams, MAFS Meeting Hyatt Regency Hotel, Columbus, Ohio	Dave Green 440/350-2183
November 2003 Deadline September 2003	All ABC Exams, NEAFS Meeting Pittsfield, Massachusetts	Bharat Lakhkar 914/231-1630
February 18, 2004 – tentative Deadline December 18, 2003	All ABC Exams, AAFS Meeting Dallas, Texas	Jennifer Mihalovich 510/238-3386
May, 2004 Deadline March, 2004	All ABC Exams, CAC Meeting San Mateo County, California	Jennifer Mihalovich 510/238-3386
Spring, 2004	All ABC Exams, SAFS Meeting New Iberia, Louisiana	Mike Healy 941/747-3011
Fall, 2004	All ABC Exams, SAFS Meeting Orlando, Florida	Mike Healy 941/747-3011
October 2004 Deadline August, 2004	All ABC Exams, CAC Meeting Ventura, California	Greg Matheson 213/847-0043

Plan ahead and prepare yourself for one of the offerings listed above, or.....

## **The ABC will proctor a test at your lab!**

Are your colleagues having a hard time getting to a test offering?

Make life easier and encourage your colleagues by bringing the test to them.

All you need is for five or more people to register and the ABC will cover the expenses of getting an ABC test administrator to your site. Even if there are only 1 to 4 people, the ABC will absorb half the cost.

Contact the ABC registrar, Mike Haas, at 715.845.3684 to get the ball rolling.

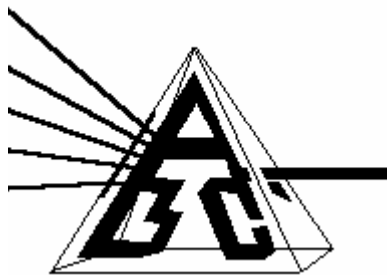
**To arrange to sit for an examination, you must contact the Registrar by letter or fax (715-845-4156) by the deadline listed.**

**Local contacts are provided for conference information only.**

**To arrange for ABC Exams to be administered in your laboratory, contact your regional representative.**

## **THE ABC LOGO**

—  
An  
Historical  
Perspective



As the ABC was forming, Jo Ann Becker designed the ABC Logo. The five rays entering the prism represent the original five members of the ABC; CAC, MAAFS, SAFS, NEAFS, and MAFS. The founding Associations came together to form a unified certification program for the whole profession.

Since that date the membership has grown, but the logo continues to represent the roots of the ABC.