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**Best Practice Recommendation for Photographic  
Documentation of Footwear and Tire Impression  
Evidence**

DRAFT



## Best Practice Recommendation for Photographic Documentation of Footwear and Tire Impression Evidence

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## Foreword

This document originated from the Footwear and Tire Subcommittee of the Organization of Scientific Area Committees (OSAC). This document is a revision of the SWGTREAD Guide for the Forensic Documentation and Photography of Footwear and Tire Impression Evidence at the Crime Scene.

All hyperlinks and links are valid and operational at the time of publication of this document.

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**Keywords:** *Footwear; tire impressions; photography; documentation.*

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# Best Practice Recommendation for Photographic Documentation of Footwear and Tire Impression Evidence

## 1 Scope

This document provides the best practice recommendations for personnel responsible for documenting and photographing footwear and tire impressions for future examinations. Deviations from this document may/may not preclude examination of captured images. The procedures included in this document may not cover all aspects of footwear and tire photography. This document is not intended as a substitute for training in the documentation and photography of footwear and tire track evidence.

## 2 Normative References

There are no normative reference documents, Annex B, Bibliography, contains informative references.

## 3 Terms and Definitions

Please refer to terms and definition included in ASB Technical Report 097, *Terminology Used for Forensic Footwear and Tire Evidence*, First Edition 2019<sup>1</sup>.

## 4 Recommendations

### 4.1 Equipment and Materials

Equipment and materials recommended to document and photograph footwear and tire impressions are listed as following.

- a) A digital camera with interchangeable lens and with the following features:
  1. 12 megapixel (approximately 23 mm × 15 mm) sensor (see Annex A);
  2. manual focus capability;
  3. off camera flash capability;
  4. a fixed normal focal length lens (50 mm to 60mm), or a zoom lens appropriately set to the normal focal length;
  5. built in timer, shutter release cable cord, or other remote control.
- b) flash or other evenly distributed white light source. Flashlight illumination is not recommended;
- c) tripod/quadrupod capable of various angles and positions;
- d) angle finder;
- e) golf ball marker or similar object to indicate direction of light/flash;

- f) compass;
- g) objects/material (e.g., dark cloth or umbrella) to block sun or bright ambient light;
- h) rigid tape measure, of sufficient length to cover the length of the tire impression, with mm and/or  $\frac{1}{8}$  in. gradations;
- i) thin rigid "L" shaped mm scale for footwear and straight flat scale for tire impressions;
- j) level;
- k) evidence markers bearing numbers or letters;
- l) labels to indicate evidence marker number, case number, and an arrow pointing north. etc.;
- m) video recording equipment, although adequate for providing documentation of the scene and evidence, is not adequate for examination quality photographs.

#### **4.2 Documentation and Photography of Footwear Impressions at the Scene**

The following procedures are recommended, as appropriate, for documenting and photographing footwear impressions. The order of the following steps may vary.

While photography should be the initial method for documenting footwear and tire impressions, it is not a substitute for casting or lifting of footwear and tire impressions. Photography complements other recovery processes to capture the most information from an impression.

- a) Capture overall images of the crime scene in-situ before moving evidence or including any photographic evidence markers.
- b) Evaluate the overall scene and available information to determine locations of footwear impressions to be photographed.
- c) Include the case number, date, time, location of scene, conditions at scene and scene responders in the field notes.
- d) A sketch of the scene and the footwear impressions within may also be required on a case by case basis, especially when reconstructing the paths and movement of persons leaving the impressions.
- e) Place evidence markers next to the impressions.
- f) Capture overall, medium range and close-up images of the footwear impressions as follows.
  - 1) Overall images should be captured from at least four different angles around the perimeter of the scene.
  - 2) Medium range images should show relationships among fixed items in the scene and other impressions or evidence. To show the spatial distance between two items, images should be captured perpendicular and mid-point to a straight line that connects the items of interest.

- 3) Close-up images should be captured to associate an impression with the evidence marker.
- g) Capture examination quality images of the footwear impressions as follows.
  - 1) Set the camera to capture images in a lossless format (e.g., TIFF or RAW).
  - 2) Set the camera to a low ISO (100-400).
  - 3) Position camera on tripod or quadrapod with focal plane parallel to the impression plane. This will require the use of an angle finder.
  - 4) Place "L-shaped" scale next to and along the length of the impression at the same plane as the bottom of the impression ensuring that no part of the scale is on top of the actual impression.
  - 5) Include a label in each photograph (e.g., impression number, case number, date, photographer's identifier and an arrow pointing north).
  - 6) If a zoom lens is used, set the focal length as close as possible to a normal lens to prevent barrel distortion and adjust the tripod height until the viewing frame is filled.
  - 7) Fill the camera frame with the impression and scale. Impressions should be captured at a minimum resolution of 300 ppi.
  - 8) Set the camera f-stop to an appropriate setting to ensure sufficient depth of field to capture the entire impression in focus.
  - 9) Manually focus on the mid-plane of the impression (autofocus should not be used).
  - 10) Capture at least one image without oblique lighting.
  - 11) Use an object/material to block bright sun or ambient light from striking the impression.
  - 12) Photograph the impression with the light source held at an angle. The use of angled light is intended to produce shadowing to create contrast in the impression. A deeper impression will require a higher angle of light and a shallower impression will require a lower angle (oblique lighting).
  - 13) Hold the light source at approximately 4 ft to 5 ft away and direct it at the impression.
  - 14) Capture images with the light source being held at the appropriate angle from at least three different positions around the impression (i.e., toe to heel, side to side, diagonally across the impression).
  - 15) Use highlighting sprays, aerosol wax or aerosol paint for impressions in snow when contrast needs improvement and re-photograph the impression.

#### **4.3 Documentation and Photography of Tire Impressions at the Scene**

The following procedures are recommended, as appropriate, for documenting and photographing tire impressions. The order of the following steps may vary.

- a) Capture overall images of the crime scene in-situ before moving evidence or including any photographic evidence markers.
- b) Evaluate the overall scene and available information to determine locations of tire impressions to be photographed.
- c) Include a label in each image (e.g., impression number, case number, date, photographer's identifier, an arrow pointing north, etc.).
- d) A sketch of the scene and the tire impressions within may also be required on a case by case basis, especially when reconstructing the direction and movement of vehicles leaving the impressions.
- e) Place evidence markers next to the impressions.
- f) Capture overall, medium range and close-up images of the tire impressions as follows.
  - 1) Overall images should be from at least four different angles around the perimeter of the scene.
  - 2) Medium range images should show relationships among fixed items in the scene and other impressions or evidence. To show the spatial distance between two items, photographs should be captured perpendicular and mid-point to a straight line that connects the items of interest.
  - 3) Close-up images should be captured to associate an impression with the evidence marker.
  - 4) Capture examination quality images of the footwear impressions as follows:
    - i. set the camera to capture images in a lossless format (e.g., TIFF or RAW);
    - ii. set the camera to a low ISO (100-400).
  - 5) For long sections of tire impressions to be captured, a tape measure should be utilized to indicate the section being photographed. Once placed down this tape measure should not be moved until the entire series of images are captured. These images can be stitched together using software.

Where practical, photograph the entire length of the tire impression. To allow for a proper comparison, at a minimum, a representation of the entire circumference of the tire should be photographed.
  - 6) Position the camera on a tripod or quadrapod with the focal plane parallel to the impression plane. This will require the use of an angle finder. Tire impressions are usually wide and may require the tripod to be adjusted so it is over the impression.
  - 7) Place the scale next to and along the length of the impression at the same plane as the bottom of the impression ensuring that no part of the scale is on top of the actual impression.

- 8) Include a label in each photograph (e.g., impression number, case number, date, photographer's identifier, an arrow pointing north).
- 9) Fill the camera frame with impression, tape measure, and scale.
- 10) Impressions should be captured at a minimum resolution of 300 ppi.
- 11) If a zoom lens is used, set the focal length as close as possible to a normal lens to prevent barrel distortion and adjust the tripod height until the frame is filled.
- 12) Set the camera f-stop to an appropriate setting to ensure sufficient depth of field to capture the entire impression in focus.
- 13) Manually focus on the mid-plane of the impression (autofocus should not be used).
- 14) Use an object/material to block sun or bright ambient light from striking the impression.
- 15) Photograph the impression using a flash held at an angle. The use of angled light is intended to produce shadowing to create contrast in the impression. A deeper impression requires a higher angle of light and a shallower impression will require a lower angle (oblique lighting).
- 16) Hold the light source at approximately 4 ft to 5 ft away and direct it at the impression.
- 17) Capture images with the light source held at the appropriate angle from at least three different positions around the impression (i.e., parallel to the long axis of the impression, perpendicular to the long axis of the impression, diagonally across the impression).
- 18) For a long tire impression capture a series of overlapping images. Each image should capture approximately 14 in. of the impression and overlap by at least 1 in. Include the scale and the tape measure indicating the section of the tire impression.
- 19) Use highlighting sprays, aerosol wax or aerosol paint for impressions in snow when contrast needs improvement and re-photograph the impression.

#### **4.4 Photography of Footwear and Tire Evidence in the Laboratory**

The following procedures are recommended, as appropriate, for documenting and photographing footwear and tire evidence. The order of the following steps may vary.

- a) Take documentation images of the footwear and tire evidence including, but not limited to: overall images of evidence, footwear uppers, labels, tire sidewall, overall tire tread, trace evidence, and condition of the evidence upon receipt.
- b) Take examination quality images of the footwear and tire evidence as follows.
  - 1) Set the camera to capture images in a lossless format (e.g., TIFF or RAW).
  - 2) Set the camera to a low ISO (100-400).

- 3) Set up the camera with the focal plane parallel to the impression, outsole, or tread (i.e., use a copy stand, tripod, quadrapod).
- 4) Include a label in each image (e.g., impression number, case number, date, photographer's identifier, etc.).
- 5) If a zoom lens is used, set the focal length as close as possible to a normal lens to prevent barrel distortion and adjust the height until the frame is filled.
- 6) Fill the camera frame with the impression, outsole, or tread and scale.
- 7) Impressions should be captured at a minimum resolution of 300 ppi. For capturing detail, a smaller region of interest within the impression or known footwear/tire should fill the frame in order to optimize resolution in these areas (e.g., Schallamach pattern).
- 8) Place the scale on the same plane as the impression, outsole, or tread.
- 9) Photograph electrostatic and black gelatin lifts in a dark room using oblique, or other appropriate lighting to enhance contrast. If necessary tape electrostatic lifts flat to eliminate undesirable reflections.
- 10) Scanners can be used as a substitute method for capturing images of impressions on lifts. Scans should be captured in a lossless format (e.g., TIFF) and minimum 600 ppi resolution.
- 11) If necessary, other lifts such as adhesive lifts can be photographed using ambient, overhead, or other appropriate lighting to enhance contrast.

## Annex A (informative)

### Image Resolution Calculations

The following instructions represent the steps to calculate the final resolution of an image given the camera used to capture the image.

#### **Assumptions:**

1. Pinhole camera
2. Set focal length to the 35 mm equivalent (approximately 50 mm for a full frame sensor)
3. No dead space between pixels
4. Variables as defined as in Figure 1 (sketch)
5. Field of view of on the order of 14 in. (length) = 355.6 mm

#### **What you need:**

1. Camera sensor size
2. Camera pixel pitch

**Step 1:** Calculate  $h$  (distance between camera and impression)

$$\tan \theta = \frac{x}{f} = \frac{w}{h} \therefore h = \frac{w \cdot f}{x}$$

**Step 2:** Calculate  $t$  (projection of pixel size onto plane of impression)

$$\tan \theta = \frac{y}{f} = \frac{t}{h} \therefore t = \frac{y \cdot h}{f}$$

**Step 3:** Calculate  $PPI$  (pixels per in.)

$$PPI = \frac{1}{t}$$

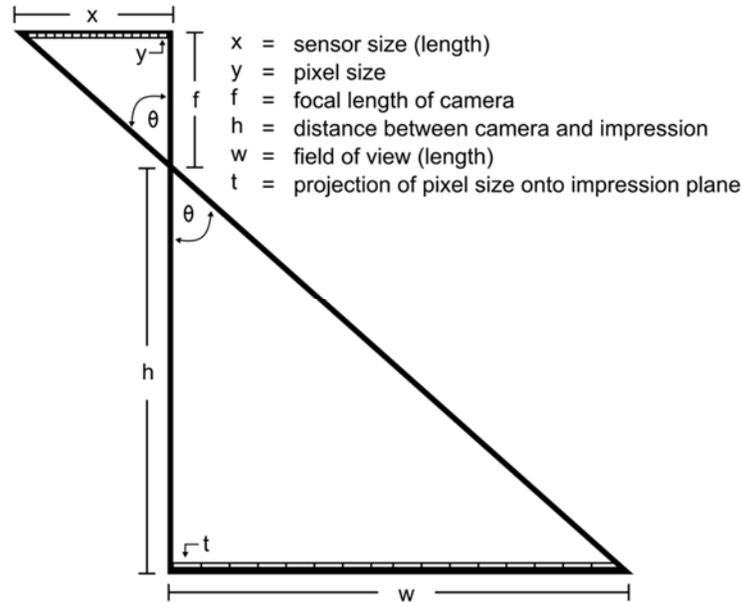


Figure 1—Definition of Variables Assuming a “Pinhole” Camera

### Example 1 - Nikon D300

— 12 megapixels, sensor size = 23.6 mm × 15.8 mm, pixel pitch = 0.005511 mm (5.51 μm),  
w:h = 3:2, 4288 × 2848, assume 35 mm focal length.

#### Step 1:

$$h = \frac{w \cdot f}{x} = \frac{35.6 \text{ mm} \cdot 35 \text{ mm}}{23.6 \text{ mm}} = 527.4 \text{ mm}$$

#### Step 2:

$$t = \frac{y \cdot h}{f} = \frac{0.005511 \text{ mm} \cdot 527.4 \text{ mm}}{35 \text{ mm}} = 0.08302 \text{ mm}$$

$$0.08302 \text{ mm} \times \frac{1 \text{ in}}{25.4 \text{ mm}} = 0.003269 \text{ in}$$

#### Step 3:

$$PPI = \frac{1}{t} \cong 306 PPI$$

**Example 2 - Nikon D3X**

- 24.5 megapixels, sensor size = 35.9 mm × 24.0 mm, pixel pitch = 0.00592 mm (5.92 μm), 6048 × 4032, assume 50 mm focal length.

**Step 1:**

$$h = \frac{w \cdot f}{x} = \frac{35.6 \text{ mm} \cdot 50 \text{ mm}}{35.9 \text{ mm}} = 495.3 \text{ mm}$$

**Step 2:**

$$t = \frac{y \cdot h}{f} = \frac{0.00592 \text{ mm} \cdot 495.3 \text{ mm}}{50 \text{ mm}} = 0.05864 \text{ mm}$$

$$0.05864 \text{ mm} \times \frac{1 \text{ in.}}{25.4 \text{ mm}} = 0.002309 \text{ in.}$$

**Step 3:**

$$PPI = \frac{1}{t} \cong 434PPI$$

## **Annex B** **(informative)**

### **Bibliography**

This is not meant to be an all-inclusive list as the group recognizes other publications on this subject may exist. At the time this document was drafted, these were the publications available for reference. Additionally, any mention of a particular software tool or vendor as part of this bibliography is purely incidental, and any inclusion does not imply endorsement.

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<sup>2</sup> <https://www.theiai.org>

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