



Scientific Working Group on Digital Evidence

SWGDE Mobile Device Photography for Comparative Analysis Position Paper

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1. Purpose

The purpose of this document is to define the SWGDE position on the use of mobile device cameras to take images of items, where that image will be subjected to comparative analysis (e.g., latent prints). This document is specific to images captured by investigative organizations.

2. SWGDE Position

Although there have been advances in the quality of images captured by mobile device cameras, all are not of the same quality. Further, these mobile devices typically do not have the capability of traditional single-lens reflex (SLR) cameras used in advanced photography, such as external removable flashes, interchangeable lenses, uncompressed or lossless file format options, etc.

SWGDE recognizes there are instances where it may be necessary, in rare circumstances, to capture images on a mobile device camera and these images may still have limited acceptable uses. Examples of these circumstances include fleeting, or transient, evidence, or real-time investigative need due to an imminent public safety issue.

If these circumstances exist, the best method available to document or preserve this evidence must be used. In these circumstances, if the only method is a camera on a mobile device, then it should be used and the following conditions should be met:

- Any image taken should conform to all organizational requirements/best practices [1], [2].
- The camera should be set to the highest quality setting without any filters applied.
- The image should be moved to the organization's storage as soon as possible and in the original format.
- The image quality (resolution, size, etc.) should not be reduced when transferring it from the mobile device. Files transferred via email, text, or vendor application have a potential to degrade the image resolution and should be avoided, or tested to confirm there is no degradation prior to the transfer.
- The metadata for the image should not be altered or deleted. How the image is transferred and/or where the image is stored may impact the metadata. Testing should be done to confirm that there is not an impact to the metadata. If an impact is identified, documentation should be created to record the metadata for the image.
- Notes should be made in the case record to reflect that it was taken on a mobile device and the circumstances that required its use.

3. References

- [1] Scientific Working Group on Digital Evidence, "SWGDE Photographic Equipment and Infrastructure Recommendations,". [Online]. <https://www.swgde.org/documents>
- [2] Scientific Working Group on Digital Evidence, "SWGDE Digital Image Compression and File Formats Guidelines,". [Online]. <https://www.swgde.org/documents>



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History

Revision	Issue Date	Section	History
1.0 DRAFT	2017-06-22	All	Initial draft created and SWGDE voted to release as a Draft for Public Comment.
1.0 DRAFT	2017-07-11	All	Formatting and technical edit performed for release as a Draft for Public Comment.
1.0	2017-08-24	All	SWGDE voted to publish as an Approved document (Version 1.0).
1.0	2017-09-25		Formatted and published as Approved Version 1.0.