



COMMONWEALTH of VIRGINIA

DEPARTMENT OF FORENSIC SCIENCE

OFFICE OF THE DIRECTOR
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To: Members of the Criminal Defense Bar
From: Linda C. Jackson, Director *Linda Jackson*
Date: May 5, 2026
RE: Comparison Examinations Performed in the Western Laboratory

The Department of Forensic Science recently notified law enforcement agencies and Commonwealth's Attorneys' Offices about an ongoing corrective action involving firearms comparison cases worked in the Western Laboratory. While we understand that the Commonwealth's Attorneys have been notifying potentially affected individuals—either directly or through their attorneys—DFS would also like to ensure that members of the defense bar receive the relevant information.

The corrective action began in February 2024 after a firearms comparison examiner in the Western Laboratory did not successfully complete an external proficiency test. That examiner and the verifier—also a Western Laboratory firearms comparison examiner—were removed from casework and placed on remediation plans. The examiner who did not successfully complete the proficiency test retired from DFS during the remediation process.

DFS initiated a review of both examiners' casework following the unsuccessful proficiency test. The process began with internal case file reviews. Some cases were reexamined by other DFS firearms comparison examiners at the request of customers. In April 2025, DFS contracted with Ron Smith & Associates to perform reexaminations on selected cases and halted firearms comparisons in its Western Laboratory. Based on additional issues identified during these reviews and the resulting corrective actions, the examiner who verified the proficiency test was decertified as a firearms comparison examiner in January 2026.

While the initial root cause identified for the corrective action was contextual bias, further investigation expanded the root cause to include a drift in both examiners' criteria for determining the sufficiency of marks for source identification. Throughout the corrective action process, the Department has kept its oversight bodies, the Forensic Science Board and the Scientific Advisory Committee (SAC), fully informed. The SAC's Firearms & Toolmarks Subcommittee received a detailed briefing at its most recent meeting, and the related [materials](#) are available on the Department's website.

DFS [notified](#) all customers on June 12, 2025, that it had removed firearms and toolmark comparison analysis and other associated components from the Western Laboratory's scope of accreditation. DFS has provided case lists to the Commonwealth's Attorneys and law enforcement agencies that include 2,610 potentially affected firearms comparison cases. For context, "comparison cases" include the comparison of bullets and/or cartridge cases to one another or to test fires from known firearms. DFS does not believe that other types of cases worked by these examiners (such as NIBIN entries, functionality testing, distance determination, or serial number restoration) are affected.

DFS will continue working with the contractor to review selected cases and expects to receive additional requests for reexaminations. The Department is prioritizing these requests as resources allow. For more information, please contact amy.jenkins@dfs.virginia.gov.