

ISFG Pre-congress workshop

Activity Level Evaluative Reporting

(Current: Bayesian Networks & Activity Level Reporting)

Tuesday September 10th 2024

WS Description:

“In your opinion, is DNA of the defendant more likely to have been recovered due to direct or indirect transfer?”

Due to the tremendous progress in forensic genetics, with ever more sensitive and specific methods finding their way to forensic casework, there is an increasing demand on the forensic biologist to address these types of questions. Be it on the stand, or when consulted by defense counsel or prosecution, scientists are expected to provide an opinion on matters of (indirect) transfer and persistence of biological traces. With this line of questioning, there is a risk that the scientist is commenting on aspects outside their area of expertise. It is therefore crucial that forensic biologists are properly prepared to provide opinions on these matters that adhere to the principles of logic and to the three principles of interpretation of forensic findings.

This workshop will provide an introduction to activity level evaluative reporting for court reporting scientists. The workshop hosts have extensive experience with reporting and testimony given activity level propositions. They will share these experiences throughout the workshop. With an actual case as the basis for the workshop, participants will be able to work progressively through the evaluative process. Topics that will be covered include:

- Case intake
- Structuring case information
- Statistical modelling (including an introduction to the use of Bayesian Networks)
- Data on DNA transfer, persistence, prevalence, and recovery (TPPR)
- Assigning probabilities
- Calculating Likelihood Ratios and testing for robustness of the LR
- Reporting standards and court testimony

Through a mix of theory and group exercises, the participants will gain theoretical knowledge on the concepts involved in Activity Level Evaluative Reporting. Further, some practical experience will be developed with:

- Formulating propositions at the activity level
- Distinguishing between task-relevant and irrelevant case information
- Probability assignment

Some relevant literature sources and case details will be provided to the participants ahead of the workshop.