

The IAI's Footwear Certification program will soon be celebrating its 25th year of existence as a forensic certifying body. Since its inception in 1998, the Footwear Certification program (along with the discipline as a whole) has seen tremendous growth from its early days. The initial concept of developing a Footwear Certification program within the IAI relied heavily on the imagination and determination of the 1995 Science and Practice (S&P) Committee then led by Chair John Neuner. An ambitious Neuner, supported by S&P Committee member Vici Inlow, made a formal proposal to IAI President Danny Hastings, who authorized the creation of a Footwear and Tire Track Certification Study Group. This study group was led by IAI member Alex Mankevich who provided a report to the Board of Directors in 1996 indicating that a certification program would be a worthy venture and "offer a valuable service and potential benefit to the criminal justice system and the public." As a result, the first Footwear Certification Board was established in 1997 with the appointments of Sandra Wiersema as Chair and William Jungbluth as Secretary. Within the first ten years of testing, this ambitious group was able to attain 84 applicants for certification and issue 75 active certifications while attracting the attention of applicants from countries such as Finland, Belgium, Canada, Sweden, Australia, and Korea. Over the years, the certification program has serviced hundreds of local and international applicants while maintaining an active certification roster of nearly 100 individuals annually. The Footwear Certification Board aims to support quality forensic footwear examination through the certification system, to continue the legacy set out by the founders of our program.

The footwear certification program was initially designed to test those individuals actively engaged in comparing footwear impression evidence in a laboratory-type setting. The examination was not designed to test those individuals whose primary job responsibility was the detection and collection aspects of the process. To qualify for test participation, individuals must meet specific criteria as listed in the Certification Program Operations Manual found on the IAI website. Years of experience as a footwear examiner, combined with formal education and documented training, will be the primary focus when determining an individual's eligibility for participating in the examination process. Additional information on these requirements can be found within the Operations Manual, specifically, Section 8.9 entitled *Prerequisites and Requirements for Certification/Recertification*.

The first portion of the footwear examination test consists of a written exam containing 100 questions in which a score of 80% or greater is required for successful completion. This test is currently under revision, with an anticipated date of new test implementation on May 31, 2022. The newly written examination will include traditional material from previously required readings in addition to new material taken from the text entitled *Forensic Footwear Evidence: Detection, Recovery and Examination*, Second Edition by William J. Bodziak (2017).

Upon completing the written examination, applicants are then mailed three practical examinations that are to be completed as casework (with special instructions for testing purposes) within 60 days of receiving the material. Correct conclusions with supporting documentation must be submitted to successfully complete this part of the examination. Upon successful completion of all aspects of the footwear certification requirements, an applicant is considered certified for a period of five years (barring any certification revocations or censures). To ensure an applicant continues to operate at a level consistent with initial IAI certification performance, applicants must participate in the recertification process every five years. It is incumbent upon the applicant to maintain the skill, acquire the required continuing education (hours/credits), and submit the necessary paperwork within the allotted time frame to maintain their certification status. The footwear recertification process consists of one practical examination, like that required during initial certification, to be completed within a 30-day time frame with a correct conclusion and supporting documentation.

The applicant must maintain up-to-date contact information in the eCert program to receive notifications at crucial intervals before certification expiration. Failure to update this information, and the resultant lack of notifications, is one of the primary reasons certifications are lost/forfeited on an annual basis. Please note that the IAI directory and eCert contact information do not interface, so updates will need to be made in both areas.

To facilitate the footwear certification program, a certification board of current IAI members in good standing, and holding a footwear certification, was established at the program's onset. This board has grown and evolved over the years and currently consists of one Chair (myself) who serves a four-year term and is responsible for the program's overall operation. In addition to the Chair, the Board also consists of one Secretary position (currently being filled by Diane Shafter), who ensures the day-to-day operations of the testing program are met; along with five other Board Member positions (presently filled by Jon Byrd, Sarah Bohne, Troy Mohror, Lisa O'Daniel, and Tanya Hiner) each with staggering three-year terms. Together, this board is responsible for the integrity and execution of the Footwear Certification Program.

Due to the hands-on nature of our practical test design, along with the added stress of test materials being mailed to and from applicants, there is a constant need for new test materials to be generated. Footwear Certification Board Members have been responsible for the continuous review of existing test material to ensure they are up to standards and the creation and validation of new practical examinations in support of the certification process. The success of the certification program relies heavily on the participation and commitment of its Board Members and Secretary. Any certified footwear examiner interested in ensuring this program's success by serving as a Certification Board Member should reach out to me or the Footwear Certification Board Secretary at fwcbsecretary@gmail.com with any questions, concerns, or simple letter of interest.

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