



Medical Forensic Exam Pubic Hair Plucking Policy[†]

The controversial practice of plucking pubic hair “standards” from victims of sexual assault has, over the past three decades, polarized authoritative experts into two opposing camps. Some crime lab scientists insist they need the entire hair, including the bulb, to attest to its length. Most victim advocates view plucking as the unnecessary re-victimization of already traumatized survivors. The American Society for Testing and Materials (ASTM), Criminalistics subcommittee of its Forensic Science Committee, has struggled with this issue for ten years now, and still has not been able to agree on a standard for publication.

Kris Karcher, the Chief Deputy Medical Examiner from Coos County and a trained nurse examiner participated in a survey of crime labs of every state and Canadian province, including national labs. Sponsored by the Forensic Science program of the Beth-El College of Nursing in Colorado Springs, the purpose of the survey was to ascertain their policies regarding the need for such hair standards. The variability between, and even within, jurisdictions was most impressive. While many “preferred” plucked hairs, only three “needed” them, and only one state (Alabama) had a policy forbidding the plucking of hairs from victims.

In light of the above and the recent ascendance of DNA evidence, the changing fashions of pubic hair shaving and dyeing, and the availability of the victim later for obtaining hair standards in the rare case in which they might be requested. The Attorney General’s Sexual Assault Task Force met with the Oregon Forensic Lab to develop a policy on plucking:

CONSIDER PLUCKING PUBIC HAIRS WHEN ONE OR MORE OF THE FOLLOWING SITUATIONS ARE PRESENT:

- Stranger or unknown assailant or multiple assailants
- Pubic hair is collected in the pubic combing
- Assailant is an acquaintance that has not previously been in the environment where the assault(s) occurred

Therefore Sexual Assault Nurse Examiners will *not* pluck pubic hair, *unless* there is a valid situational reason to do so or if specifically requested to do so by the Forensic Lab.

[†] Please contact the Attorney General’s Sexual Assault Task Force for permission to reproduce this document in full or in part:
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