

# **Scientific Working Group for Forensic Toxicology (SWGTOX) Standard for Developing a Guide and Code of Professional Conduct in Forensic Toxicology**

## **1. Introduction**

This document is intended for use by authoritative bodies including, but not limited to, laboratories, professional membership societies, accreditation and credentialing bodies who work in the discipline of Forensic Toxicology. The document provides elements of professional conduct for both individuals and laboratories that are recommended for inclusion in a Code of Professional Conduct.

## **2. Definitions**

- 2.1. *Authoritative Body* - an organization that establishes and enforces a Code.
- 2.2. *Code* – system or collection of expectations, procedures, rules and regulations to be enforced by the authoritative body.
- 2.3. *Guide* – recommended elements to assist, inform, instruct and advise an organization in establishing a Code of Professional Conduct.

## **3. Principles of Ethical Behavior for Individuals and Laboratories**

- 3.1. The term “ethics” refers to well-established principles of right and wrong to which forensic toxicologists and laboratories should adhere.
  - 3.1.1. Ethics requires recognizing that one’s overriding moral and professional duty is to the truth.
  - 3.1.2. Ethics requires developing, implementing and reviewing one's ethical principles.
  - 3.1.3. Ethics requires constantly re-examining one's ethical principles to ensure they are reasonable, well-founded and conform to established authority(s).
- 3.2. Ethical behavior involves the continuous awareness of one’s conduct and striving to ensure that we, and the institutions we represent, live up to these principles.

#### **4. Guide for Individuals**

Individuals will:

- 4.1. Attend relevant ethics training.
- 4.2. Perform professional activities with honesty, integrity and objectivity.
- 4.3. Refrain from any misrepresentation of one's professional qualifications including, but not limited to: education, training, experience, certification, area of expertise or professional memberships.
- 4.4. Disclose to all applicable parties any involvement or personal interest that may give rise to a conflict of interest, real or perceived.
- 4.5. Disclose to all applicable parties any attempt by others to influence you to engage in improper conduct.
- 4.6. Disclose to all applicable parties improper conduct of which you become aware.
- 4.7. Hold in confidence and refrain from the misuse of information obtained or received in the course of professional activities.
- 4.8. Provide expert advice and opinions within the limits of individual competence and generally accepted scientific principles.
- 4.9. Render truthful testimony without bias or misrepresentation.
- 4.10. Accept responsibility for work performed and opinions rendered.

#### **5. Guide for Laboratories**

Laboratories will:

- 5.1. Operate in accordance with applicable laws and regulations.
- 5.2. Demonstrate competency through attaining and maintaining relevant accreditation.
- 5.3. Only undertake work the organization is qualified to perform.
- 5.4. Provide unambiguous, accurate and objective reports.

- 5.5. Provide ethics training for relevant personnel.
- 5.6. Establish a procedure for the reporting of unethical, illegal or scientifically questionable conduct of personnel to the applicable legal or administrative authorities.
- 5.7. Allow for non-punitive reporting of unethical, illegal or scientifically questionable conduct of the laboratory or its employees.
- 5.8. Investigate all reports of unethical, illegal or scientifically questionable conduct of the laboratory or its employees.

## **6. Code of Professional Conduct**

- 6.1. Authoritative bodies must establish a Code of Professional Conduct for individuals and laboratories that is based on the elements described in Sections 3-5 of this Standard.
- 6.2. The Code of Professional Conduct must include procedures for enforcement. These procedures must define the process including, but not limited to, investigation of the allegation, methods of notification, corrective actions, timeliness, sanctions and appeals.
- 6.3. Authoritative bodies must provide Code of Professional Conduct training for relevant personnel.