FAQ's Firearms and Toolmarks

Q. What is National Integrated Ballistic Information Network (NIBIN)?

A. It is a national database supervised by ATF that uses digital imaging to compare pictures of fired cartridge cases and shotshells for similarity. The system ranks the images according to similarity in relation to the target image. The NIBIN operator then manually looks at the images for similarity.

Q. Do I need to make a special request for a firearm to be entered into NIBIN?

A. No. Any firearm submitted for examination that is suitable for NIBIN is entered.

Q. Will I know if my evidence is entered into NIBIN?

A. Yes. If your evidence is suitable and entered in NIBIN it will be stated in a laboratory report.

Q. Can fired bullets be entered into NIBIN?

A. No. The system the Crime Lab currently uses does not allow fired bullets to be entered. The unit is set up to take digital images of fired cartridge cases and shotshells.

Q. Are there any types of firearms that are recommended for entry?

A. Yes. Firearm action types of any caliber or gauge that normally leave cartridge cases behind at a crime scene by their operation are prime candidates. Semi-automatic pistols are most common firearm type submitted.

Q. Does other evidence processes on firearms evidence interfere with NIBIN?

A. No. dusting or fuming (super glue) for fingerprints or swabbing for DNA won't interfere with NIBIN entry.

Q. Does NIBIN automatically search the entire United States?

A. No. The system has a default search area covering the states of Wisconsin, Minnesota, Illinois, Indiana, & Mississippi.

Q. What is a NIBIN Hit?

A. A "Hit" occurs when the operator finds images that look like they may have been fired in the same gun. In the laboratory, that evidence is recalled for microscopic examination to verify they are fired in the same firearm by an examiner. This may allow the investigator to link seemingly unrelated events or evidence.

Q. Does the lab process gunshot residue (GSR) swabs?

A. No. The lab system does not process gunshot residue (GSR) swabs to identify a potential shooter by trace elements left behind when a gun is fired. Modern ammunition may or may not have those trace elements present. There are also other potential sources (automotive brake dust, fireworks, blank cartridge powered tools, etc.) other than GSR that could cause those elements to be present. The lab system stopped processing GSR swabs in 1995.

Q. Can you identify a tool to a toolmark by use of photographs?

A. No. We cannot make an identification from a tool to a toolmark by use of a digital image or photograph. Pictures can be helpful in determining how a tool was used at the scene, but they shouldn't be used for identification.