Deciphering the Symbols and Codes on Footwear Labels
Rhonda Banks and Christopher Hamburg
Oregon State Police Forensic Services Division

Need for Information
In the course of footwear impression casework and entry into a reference database, there is often a need to know the maker, model, and other information about an item of footwear. This information is frequently present on the shoe in the form of various codes on the label. The information presented on the label and the codes used vary by manufacturer. The manufacturers do not provide readily accessible information on how to decipher the information presented on the labels, and many of the companies do not have individuals readily available to assist with law enforcement inquiries.

Use in Forensic Casework
An example of the use of manufacturers' label information is in a case in which a pair of shoes submitted to the laboratory for comparison was found to be similar in overall trend design to an impression from another unsolved case that was entered in the casework database. Information on the label of the shoe indicated that the shoe was manufactured after the date of the incident and could not have made the questioned impression from the database. The shoe was eliminated as a possible source of the impression using only the label information.

Project Design
A list of manufacturers was developed representing some brands of shoes commonly encountered in laboratory casework. Shoes of those brands were located at retail stores and images of the labels were taken. Gathering the images from retail locations ensured that the information obtained was from current products available in the retail market. Contact was then made with representatives from each of the manufacturers. The representatives were provided with the images that had been gathered from labels on footwear manufactured by their respective companies and asked to provide assistance in deciphering the information present on the labels.

Acknowledgements
The authors would like to acknowledge Kate Kerenguin and Charlotte Wright who assisted with this project while working as volunteers at the Oregon State Police Portland Metro Forensic Laboratory. In addition, the authors thank the management of the Oregon State Police for allowing the time and resources to complete this project and the manufacturer representatives who provided the label information.