

# GUIDE TO COMPUTER INVESTIGATIONS

Northern California Computer Crimes Task Force  
(707) 253-4500 | fax (707) 253-4664

The NC3TF can assist you by conducting forensic analyses on seized computers, by assisting with individual search warrants, and by providing technical advice on computer-related issues such as search and seizure procedures, internet service provider information, website and email tracing, and by directing you to various state and federal resources.

If you suspect a computer may be the fruit of a crime, a tool of the offense, or contain useful evidence, contact NC3TF to help you properly prepare the case. You must have 3 things:

- 1) Probable cause for a search warrant or an exception to the warrant requirement;
- 2) Appropriate collection procedure to ensure evidence is not altered or destroyed;
- 3) A forensic examination by a trained expert.

If you come across a computer at a crime scene, **DO NOT TURN IT ON!** If it is already on, contact the NC3TF for immediate assistance in bringing it down properly.

- 1) *Officer Safety.* Sophisticated computer users often booby-trap their systems. The power switch, the boot-up electronic signals or the hard drive controller card could be wired to an explosive. Remember to wear protective gloves when handling the computer and component parts to protect yourself and to preserve biological and fingerprint evidence.
- 2) *Admissibility in court.* A specialist must document and preserve the evidence according to specialized procedures, or the entire findings could be jeopardized. Thousands of files are changed every time a computer is turned on. If the chain of custody is not maintained appropriately, or if the electronic evidence is in any way tampered with, the scientific method of the forensic analysis is compromised. This can and does mean that any evidence found on the computer can be inadmissible in court.

Interview the suspect and anyone else at the scene: who owns/uses this computer. If anyone denies a property interest in the computer, document that in your report. This improves the chances for forfeiture of the equipment after the case is resolved.

Operations Manager: Lt. Rick Nichelman, Vallejo Police Dept. (707) 265-2370  
High Tech Supervisor: Sgt. Dave Bettin, Novato Police Dept. (707) 265-2371  
Identity Theft Supervisor: Sgt. April Chapman, Sonoma County DA Investigations (707) 253-4226  
Supervising Prosecutor: Johnette Jauron, Solano County Deputy DA (707) 421-3267  
After Hours Call: Novato PD Dispatch (415) 897-1123