Testing Mobile Phones for Drugs Traces

Mobile phones have been in the news recently as they are notorious carriers of germs. A recent study found more than 17,000 bacterial gene copies on the phones of high school students.

Germs get onto phones because we take them everywhere and criminals’ phones are no different. Although criminals might be more conscientious and wipe any evidence of drugs they might be handling from their phones, the truth is they won’t get into every nook and crevice – but we can.

One of the benefits of using our highly sensitive Thermal Desorption Mass Spectrometers is that we can identify traces of drugs, or other substances of interest, from the tiniest pieces of material recovered from joins between the case and the display, charging ports, or openings for microphones and ear pieces. This means we can test evidence that a straightforward swab test might miss.

There are two ways we can help you with testing:

1. Bring the phones directly to us:
   This is our preferred method. Cost is £190 per phone, including statement. Discounts are available for multiple items and we can provide a while-you-wait service. Bring the phones to us prior to any digital forensics being carried out so that there is less chance of cross-contamination.

2. Request our remote testing kit:
   We can supply forensically-clean phone testing kits. Just use the easy-to-follow instructions provided with the kit to do your own swabbing of mobile phones and send the kits on to us for testing. Price for the kit is £15 each with the purchase price subtracted from the analysis cost.

Like our Drugs on Money testing, the reports we produce from mobile phones or other artefacts is admissible as evidence in any court in the UK.
Why you can still test banknotes for drugs

It is a common misconception that it is not worth testing for Drugs on Money because “traces of drugs are found on every banknote.” It is true that nearly all banknotes bear traces of drugs, in particular cocaine, however, our innovative approach still allows valuable evidence of an association with drugs to be derived from the analysis of seized cash.

Our techniques and procedures are accredited by the United Kingdom Accreditation Service to the internationally recognised ISO/IEC 17025:2017 standard; we are the only laboratory in the world to have achieved this status for the analysis of drugs on both paper and polymer banknotes. We test ‘normal’ banknotes from general circulation to establish what the ‘typical’ amounts of contamination are. In addition, we have analysed cash from seizures known to have been associated with drug crime. When we are asked to test money the police believe has been involved in drug crime, we can evaluate the results from the exhibit and make a professional judgement as to whether it is likely the exhibit has been involved in a drug related crime or not.

Drugs we test for include cocaine, MDMA, cannabis, diamorphine, amphetamine, ketamine, as well as cutting agents such as benzocaine, phenacetin and caffeine. We can test for many other compounds as well.

Our work is backed up by published academic research in the fields of analytical chemistry, forensic science and chemical statistics. These papers have been subjected to a rigorous ‘peer-review’ process, where the findings are scrutinised by independent experts in the field. For example, two of our papers, published in 2007 and 2017, demonstrated that due to the cash distribution methods of the Bank of England, the background levels of cocaine and other drugs do not differ significantly regardless of the region or city that they are taken from.

Our evidence has been used in thousands of Court cases, from Civil cases to Criminal cases in the Court of Appeal. Many millions of pounds worth of assets have been seized for the Crown, and hundreds of convictions have resulted.

The Cocaine Contamination Detected on 110 Paper Bank of England Banknotes Taken From General Circulation

The Cocaine Contamination Detected on 100 Paper Bank of England Banknotes Taken From Exhibit A

It is our knowledge of the levels of drugs likely to be found in different scenarios that allows us to compare patterns of contamination for most drugs, including cocaine. The two charts above show how most banknotes in general circulation (seen on the left) are not highly contaminated with cocaine, whereas in an unusually contaminated exhibit most of the banknotes show high contamination (seen on the right). For more information on what is available please feel free to contact us for advice or visit our website.
We introduced new lab pricing in July this year. If you missed it, this is what it means for you:

- Pricing is now based on weight rather than the cash value of the exhibits. This is a fairer way for us to estimate the analysis effort required.
- Total price is broken-down into three segments: booking-in, analysis, and report generation
- We are extending our free screening service for the foreseeable future.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Action</th>
<th>Cost per case/initial exhibit</th>
<th>Cost per additional exhibit</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Screening test</td>
<td>Free of charge – MSA will test exhibits for evidence of drugs free of charge. Positive test exhibits will go straight into the testing process as outlined below. Negative exhibits will be returned.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Booking-in fee:</td>
<td>£135</td>
<td>£20 per additional exhibit</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Abbreviated statement:</td>
<td>£450</td>
<td>£65 per additional exhibit</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Full statement:</td>
<td>PoA - It is unusual that our evidence is challenged in court, but if it is, we can quote for a full statement upon request.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Evidence analysis:</td>
<td>See table below</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
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Each UK banknote, whether it is paper or polymer, weighs approximately 1g. By weighing each exhibit, we can estimate the quantity of banknotes and calculate how much effort is involved in testing it.

We have created 5 pricing bands depending on the size of the exhibit, any exhibit that falls on the threshold of two bands will be calculated to the lower band.

**Exhibit analysis price bands: (weight used is the unpackaged exhibit weight, minimum weight: 100g)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Exhibit Weight</th>
<th>Price</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 - 500g:</td>
<td>£225.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>500g - 1kg:</td>
<td>£435.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1kg - 5kg</td>
<td>£825.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5kg - 10kg</td>
<td>£1,635.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10kg - 20 kg</td>
<td>£3,147.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Over 20kg</td>
<td>Call for a quote</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

You will notice that the bands are sufficiently wide enough to deal with variations in packaging, that way it is easy for you to estimate how much a case will cost to test.

If you have any questions about the new pricing scheme, or would like us to send you a quote, please contact us on the email or phone details below.
Book a free Forensic Briefing for your team

Over the summer we’ve given Forensic Briefings to several of our customers with great results. We are always interested in helping our customers deliver justice in the most robust and cost-effective way possible, so we’ve put together a 90-minute briefing that will bring you and your team up to speed on state of the art drugs on money testing as well as trace detection of drugs and other substances of interest. Along with the rapid movement of officers within the police services, the area of forensic testing is rapidly changing with new threats and drugs coming on to the scene. This briefing will give you up-to-date information on how to respond to these changes and to prepare robust case evidence that delivers justice for all concerned.

If you would like MSA to provide you with a free forensic briefing, contact us and we’ll find a date.

Coming Soon: Proceeds of Crime Testing

MSA will be introducing a new low-cost Proceeds of Crime Test service for smaller cash seizures under £5,000 that are destined for civil court proceedings. It involves the same 5-drug test with a simpler booking-in process and report to help with POCA cash seizures associated with Cannabis, MDMA and other drugs.

For further information contact Mass Spec on:
+44 (0)11 7317 3600
service@msaltd.co.uk

As well as other enquiries a crucial part of the evidence was the Mass Spec examination as this showed the money had been in contact with drugs, thereby severely undermining the subject’s account. This evidence has greatly influenced the defendant to plead guilty on the morning of trial.