

# *Cellular Forensics*

## Part II

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In my last article on *Cellular Forensics*, we discovered the viable need for the Cellular Forensic Examiner and his importance in the role of not only discovering leads and information, but in his effective ability to testify on behalf of the evidence in court.

So now the rubber meets the road: Let's say you now have a cell phone you need examined. How do you **PRESERVE THE EVIDENCE** that this tiny wonder holds? How do you keep what's in that phone from being deleted?

Follow these simple rules:

1. Don't mess with it! If you don't remember anything else, remember this point.

Don't push any buttons or try to extract any information on your own. Do not pull out the SIM card. A simple static spark can delete the whole card. Like any piece of evidence, you want it preserved so that those qualified can properly examine and extract what is in that phone. Remember, you and the Examiner may very well have to testify in court as to how that phone was handled. If you play with it, you will pay for it somewhere down the road of your case.

2. Determine if the cell phone owner placed a PIN on that phone. The PIN is the *Personal Identification Number* that the phone's owner entered into its memory to allow the owner to lock and access the phone. The problem with a PIN is that if you power the phone down, to preserve evidence, and you don't know the PIN, when you power it back up it's locked up tight and no one is going to get the information out of it. Just think of it like your PIN number on your checking account. No PIN, no info! Simple as that. So how would you know if the phone has a PIN or not? Simple...ask the owner. If they're not available, then you will have to take a chance that it's not. Don't sweat it. The majority of phone owners never PIN protect their cell phones. Recently, I asked a group of 15 private investigators how many of them use a PIN on their cell phones. 3 P.I.'s raised their hands. 'Nuff said.
  
3. Power the phone down. If you're sure it's not PIN protected, or you just don't know, the simplest way to preserve information on a cell phone is to just *turn it off*. If it's not on, it's not communicating with a cell tower.

BUT, what if the phone is PIN protected? How do you preserve the evidence until you can get it to the Forensic Examiner? Here's some do's and don'ts if the phone is PIN protected:

1. Leave the power on.

2. Get some heavy duty tin foil and wrap the phone in at least 3 sheets of tin foil. Be careful if you have the power cord connected to the phone. Even though the phone itself is wrapped, the power cord acts as an auxiliary antenna and will still allow the phone to receive and send information.
  
3. Place the phone in an approved container. Here's where an "Arson Evidence Can" (like the CSI boys use) comes in handy. Place the wrapped phone in the arson evidence can and seal it. Personally, I am not a fan of the "Wireless Evidence Bags" currently on the market. A Purdue University study found that the triple layers of tin foil actually worked better than the \$25 cell phone evidence bag.
  
4. Fill out the proper "Property and Evidence" sheet and get it to the Forensic Examiner ASAP.

As we have stated before, today's cell phones are a modern wonder. The information sent and generated from them can be instrumental to your case and profitable to your business. However, proper handling of a cell phone, like any evidence, is of the utmost importance and vital to the success of any case.

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