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Historical Evolution: A Technical Viewpoint

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This paper presents the personal perspectives of the authors on the early development of nuclear forensics, beginning with the early 1990s. Independently, we started to work on nuclear forensics, recognizing that we were addressing a new set of questions. In 1995 an “International Conference on Nuclear Smuggling Forensics Analysis” was held at Lawrence Livermore National Laboratory, which ended by forming a International Technical Working Group (ITWG) as a forum for international technical cooperation on nuclear forensics. This conference also marked the start of our working relationship. Some of the early work of the ITWG is highlighted, notably the development of a “model action plan” and the execution of exercises in which scientists learned from one another. In the 2000s a number of countries and organizations started programs to make technical progress in developing nuclear forensics. Signatures are at the heart of the technical development, as they are crucially important for drawing technical interpretations from measurements. Some examples of cooperative research projects that include multiple countries will be described. Finally, based on our experience in the early evolution of nuclear forensics, we present some lessons learned regarding the development of a new field like nuclear forensics.

Primary authors: KOCH, L. (retired, European Commission, Institute for Transuranium Elements); NIEMEYER, S. (retired, Lawrence Livermore National Laboratory, USA)

Presenter: Mr NIEMEYER, S. (United States of America)

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