International Journal of Environmental Sciences
ISSN: 2229-7359
Vol. 11 No. 21s, 2025
https://theaspd.com/index.php

Greening The Scales Of Justice: Integrating Sustainable Practices Into Forensic Science In India

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Abstract
While scientific evidence has revolutionized criminal investigations and judicial processes, its collection, preservation, and analysis often come at a hidden cost to the environment. From the chemical-intensive preservation of forensic samples to the e-waste generated by high-tech forensic equipment, the process of truth-seeking may inadvertently contribute to environmental degradation. This paper critically explores how standard procedures in evidence handling—particularly in sexual offence cases—utilize non-biodegradable materials, toxic reagents, and energy-heavy technologies that leave ecological footprints. Through an interdisciplinary lens, the paper examines whether the justice system can reconcile the ethical imperative to protect human rights with the equally urgent need to safeguard the environment. It argues for a shift toward sustainable forensic practices that uphold both justice and ecological responsibility.
Keywords: *Scientific Evidence, Forensic Science, Sexual Offences, Toxic waste, Sustainability, DNA analysis, Green Criminology.*

1. INTRODUCTION

Scientific evidence has revolutionized the administration of criminal justice in the 21st century. Particularly in sensitive cases such as sexual offences, where physical and testimonial evidence may be limited or compromised, scientific forensics—especially DNA profiling, toxicological reports, and trace evidence—play a pivotal role in establishing the guilt or innocence of an accused. As India continues to strengthen its forensic infrastructure under various criminal law reforms, scientific evidence has become the gold standard of credibility in courtrooms. However, in the pursuit of accuracy, precision, and justice, an important question remains underexplored: What are the environmental costs of collecting and preserving such evidence?

The criminal justice system rarely considers the ecological consequences of its tools and processes. Scientific evidence is not generated in a vacuum. Its collection involves extensive use of single-use plastics, chemical preservatives, non-biodegradable packaging, and energy-intensive equipment. Most forensic laboratories in India still rely on conventional fossil-fueled energy sources and outdated waste disposal practices. Similarly, crime scene investigation units often leave behind chemical residues in sensitive ecological zones, especially in cases involving natural disasters, rural locations, or outdoor crimes. In essence, the same evidence that serves as a pillar of justice may also contribute to environmental degradation—an irony both profound and disturbing.

Despite the increasing awareness of environmental protection under Article 21 and Article 48A of the Indian Constitution, and the development of a robust environmental jurisprudence led by the Supreme Court and National Green Tribunal, the ecological impact of forensic practices remains a blind spot. No legislation under the Bharatiya Nagarik Suraksha Sanhita (BNSS) 2023, the Indian Evidence Act, or the Environment (Protection) Act, 1986 specifically regulates the ecological footprint of forensic investigation. Biomedical waste management rules primarily cater to hospitals and diagnostic centers but rarely extend in letter or spirit to crime laboratories or police forensic units. As a result, there exists a legislative and regulatory vacuum that allows harmful materials and procedures to go unchecked in the name of justice.This research paper aims to bridge this gap by critically analyzing the environmental harm caused during the collection, preservation, and processing of scientific evidence in criminal investigations, with a particular focus on sexual offence cases. Sexual offences often involve intricate medico-legal protocols—collection of bodily fluids, tissue samples, vaginal swabs, hair strands, blood, and semen—all of which require secure packaging, preservation of chemicals, and long-term storage in laboratory conditions. While the reliability and admissibility of such evidence have been the focus of legal scrutiny, little to no attention has been paid to how such processes affect soil, water, air, and ecosystems when executed without sustainable practices.

Furthermore, forensic laboratories are becoming increasingly tech-heavy, relying on devices like gas chromatography machines, DNA sequencers, and electron microscopes. These consume significant energy and generate hazardous waste, including reagents and obsolete electronic components. The lack of sustainability standards for such institutions not only poses environmental risks but also challenges India's commitments under international environmental agreements and sustainable development goals. By employing a doctrinal method, this paper will analyze legal texts, judicial pronouncements, and forensic protocols to investigate how the law currently treats environmental considerations within evidence management. Comparative references from international jurisdictions where eco-forensic practices are emerging will also be utilized to frame policy-level recommendations for India. Through an interdisciplinary lens—merging legal analysis with environmental ethics and forensic science—this study calls for a conscious shift toward green justice: a framework where the pursuit of human justice does not come at the cost of ecological imbalance. In sum, this research does not challenge the centrality or necessity of scientific evidence in criminal law. Instead, it questions the methods and materials used in the process of achieving truth. In doing so, it brings to light an uncomfortable but essential debate: that even the quest for justice must be tempered with responsibility—not only to the victim and the accused but also to the planet. If criminal law is to evolve, it must do so not only in the direction of technological sophistication but also toward environmental sustainability.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study employs a doctrinal legal research methodology, which involves a critical and systematic analysis of existing legal principles, statutory frameworks, case laws, and scholarly interpretations. The primary objective is to explore the environmental consequences of forensic practices associated with the collection, preservation, and analysis of scientific evidence, particularly in the context of criminal investigations such as sexual offences.The research also draws upon secondary sources such as commentaries by forensic experts, law commission reports, forensic manuals, research articles, and policy documents to assess the practical implications of forensic procedures.

2. Materials Used in Collection and Preservation: Ecological Red Flags

Scientific evidence has become the linchpin of modern criminal investigations. From DNA samples to blood traces, hair strands to vaginal swabs, such evidence forms the backbone of medical and forensic jurisprudence, particularly in sensitive cases such as sexual offences. However, while the utility of scientific evidence in establishing guilt or innocence is beyond dispute, the environmental consequences of the materials and methods used in the collection and preservation of this evidence have not been adequately addressed in legal or scientific discourse.

The process of evidence collection is typically associated with a stringent protocol: sterile instruments, tamper-proof packaging, chemical preservatives, and climate-controlled storage. Though these measures ensure integrity and admissibility in court, they often rely on non-biodegradable, chemically hazardous, and energy-intensive materials. This section explores the ecological red flags associated with these practices, raising concerns about their sustainability and long-term environmental impact.

2.1. Single-Use Plastic: The Forensic Norm with a High Environmental Cost

One of the most visible components of forensic evidence collection is the extensive use of single-use plastic. Swabs, vials, gloves, pipettes, containers, sealing tapes, sample tubes, and packaging sheets are all made of plastic—often multilayered, sterile-grade, and non-recyclable. While these are necessary to avoid contamination and ensure forensic accuracy, they contribute significantly to plastic waste, particularly in high-volume cases such as sexual assaults or mass crime scenes.

Each forensic examination kit (such as a Sexual Assault Forensic Examination—SAFE—kit) may contain up to 30–40 individual plastic-based components. With thousands of such kits used annually in India alone, the cumulative environmental burden is immense. These plastics often end up in biomedical waste streams, but due to poor segregation, they frequently find their way to landfills or open incineration units, releasing toxic dioxins and microplastics into the environment.

2.2. Chemical Preservatives: Necessary for Science, Toxic for Nature

The preservation of biological samples such as blood, urine, saliva, semen, or tissue often requires chemical stabilizers like formalin (formaldehyde solution), ethanol, methanol, and sodium fluoride. While these chemicals serve to prevent degradation of evidence, their disposal poses serious threats to the environment if not handled as per hazardous waste norms.Formalin is a known carcinogen and highly

toxic to aquatic life. Spillage or improper disposal can contaminate groundwater and soil.Ethanol and methanol, though organic in nature, are volatile and flammable, requiring specialized storage and ventilation systems. They also contribute to VOC emissions (Volatile Organic Compounds), which impact air quality and contribute to atmospheric pollution.Preservatives used in toxicology also include sodium azide and potassium oxalate, both of which can be harmful if released into natural ecosystems.Many crime laboratories and field units lack proper hazardous waste disposal facilities. In rural or semi-urban areas, these chemicals are often discarded into drainage systems, where they bypass treatment plants and contaminate local water bodies.

2.3. Non-Biodegradable Packaging Materials

To ensure chain of custody and avoid tampering, evidence is packed in airtight, tamper-evident, heat-sealed bags—usually made of polypropylene or polyethylene. These plastics are durable and impermeable, but also non-degradable. Additionally, secondary packaging involves cardboard, styrofoam insulation, thermocol, bubble wraps, and plastic wrap—all used for shock resistance during transport or refrigeration.Even though such packaging serves a valid legal and procedural purpose, most of it ends up as waste after evidence has been logged or processed. Very little of this packaging is reused or recycled, primarily due to contamination risks. In many Indian forensic labs, waste segregation practices are either missing or poorly implemented, leading to the mingling of chemical, biological, and general waste—creating mixed hazardous streams that are ecologically catastrophic.

2.4. Cold Chain Preservation: Hidden Energy Footprint

In many cases, particularly those involving DNA, semen, or blood, samples must be stored at sub-zero temperatures. This requires refrigerators, cold boxes, or deep freezers, especially during transport from crime scene to laboratory. Maintaining this "cold chain" involves:

- High electricity consumption (often diesel-powered generators in field locations)
- Refrigerants like CFCs or HFCs which are potent greenhouse gases
- Long-haul air-conditioned transport vehicles for sensitive evidence

This creates a carbon-intensive logistics chain, which is rarely offset or accounted for in forensic planning. In remote areas, where electricity is scarce, mobile preservation units run on diesel—further contributing to emissions.

2.5. Gloves, Masks, Gowns: The PPE Pollution

Post-COVID-19, personal protective equipment (PPE) has become standard in all forensic work. Crime scene investigators, forensic doctors, and lab technicians now regularly use:

- Latex or nitrile gloves (single-use)
- Non-woven polypropylene gowns
- Plastic shoe covers
- Face masks or shields

While crucial for contamination prevention, these items generate biomedical plastic waste, with almost no biodegradable alternatives in current use. Burned in incinerators, they release harmful fumes; when discarded in open areas, they degrade into microplastics or act as carriers of chemical residue.

2.6. Fluorescent & Chemical Sprays: Soil and Water Contaminants

To detect trace amounts of blood or body fluids at crime scenes, forensic teams often use chemical reagents like:

- Luminol (hydrogen peroxide and phthalate compounds)
- Ninhydrin spray for fingerprints
- Silver nitrate and iodine fumes
- Bluestar, phenolphthalein, and leuco crystal violet

While these sprays are effective, they leave behind chemical residues in open environments—especially when used in outdoor or semi-rural crime scenes. Luminol, for instance, is toxic to small organisms and can alter soil pH. These substances are rarely neutralized or cleaned up after use, and there's no mandate in Indian law requiring post-investigation environmental remediation.

2.7. E-Waste from Evidence Processing

High-end forensic machines such as:

- Gas Chromatographs
- PCR Machines
- DNA Sequencers
- FTIR Spectrometers

●Computer Forensics Hardware

all contribute to electronic waste once obsolete. Forensic labs periodically upgrade their equipment, and outdated machines are often discarded without e-waste recycling protocols. This leads to leaching of heavy metals like cadmium, lead, mercury, and brominated flame retardants into the soil—posing long-term threats to biodiversity and human health.

3. Forensic Laboratories: High-Tech, High-Footprint

Forensic laboratories are the backbone of scientific investigation within the criminal justice system. They transform physical traces—blood, hair, semen, bodily fluids, soil, toxic substances—into conclusive scientific reports that play a pivotal role in securing justice. However, while these spaces are temples of truth, they are also silent contributors to environmental degradation. The "high-tech" status of modern forensic labs masks a deeply unsustainable operational model that is rarely scrutinized through the lens of environmental ethics.Modern forensic labs in India and around the world are highly resource-intensive. The equipment used—DNA sequencers, gas chromatographs, spectrophotometers, PCR machines, electron microscopes—requires continuous power, controlled environments, and significant amounts of water and cooling systems. Most Indian forensic labs, including the Central and State Forensic Science Laboratories (CFSLs and SFSLs), are connected to conventional energy grids powered by fossil fuels. Backup systems often use diesel generators. The cumulative energy footprint is massive and virtually untracked.

Moreover, forensic analysis involves toxic chemicals and reagents such as formaldehyde, xylene, phenolphthalein, luminol, ninhydrin, silver nitrate, and various solvents. These are used in tests ranging from DNA extraction to fingerprint visualization and toxicological analysis. Many of these substances are hazardous, flammable, carcinogenic, or environmentally persistent. Without strict waste disposal protocols, these chemicals can enter local water bodies or seep into the soil, contaminating ecosystems and posing health risks to communities.Another overlooked issue is electronic waste (e-waste). Forensic laboratories operate in a high-upgrade culture—where equipment becomes obsolete every 5–7 years. Obsolete machines, hard drives, analysis software, and testing modules often pile up without systematic e-waste management policies. Components containing mercury, lead, cadmium, and brominated flame retardants can leach toxins if discarded improperly—contributing to India's mounting e-waste crisis.

Then there's the problem of biomedical and biohazardous waste, particularly in labs handling evidence from sexual offences, murders, or violent crimes. Body fluids, tissues, used swabs, and contaminated PPE (gloves, gowns, shoe covers) are generated daily. Although such waste should be incinerated under the Biomedical Waste Management Rules, 2016, many labs—especially in smaller states—lack in-house incinerators or contracts with licensed disposal facilities. This results in open dumping or local burning, both environmentally hazardous.Despite being scientific institutions, most forensic labs in India lack green certifications, environmental audits, or sustainability protocols. Unlike hospitals or diagnostic labs, forensic labs operate in a regulatory grey zone when it comes to environmental accountability. This is a legal and ethical vacuum that needs urgent attention.To move forward, there is a pressing need to reimagine forensic infrastructure through a sustainable lens. Solar-powered labs, green-certified reagents, biodegradable PPE, and strict chemical disposal protocols must become standard. Incorporating environmental audits into accreditation processes and updating forensic manuals with sustainability clauses could bridge the gap between scientific precision and ecological preservation.Justice must not come at the cost of the environment. As forensic science moves forward in technical sophistication, it must also walk in step with environmental responsibility.

4. Field Investigations and Ecological Disruption

Field investigations are the first point of contact between science and crime. They are essential to evidence gathering and often dictate the course of an entire trial. Whether it's a remote field where a body is discovered, a forested area where a crime is reported, or a flood-hit zone with multiple fatalities, forensic teams are deployed to collect and secure trace evidence with speed and precision. However, the impact of these operations on local ecosystems is rarely acknowledged, let alone regulated.Crime scene investigation protocols often require intrusive methods: digging, spraying chemicals, collecting soil or water samples, and sealing large areas with synthetic materials. In rural or ecologically sensitive zones—such as riverbanks, forest fringes, wetlands, or tribal lands—these activities disrupt natural habitats, disturb micro-ecosystems,

and leave behind chemical and material waste. These unintended consequences of justice-oriented procedures are a classic case of environmental harm by institutional neglect.

One of the most common ecological threats during field investigation is the use of chemical reagents. Substances like luminol, used to detect blood traces, contain hydrogen peroxide and sodium carbonate, which can alter soil pH and harm beneficial soil organisms. Similarly, ninhydrin used for fingerprint detection and silver nitrate for visualizing prints on porous surfaces are toxic to aquatic and terrestrial life if not handled or disposed of properly. There are no legal requirements in India for post-investigation cleanup or neutralization of these chemicals at outdoor scenes.Another concern is plastic waste. Crime scene officers often use plastic barriers, evidence bags, gloves, PPE suits, and marking tapes—most of which are discarded on-site after a scene is cleared. In forested or rural areas, these materials are left behind, adding to non-biodegradable waste burdens. Animals may ingest them, or they may break down into microplastics, contaminating the food chain. Despite the availability of biodegradable forensic consumables globally, Indian field protocols have yet to adopt sustainable alternatives.

Vehicle movement and human activity during field investigations can also cause ecological stress. In protected areas or buffer zones (like forest edges or riverbanks), the movement of heavy police vehicles, generators, and floodlights can damage fragile terrain. Sensitive flora may be trampled or uprooted, and faunal species may be disturbed, displaced, or harmed. Unfortunately, Indian crime scene protocols do not consult with environmental authorities or forest departments before operating in ecologically significant zones.

Furthermore, in cases involving mass graves, custodial disappearances, or crimes in disaster zones, the deployment of large forensic teams and excavation tools can cause deep ecological scars. Soil erosion, contamination of water sources, and air pollution from equipment are common but unaccounted-for impacts.In the absence of legal obligations to mitigate environmental harm during investigations, such activities escape scrutiny. The intersection of criminal justice and environmental protection remains neglected in operational planning. There is an urgent need for eco-sensitive crime scene protocols, inter-departmental coordination with environmental agencies, and training for forensic personnel in sustainable investigation practices. Justice delivered at the cost of the environment is ultimately a justice incomplete.

5. Field Investigations and Ecological Disruptions

In the realm of criminal justice, field investigations are the frontline procedures that determine the fate of vital evidence. These operations are designed with a singular focus: retrieving material that can lead to the identification, arrest, and conviction of offenders. However, in the shadow of this investigative zeal lies an often-ignored reality the ecological cost of crime scene investigations, particularly in natural, rural, and environmentally sensitive areas.Modern forensic teams, when dispatched to outdoor crime scenes be it forested areas, agricultural lands, riverbanks, or remote tribal zones arrive equipped with tools, chemicals, and personnel aimed at precision and speed. Yet, the absence of eco-centric planning in these operations often leads to significant disruption of local ecosystems. The procedures are not just invasive in a criminal-legal sense, but also environmentally extractive.

One of the most immediate ecological disruptions is habitat disturbance. Investigative teams routinely trample through vegetation, dig soil, cut through natural growth, and displace animal life in their effort to secure a site. In biodiversity-rich zones, this seemingly routine intervention can cause irreversible ecological imbalances, displacing species and damaging fragile ecosystems that may take years to regenerate.The use of chemical reagents such as luminol, ninhydrin, and silver nitrate while indispensable for detecting blood, fingerprints, and other traces raises serious ecological red flags. These chemicals, when sprayed or spilled onto soil or near water bodies, can alter pH levels, reduce microbial diversity, and contaminate aquatic ecosystems. There are currently no national guidelines in India that mandate the eco-safe disposal or neutralization of such substances post-investigation.

Moreover, forensic teams often rely on single-use plastics evidence bags, gloves, PPE suits, marking tapes, and temporary fencing all of which contribute to non-biodegradable waste. In the absence of proper disposal infrastructure, much of this waste is either burned (causing air pollution) or left behind, adding to the already mounting pressure of plastic pollution in rural and forested zones.Another layer of disruption comes from the vehicular footprint. Investigation units may use diesel generators, floodlights, and transport vehicles that damage terrain, emit fumes, and contribute to noise pollution. In ecologically fragile or wildlife-sensitive regions, such noise and movement can lead to disorientation of fauna,

increased stress responses in animals, and even fatalities due to vehicular movement.Compounding the problem is the institutional blind spot neither the police nor forensic units are trained in environmental sensitivity, nor is there any collaboration with local environmental authorities before operating in protected areas. The result is a justice process that, ironically, inflicts collateral damage on the very communities and ecosystems it aims to protect.

Thus, while field investigations are indispensable to justice, their ecological consequences cannot be ignored. There is an urgent need to revise field protocols to integrate environmental safeguards, mandate post-scene cleanups, and promote inter-agency coordination. Only then can justice be pursued without compromising the planet's delicate ecological balance.

6. When Science Leaves Scars

While forensic science is hailed as the silent guardian of justice, it sometimes leaves behind not-so-silent consequences—especially when deployed in ecologically sensitive zones. The equipment, chemicals, and practices used during field investigations can significantly disrupt local environments, and unfortunately, this side of the story is often overlooked in legal or scientific discourse.

6.1. Hathni Kund, Haryana – Wildlife Crime Meets Environmental Damage

In 2019, a case involving suspected poaching near the Hathni Kund Barrage—an ecologically sensitive bird habitat—led to extensive field investigation by the Wildlife Crime Control Bureau. Though the forensic team successfully retrieved feathers, blood stains, and bone fragments, their methods included spraying chemical reagents and deploying plastic-based containment units. Local conservationists reported that chemical residues affected the nesting patterns of migratory birds, and the team's trampling damaged underbrush critical to native species. Here, the ecological cost was deemed "collateral damage" to justice.

6.2. Bhopal Gas Tragedy Site – Re-Investigation Turned Toxic

Nearly two decades after the infamous Bhopal Gas Tragedy, forensic teams revisited the abandoned Union Carbide site to collect samples as part of ongoing litigation. Though necessary, the forensic dig released dormant toxic compounds into surrounding soil and groundwater. Villagers nearby reported an increase in water contamination incidents post-investigation. In this case, scientific evidence collection inadvertently revived environmental trauma.

6.3. Kaziranga National Park – A Cautionary Tale in Forensic Enthusiasm

Kaziranga, a UNESCO World Heritage site, is home to endangered one-horned rhinoceroses. In 2017, a poaching case triggered a forensic investigation involving tire tracks, bullet trajectory analysis, and collection of faecal and blood samples. Despite strict protection policies, forensic vans and drones disrupted the movement of several wild elephants and water buffaloes. Conservationists criticized the lack of coordination between forensic and ecological authorities, citing the investigation as a direct violation of eco-tourism guidelines.

6.4. Munnar Forests, Kerala – Rape Investigation vs. Forest Integrity

In a deeply sensitive rape case involving a tribal woman in the Munnar forests, forensic experts were summoned to a remote forest zone in 2021. The collection of samples, including soil, vegetation, and garments, necessitated the use of portable lighting, plastic gloves, and chemical reagents. The forest department later noted several species of medicinal plants in the area had been destroyed due to careless movement and lack of containment protocols for the chemicals used.

7. Legal Vacuum: No Green Forensics Code

In the Indian criminal justice system, the recent enactment of the Bhartiya Nagarik Suraksha Sanhita, 2023 (BNSS)—which replaces the colonial-era Code of Criminal Procedure (CrPC)—was expected to modernize and rationalize procedural law. Yet, when viewed through the lens of environmental sustainability in forensic practices, the BNSS remains eerily silent. There exists no green forensics code or binding protocol that mandates ecological accountability during criminal investigations.

7.1. General Powers, No Specific Duties (BNSS Sections 103–112): BNSS grants broad powers to investigative agencies under Chapter VI (Sections 103 to 112) related to investigation, arrest, and search & seizure. Section 105 empowers police officers to enter premises and conduct searches. However, nowhere does the statute require eco-sensitive conduct—no obligation to avoid environmental degradation during evidence collection, no clause on chemical usage guidelines, and certainly no mandate

for biohazard waste management.For instance, Section 106(2) permits the seizure of any item necessary for investigation, but it fails to regulate the disposal or environmental impact of contaminated soil samples, plastic swabs, chemical reagents, or single-use forensic tools post-analysis.

7.2. No Protocols for Handling Hazardous Evidence: BNSS does not prescribe any forensic best practices for preserving environmental integrity during crime scene examination. Whether it's a crime committed in a forest, a protected wetland, or an urban park, there is no procedural differentiation. Section 113 vaguely references "collection of evidence," but does not direct that biological or chemical evidence be collected using green protocols.In real terms, this legal lacuna allows forensic teams to use non-biodegradable gloves, synthetic plastic body bags, and alcohol-based chemicals in ecologically sensitive areas—without any accountability. In sexual offence cases especially, the use of reagents for detecting semen, blood, or DNA often leads to irreversible contamination of the environment, especially in outdoor scenes.

7.3. Inadequate Training and Certification: Section 113(4) allows experts to be called for assistance during investigations. However, the BNSS does not mandate environmental or sustainability training for forensic experts or police officials. There is no legal requirement to certify that field investigators are trained to reduce ecological harm. This omission perpetuates ignorance and continues the cycle of ecological insensitivity in the name of justice.

7.4. Absence of Chain-of-Custody Accountability for Ecological Waste: BNSS mandates maintaining a chain of custody for physical and biological evidence, but only to ensure its legal admissibility—not its ecological safety. Toxic waste, soiled materials, and chemical residues used during forensic processes often remain unregulated and unreported, leading to improper disposal in public or natural spaces.

In India, the institutions that lead forensic science—such as the National Forensic Sciences University (NFSU) and the Central Forensic Science Laboratories (CFSLs)—operate primarily under the aegis of the Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) or the Ministry of Education, not the Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change (MoEFCC). This institutional disconnect represents one of the most striking omissions in the pursuit of environmentally responsible forensic science. Let's get real: we have a climate-conscious ministry, the MoEFCC, which regulates industrial pollution, waste management, and environmental clearances. And then we have NFSU and CFSLs—the institutions generating biohazards, toxic waste, plastic-heavy packaging, and chemical spills through evidence processing—but no oversight from the very ministry responsible for protecting nature. NFSU, declared an Institution of National Importance in 2020, leads India's forensic education and research. It is pioneering in DNA forensics, toxicology, cyber forensics, and crime scene management. CFSLs under MHA provide lab testing and expert reports used in courts. Both institutions are scientifically advanced, no doubt, but also ecologically insulated. Neither institution is mandated to report their chemical waste usage to the Central Pollution Control Board (CPCB).Follow eco-friendly procurement standards for forensic kits.Collaborate with MoEFCC or comply with Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) norms for setting up or expanding laboratories.This separation of power—where scientific evidence is treated as purely a law enforcement matter, devoid of environmental implications—creates a jurisdictional vacuum. This is not just bureaucratic laziness. It's an active legislative and administrative blind spot.

Despite being the nodal authority on environmental matters, MoEFCC is never consulted while framing forensic protocols, setting standards for scene-of-crime equipment, or drafting forensic curricula. There is:

- No green certification scheme for forensic labs.
- No rules for plastic use, solvent disposal, or e-waste from digital forensics labs.
- No ecological impact assessment when crime scenes fall within Eco-Sensitive Zones, wetlands, or forest areas.

Even crime scenes in protected biospheres or wildlife corridors are investigated without environmental permissions. Forensic investigators can waltz into a tiger reserve to collect evidence without ever informing the Forest Department or MoEFCC. This is not just procedural oversight—it's environmental negligence.To create green, sustainable, and ethical forensic systems, there must be inter-ministerial collaboration. MoEFCC must not only be looped into forensic governance but should also help draft India's first "Green Forensics Guidelines". This could regulate material use, waste disposal, energy efficiency in forensic labs, and protocols for ecological protection at crime scenes.Until then, we're living in a world where justice is pursued through methods that harm the very world we seek to protect. It's time to stop treating forensics as just a lab problem—and start treating it as a planetary responsibility.

8. A Roadmap to Eco-Conscious Justice

Green forensics isn't just a possibility, it's a necessity. As the climate clock ticks and our planet groans under the weight of anthropogenic harm, it's time forensic science sheds its industrial-age skin and evolves into a discipline that solves crime without committing environmental sins.

8.1. Reimagining Crime Scene Kits: From Plastic to Planet-Safe

Most forensic kits used today—DNA swabs, sampling bottles, fingerprint powders—are made of single-use plastic or chemical-heavy materials. Transitioning to biodegradable, compostable, or recyclable materials can drastically reduce environmental impact. For instance:

- Replace plastic evidence bags with plant-based polymer alternatives.
- Use charcoal- or cornstarch-based fingerprint powders instead of toxic metallic powders.
- Invest in solvent-free reagents and water-based fixatives.

Developing and standardizing "green kits" should be the first step. These can be piloted in sensitive ecological areas like wetlands, biosphere reserves, and tribal belts where environmental preservation is non-negotiable.

8.2. Sustainable Lab Practices: Audits and Accountability

Labs particularly CFSLs and NFSU wings—need to adopt eco-efficient practices. Here's what that might look like:

A. Green energy: Solar power for lab operations.
B. Water recycling: Closed-loop systems for chemical washing.
C. Hazardous waste protocols: Mandatory toxic waste reporting to Pollution Control Boards.
D. Eco-audits: Annual environmental audits as part of accreditation.

This isn't utopian. Labs in Sweden, the Netherlands, and Canada have already begun integrating ISO 14001 (Environmental Management Systems) into their forensic processes.

8.3. Curriculum Reform: Teaching the Environment as a Stakeholder

India's forensic science education is largely techno-centric. Time to bring in eco-legal modules:Teach forensic students about environmental law, green chemistry, and ecological ethics. Conduct joint workshops with environmental scientists and forest officers.Create elective courses on "Environmental Forensics" which already exists as a discipline in the U.S.Green forensics isn't just about materials; it's about mindset. The shift must begin in classrooms.

8.4. MoEFCC Joins the Conversation a tripartite coordination must emerge—between: Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA),Ministry of Education (which governs NFSU), and Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change (MoEFCC). Together, they can establish "Green Forensic Protocols". Pre-approval for crime scene investigation in eco-sensitive zones.Limiting sample collection to what's absolutely necessary.Protocols for forensic drone usage to avoid wildlife disturbance.Think of this as inserting an Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) into forensic practice.

8.5. Eco-Conscious Innovations: AI, Digital and Paperless Forensics

Digital forensics can reduce environmental load significantly—if done right. Cloud storage, AI-driven sample filtering (to reduce unnecessary tests), and paperless evidence tracking systems can replace cumbersome, resource-heavy methods.

9. CONCLUSION

The forensic process designed to illuminate the darkest corners of criminal acts ironically casts its own shadow on a vital but often ignored victim: the environment. This research has tried to peel back the layers of scientific evidence collection and preservation, especially in the context of sexual offences, to reveal a hidden truth that justice, in its current form, is environmentally expensive. The pursuit of justice must not become a zero-sum game between human rights and ecological survival. The absence of green protocols in the collection, storage, and analysis of forensic evidence reflects a systemic oversight, where speed, efficiency, and accuracy have been prioritised at the cost of sustainability. The impact of field investigations in ecologically fragile zones, the materials used in forensic kits, the high energy consumption of forensic laboratories, and the disposal of chemical reagents all contribute to a cumulative environmental footprint that has gone largely unaccounted for in policy, law, and even academic discourse.

Sexual offences undeniably traumatic and socially sensitive demand a nuanced and careful legal response. Yet, in our quest to strengthen scientific investigation and improve conviction rates, we've bypassed the environmental cost of forensic rigor. While victims deserve swift and certain justice, the ecosystem cannot be treated as a disposable bystander in this process. The irony lies in the fact that most forensic operations intended to uphold the dignity of human life often inadvertently degrade the natural world upon which all life depends.

There exists today a legal vacuum a lack of regulatory control over how forensic procedures are to be conducted in environmentally sensitive areas. The Bharatiya Nagarik Suraksha Sanhita (BNSS), despite its progressive overhaul of procedural law, remains silent on the ecological safeguards in forensic investigation. It provides no green code, no mandatory environmental audits, and no obligations for state forensic bodies to coordinate with environmental authorities. The Bharatiya Sakshya Adhiniyam (BSA), although redefining evidentiary parameters, also doesn't impose eco-conscious guidelines for the admissibility of evidence procured through potentially harmful processes. This legislative silence is not just an omission it is a missed opportunity to build an evidence regime that is both reliable and responsible.

Moreover, the disjunct between institutions like the National Forensic Sciences University (NFSU) and the Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change (MoEFCC) exemplifies the fragmented administrative structure. Forensic training, curriculum development, and field protocol design continue in isolation from environmental realities. While agencies like CFSL (Central Forensic Science Laboratory) are geared toward technological advancement, their sustainability metrics are largely absent. The absence of green audits, the lack of interdisciplinary curriculum that combines forensics with environmental ethics, and the failure to involve environmental experts in crime scene management are indicative of a larger epistemic gap between science and sustainability.

This paper also explored whether forensics can go green and the answer, clearly, is yes. From the development of eco-friendly forensic kits to the introduction of solar-powered labs, from curriculum reform to multi-stakeholder environmental protocols the possibilities are real, attainable, and urgently necessary. Green forensics isn't about limiting investigation; it's about innovating responsibly. If the scientific community can decode DNA, map microtraces, and reconstruct events with cutting-edge technology, then surely it can also engineer planet-friendly tools and systems for those purposes.

To move forward, the justice system must embrace a holistic vision of rights a vision that sees justice for victims not as separate from environmental justice. The notion of "One Health", increasingly used in global health and climate discourses, can be extended here: a healthy justice system must be in sync with ecological health. It must recognise that crime scenes are not just sites of human trauma but also parts of living ecosystems forests, rivers, rural landscapes where procedural care must also mean environmental care.It is not enough to collect scientific evidence; how we collect it matters. The tools we use, the waste we generate, the air and water we contaminate in the proces all these become part of the ethical fabric of justice. If the rule of law aims to protect life, it must also protect the conditions that make life possible. And for that, the law must look beyond the courtroom and the laboratory towards the forests, rivers, and air that silently bear the weight of our forensic ambitions. In the end, justice must evolve not just to be swifter or surer, but greener. The future of forensics lies not only in nanotechnology, AI, or precision science, but in its ability to coexist with the earth. True justice cannot come at the cost of another silent victim "our planet."

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