

Bloodstains give him food for thought

Antony Cooper of the CSIR has become the first person from Africa to be invited to a meeting of the Scientific Working Group on Bloodstain Pattern Analysis ([SWGSTAIN](#)). This elite working group is sponsored by the American Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI).

The four-day meeting (3-6 November 2008), attended by some 20 members and a handful of invited guests, was held in Dumfries, Virginia, USA, as it is close to the FBI's forensics lab. Cooper's invited plenary presentation was titled 'Thoughts on characterising bloodstain patterns'.



Antony Cooper

His interest in bloodstain analysis started in 2003, when he attended the 3rd European Academy of Forensic Science Triennial Meeting in Istanbul. He did a presentation on crime mapping at the conference and decided to attend a session on bloodstain analysis.

Cooper thought the classification of bloodstain patterns that surfaced during the session was not as effective as it could be, and discussed his ideas with the session chair. Later, he penned his thoughts in a [three-page document](#) and sent it to the session chair, who passed it on to colleagues and it eventually ended up with the chair of SWGSTAIN's Taxonomy and Terminology Subcommittee. Thus it came about that Cooper was invited to participate in a SWGSTAIN meeting and address the working group.

"The SWGSTAIN meeting brought different schools of thought together with the aim of having consistency and rigour in bloodstain pattern analysis so that evidence can stand up in court," says Cooper. SWGSTAIN works mainly through its subcommittees and he joined the Taxonomy and Terminology Subcommittee, with his expertise in terminology informing discussions in the group. The completed terminology should be made available soon.

"It was quite an experience to be among this group of top detectives and forensics experts, some of whom are now retired and working as consultants. The topics during meals over the four days were usually quite gory, with participants recalling their bloodiest forensic cases," Cooper chuckles.

To add even more colour to his time in the USA, his stay coincided with the presidential election, which was a huge event - "The working group's participants were very professional and did not let this distract them during proceedings or detract from the work at hand. The nation and the media, however, had a field day with some of the major newspapers printing more than 100 000 extra copies as souvenirs," he comments.

As a Fellow of CSIR Built Environment, a computer scientist by training and a geographical information scientist by profession, Cooper dabbles in all kinds of fields. Recently he has been conducting research for the criminal and civil justice system, a study on the standardisation of international addresses, modelling the breakwater armour around harbours, and completing several standards for the Department of Education. And with his most recent interest, international collaboration in bloodstain analysis could be on the cards soon, as Cooper has already been invited to attend the next biannual meeting of SWGSTAIN.