



Registration Number 2008/084809/23

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What is a Polygraph?

A Polygraph is an instrument that when its components are placed and attached onto a person's body, records the physiology being exhibited by the person.

Physiological changes occur when a person answers a question and knows for sure that the answer given is not 100% truthful.

How does a Polygraph Instrument work?

A Polygraph instrument consists of the instrument box and three major components:

Two Pneumatic tubes- that records changes within a person's upper and lower body's movements and respiration;

Two Galvanic plates - that records changes in skin resistance and perspiration;

A Cardiac cuff - that records changes in the heart rate and the diastolic relative blood pressure.

These components records normal body movements when an examinee are subjected to a series of questionings. Any physiological changes that are experienced by the examinee when he or she answers the questions posed to them are then recorded with the normal movements.

By analysing these physiological reactions recorded, a trained and experienced Polygraph Examiner can then be able to give an opinion regarding the examinee's truthfulness regarding the relevant questions posed to him or her.

Who uses Polygraph Examinations and why?

Polygraph examinations are utilized by anyone, any person, any company and any institution that require the need to establish the truth.

For what are Polygraph Examinations utilized?

Specific investigations with the intent to clear the innocent and unmask the guilty person or persons;

General screening investigations with the intension to establish financial losses and the person or the persons responsible therefore;

Background screening of potential new employees, with the intent to establish their truthfulness to the information supplied in their application and the ethical conduct at their previous or current employers.

Assistance to investigations with the intent to verify or discredit statements made by any suspects; witnesses or complainants.

An aid in obtaining truthful statements, hidden evidence and any additional investigation leads.

Below are some interesting facts about polygraph examinations:

Accuracy:

Over 250 studies done over the past 75 years regarding the soundness, correctness and consistency of polygraph testing by the American Polygraph Association (APA) has placed the accuracy of the polygraph examination result at 98 percent.

The American Polygraph Association (APA) undertook an exhaustive review of all the peer-reviewed publications on polygraph testing that represented field practices and which met the requirements of the American Polygraph Association's (APA) standards of practice.

A meta-analysis was conducted, and a report was completed in late 2011. An executive summary of the report is freely available and it can be downloaded by visiting the Executive Summary of the Meta-Analytic Survey Accuracy of Validated Polygraph Techniques. The executive summary reports that 38 studies satisfied the qualitative and quantitative requirements for inclusion in the meta-analysis. These studies involved 32 different samples, and described the results of 45 different experiments and surveys. They include 295 scorers who provided 11 737 scored results of 3 723 examinations, including 6 109 scores of 2 015 confirmed deceptive examinations, 5 628 scores of 1 708 confirmed truthful exams.

Nervousness:

Nervousness should not affect the results of a polygraph examination. Any examinee is expected to be nervous when taking a polygraph examination, whether they are planning on answering the relevant questions truthfully or not.

Nervousness is taken into account and any experienced polygraph examiner should only take note of action specific responses.

CCMA, Disciplinary Hearings and Labour Courts:

Although polygraph examinations are considered to be quite accurate if conducted correctly in accordance with national and international standards and requirements it is not accepted as the only evidence in any matter, it is only considered and accepted as supporting evidence.

The main reason therefore is the fact that no polygraph examination can be duplicated and therefore the process and the result cannot be challenged or questioned.