



Standard Practice for Receiving, Documenting, Storing, and Retrieving Evidence in a Forensic Science Laboratory¹

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1. Scope

1.1 This practice describes procedures and techniques for protecting and documenting the integrity of physical evidence with respect to suitability for scientific testing, and admissibility as evidence in criminal or civil litigation.

2. Summary of Practice

2.1 Physical evidence is provided with a traceable paper trail documenting the chain of custody and processes to which the evidence has been subjected.

3. Significance and Use

3.1 Prior to its presentation in court, a foundation must be established showing how evidence was collected, who collected the evidence, where it was collected, who has had custody of the evidence, and when changes of custody have occurred.

3.2 If the procedures outlined in this practice are followed, the chain of custody with respect to the evidence while it is in the custody of the forensic laboratory will be protected.

4. Procedure

4.1 *Identifying the Evidence:*

4.1.1 When evidence from a particular incident is first brought to the laboratory, assign it a unique numeric or alphanumeric case number, and use that case number to identify the submitted evidence and all subsequent items of evidence submitted from the same incident or case.

4.1.1.1 Record case numbers in a permanent laboratory record along with the following information: case number, date the case was opened, and the submitter of the evidence.

4.1.1.2 If delivered in person, identify the person delivering the evidence and record that person's name in the record of the chain of custody.

4.1.1.3 Maintain a record of the chain custody. Include in the record at least the following information: case number, item

number, description, person submitting the evidence, person receiving the evidence, and date the evidence was received.

4.1.2 If requested, provide a signed evidence receipt to the submitter.

4.1.3 When a case number is assigned, create a case file identified by the case number.

4.1.4 In addition to the case number, identify each container or piece of evidence with a sequential item number.

4.1.5 In the event evidence which is received is other than as stated on the container or accompanying documents, or if the condition of the evidence is not as stated on the container or accompanying documents, document and photograph the evidence and packaging, and notify the client or submitting agency as soon as possible.

4.1.6 Retain packing material necessary to maintain the chain of custody or which may be relevant to the integrity of the evidence.

4.2 *Documentation of Testing Procedures:*

4.2.1 Each individual laboratory shall maintain a current record identifying what evidence is in the laboratory for analysis, its current status, and the date the evidence is removed from the laboratory.

4.2.2 Whenever practical, retain in a case file all notes, test data, and other documentation generated during the inspection of the sample. Otherwise, keep summary information or photocopies of original notes in the case file and refer to the location of the original documentation.

4.2.3 Retain copies of reports generated as the result of the examination or inspection of evidence in the case file.

4.3 *Alteration of Evidence:*

4.3.1 Do not alter a piece of evidence any more than is absolutely necessary to obtain a valid analysis.

4.3.1.1 It is recognized that there are some types of analyses which require the consumption or substantial alteration of the evidence. Carefully document such consumption or alteration of the evidence.

4.3.2 Whenever possible, and when the accuracy of the analysis will not be affected, maintain an adequate portion of the evidence for testing by other methods or other laboratories.

4.3.3 Package samples in containers, and store in a manner which will maintain the sample in the same condition in which it was submitted to the laboratory.

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4.3.3.1 Different types of samples have different container requirements. The individual analyst is responsible for ensuring that the sample is properly packaged.

4.3.3.2 When requested, the laboratory staff shall provide instructions to the submitter in proper methods of packaging evidence.

4.3.3.3 A laboratory employee competent to evaluate the material shall determine whether improper packaging has diminished or destroyed the value of the material for laboratory analysis.

4.3.3.4 In the event that an item is submitted to the laboratory that may have no apparent, or diminished, value as evidence, or for laboratory analysis, the laboratory shall take the necessary steps to preserve the chain of custody of that item. Notify the submitter as soon as practical.

4.3.3.5 In the event that the material has value for laboratory analysis, the laboratory shall be responsible for ensuring that the evidence is properly packaged and labeled at the time of submission.

4.4 Storage:

4.4.1 Protect and store evidence in an orderly, traceable, and retrievable fashion and in a manner which preserves the integrity of the evidence.

4.4.2 Secure the evidence storage area from unauthorized entry.

4.4.3 Maintain adequate records for all evidence placed in the evidence storage area.

4.4.4 Establish procedures for routine maintenance of the contents of the evidence storage area.

4.4.4.1 When evidence is first placed in the evidence storage area, specify procedures for eventual removal. These procedures shall ensure that after a reasonable period of time, the submitting agency is contacted requesting instructions for disposition of the evidence.

4.5 Removal of Evidence:

4.5.1 When evidence is to be removed from the laboratory for return to the submitter, for presentation in court, or for disposal, make appropriate entries in laboratory records.

4.5.1.1 The person receiving the evidence from the laboratory shall be properly identified and shall sign and date a receipt for the evidence. Maintain the signed receipt in the case file.

5. Keywords

5.1 change of custody; evidence documentation; evidence labeling

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