



Standard Guide for Physical Evidence Labeling and Related Documentation¹

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1. Scope

1.1 This guide describes methods to be used for labeling physical evidence collected during field investigations; received in a forensic laboratory; or isolated, generated, or prepared from items submitted for laboratory examination.

1.2 Many types of physical evidence may be hazardous. It is assumed that personnel assigned to the collection, packaging, storing, or analysis of physical evidence will take precautions as appropriate to the evidence.

1.3 *This standard does not purport to address all of the safety concerns, if any, associated with its use. It is the responsibility of the user of this standard to establish appropriate safety and health practices and determine the applicability of regulatory limitations prior to use.*

2. Summary of Practice

2.1 Any individual item of evidence is marked with a numeric or alphanumeric designation that is unique and allows the origin of the item to be unequivocally established.

3. Significance and Use

3.1 By following the procedures specified in this guide, any item of physical evidence will have a traceable audit trail by which the origin, past history, treatment, and analysis of the item can be determined.

3.2 By following these procedures, the chain of custody of any item of physical evidence will be maintained and documented.

4. Marking Evidence Upon Original Collection

4.1 General Requirements:

4.1.1 Each item of evidence will be assigned a unique alphanumeric designator by the investigator who collects the evidence, or by someone designated to assign item numbers.

4.1.2 Whenever possible, sequential numbers will be used for evidence associated with a particular incident, event, or scene.

4.1.3 The location and condition of each item should be documented prior to collection.

4.1.4 Each item should be properly protected in an appropriate manner and marked or tagged with the following information:

4.1.4.1 Item number,

4.1.4.2 Case or incident number,

4.1.4.3 Identification of person who collected item,

4.1.4.4 Date item collected, and

4.1.4.5 Brief description.

4.1.5 If possible, the evidence should be sealed in a tamper-evident container.

4.2 The following procedures are intended as an example of a procedure that will satisfy the requirements of 4.1. They may be adapted to the requirements of a specific incident or agency as required.

4.2.1 At each scene, assign one individual to package, label, and inventory evidence.

4.2.2 Give each scene a separate identification number. This may be the same as the incident or report number, or may be a combination of an incident or report number and a scene-specific number.

4.2.3 Give each item collected at a specific scene a unique sequential number.

4.2.4 Separately package and mark each item with the information called for in 4.1.4.

5. Marking Items Produced During Examination in the Forensic Laboratory

5.1 General Requirements:

5.1.1 Any item isolated, generated, or prepared during laboratory examination should be appropriately protected and marked with a unique designator that can be traced to the original evidence number.

5.1.2 Laboratory records should reflect when the item was isolated, by whom, how the item was isolated, sample designation and description, packaging and storage conditions, and any analytical data.

5.2 The following is an example of a procedure that meets the requirements in 5.1-5.1.2.

5.2.1 The isolated item should be appropriately packaged and the container marked with the following information:

5.2.1.1 Laboratory case number,

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- 5.2.1.2 Original item number,
- 5.2.1.3 Item number,
- 5.2.1.4 Brief description of the item,
- 5.2.1.5 Date item prepared, and
- 5.2.1.6 Initials of examiner.
- 5.2.2 A typical numbering scheme is illustrated below:

- Item 1—Coat
- Item 1-1—Debris removed from front of coat
- Item 1-1-1—Slide containing fiber(s) from debris
- Item 1-1-2—Bindle containing hair from debris

Item 1-2—Debris from back of coat

6. Records

6.1 Contemporaneously made records should include the following information:

- 6.1.1 Date of receipt of evidence, and
- 6.1.2 Method of packaging, marking and storage, specifically referring to packaging, marking, or storage that might affect the integrity of the evidence.

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