

CRIME SCENE PROCEDURES III.

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Evidence Collection

Investigators should perform the evidence collection process in a systematic and careful manner. The process begins with the preliminary crime scene survey/walk-through, followed by a determination of the evidence collection sequence to be used.

The evidence collection sequence may be based on the following information:

- The scene location: interior, exterior, within a vehicle.
- The condition of the evidence: either fragile or stable.
- Weather conditions which might affect the scene or evidence within.
- Scene management considerations which may alter or contaminate the evidence.
- Additional processing techniques that may need to be conducted at the scene with specialized personnel.

Investigators should use the appropriate equipment when collecting evidence. Collection equipment that may come into contact with evidence should be sterile.

The following equipment may be used in the evidence collection process:

- Latex gloves/nitrile gloves (N-DEX, nonlatex).
- Forceps.
- Tweezers.
- Scalpels.
- Swabs.
- Paper bags.
- Plastic bags.
- Cardboard boxes.
- Wrapping paper.
- Hand tools.
- Thermometer.
- Plastic 5 gallon bucket with lid.

Collection Methods

The swabbing collection technique should be used for the recovery of biological evidence in a dried or liquid state. Best practice techniques include the following:

Dried Material Collection Technique

- With gloved hands, slightly moisten the swab with distilled water. (The swab should be damp but not overly wet.)
- Thoroughly rub the stained area using a single moistened swab for a small stain and multiple swabs for a large stain. When only a small amount of the stain is available, concentrate as much of the stain as possible on the tip of the swab.
- Air-dry the swabs.
- Place each swab into separate package.
- This package may be placed inside a paper envelope.
- Collect a substrate/control sample from an unstained area using the same techniques.

Liquid Material Collection Technique

- A. When suspected biological evidence is found on clothing or other absorbent surfaces, transport it to the laboratory in an appropriate container. Wet evidence should not be folded over on itself. Use paper wrapping to prevent contamination during the transfer. This will protect bloodstain patterns and prevent cross-contamination between stains on one item. The item should be air-dried thoroughly in a drying locker and packaged in a container suitable for dried evidence.
- B. If the suspected biological evidence is in a liquid form on a fixed surface that cannot be transported (i.e., concrete floor), the substance should be recovered using the following swab technique:
 1. With gloved hands, swab the liquid material allowing the swab to absorb as much of the substance as possible. Multiple swabs should be obtained when a large quantity is available.
 2. Thoroughly air-dry each swab.
Package the swab inside an appropriate container.
 3. Collect a substrate/control sample from an unstained area using the same techniques.

Evidence Marking and Packaging

All evidence collected at a crime scene, or received at or during a crime scene investigation, is inventoried and packaged prior to leaving the scene to prevent loss or cross-contamination. Mark the item of evidence when possible. Evidence which cannot be marked, such as soil, hair and stains, should be placed in an appropriate container or envelope. Marking some items directly may interfere with forensic analysis of the item. Always mark the outer packaging.

When marking evidence directly, include the following:

- Agency case number.
- Item number.
- Date recovered or received.
- Investigator's initials.

Evidence that has been inventoried, marked and prepared for submittal (or to be returned to the investigating agency) is packaged in an appropriate container and labeled per agency protocol.

All outer packaging is marked with the following information:

- Agency case number.
- Item number.
- Description of the item(s).
- Investigator's name or initials.

Containers that have been inventoried and marked are sealed with agency-approved evidence tape prior to submittal or release to the custody of the investigating agency. Evidence tape is used to seal the packaging and is marked with the investigator's name or initials and the date sealed.

Establishing the Chain of Custody

The chain of custody is a tracking document beginning with detailed scene notes that document where the evidence was received from or collected. The chain of custody is initially established when an investigator takes custody of evidence at a crime scene, or when evidence is received from an officer or detective at, or from, the crime scene.

The chain of custody is established through a process that includes the following:

- Take notes, including documenting the recovery location, the time and date recovered or received, description of the item, condition of the item and any unusual markings or alterations to the item.
- Collect, preserve, mark and package the evidence.
- Seal the evidence.
- Create the inventory list.
- Prepare the chain-of-custody documentation.

Transfer of Evidence to Property Room

Many agencies transfer evidence to a property room prior to submission to a crime laboratory. Property room documentation or secure electronic transfer is used when the investigator submits evidence to the property room.

The associated information may include the following:

- Agency case number.
- Type of evidence.
- Officer responsible for the investigation: the name, rank and identification number of the officer for whom the evidence was recovered. The official laboratory report is addressed to this officer.
- Transporting officer: the name, rank, identification number and assignment of the investigator.
- Signature or other identifier of responsible officer and date prepared; the date the evidence is submitted to the property room.
- Comment: the address where the incident was located, or where the evidence was recovered.

The list of the evidence/property may include:

- Number each evidence item sequentially.
- Quantity of items included, e.g., 10 spent shell casings.
- Serial number of the item, e.g., VCR, handgun.
- Item description.
- Status: e.g., Submit for analysis, Hold, or RTC (releasable, return to claimant or owner).

Chain of Custody

The chain of custody documents the transfer of evidence/property from an investigator to another individual, location or agency.

The following information is included in the chain of custody:

- List of evidence: the item number and a brief description.
- All transfers must include the date and time of transfer.
- The signature of the individual releasing the evidence to another individual or location.
- The signature of the individual transporting the evidence.
- The signature of the individual receiving the evidence from another individual or location.
- Reason for the transfer as needed.

Reporting

Two reporting formats may be used by an agency. The crime scene report is used to report crime scene activities and processing results. The second is used when analyzing evidence in the laboratory.

- A crime scene report may be used for reporting scene activities. Investigators may prepare a draft/outline of their scene report per agency policy and later prepare a final report.
- A laboratory examination report is used for reporting evidence analysis performed by laboratory personnel.

Both types of reports are reviewed. The process may include an administrative and a technical review. Generally, a copy of the completed report is distributed to the prosecutor and the submitting agency.

Content courtesy of the Indiana State Police.