

TENNESSEE BUREAU OF INVESTIGATION

Forensic Services Division

Violent Crime Response Team Standard Operating Procedures Evidence Handling



7.0 Crime Scene Evidence Handling

7.1 Purpose

It is important that all evidence is handled, packaged, and stored in a way that will ensure its integrity. All VCRT members shall be responsible for ensuring that evidence is not lost or contaminated. All evidence recovered at a crime scene or received by a VCRT member at or during a crime scene investigation shall be documented, marked for identification, and packaged before departing the scene.

7.2 Documentation of Evidence

7.2.1 Evidence Collected from the Scene

The VCRT Leader (or designee) shall:

- Take custody of the evidence
- Coordinate the receipt and submittal of all recovered evidence to the Evidence Receiving Unit
- Maintain all case information and an inventory of the evidence recovered from the scene and transported to the laboratory
- Compile the necessary paperwork associated with the intake of the evidence, review these documents to ensure that the item designations, descriptions, and the chain of custody are properly documented, and sign the completed Request for Examination form

7.2.2 Evidence Submitted in the Field

7.2.2.1 Members of the VCRT, as an extension of the TBI Crime Laboratory, may accept evidence in the field from TBI Criminal Investigators or from representatives of other law enforcement agencies.

7.2.2.2 This evidence shall be accompanied by a completed TBI Request for Examination form and shall meet all the requirements for documentation, packaging, and storage.

7.2.2.3 The submitting officer and the receiving VCRT member shall both sign the Request for Examination form.

7.2.2.4 The receiving VCRT member shall initiate and document the chain of custody on the Request for Examination form.

TENNESSEE BUREAU OF INVESTIGATION

Forensic Services Division

Violent Crime Response Team Standard Operating Procedures Evidence Handling



7.2.3 Digital Evidence

7.2.3.1 Digital evidence may be recovered at a crime scene in many formats. VCRT members are responsible for the collection, handing, and the storage of digital evidence.

7.2.3.2 Due to the unique challenges with digital evidence, it may be necessary to contact someone in the TBI Technical Services Unit for consultation.

7.2.4 Firearms Evidence

7.2.4.1 All firearms being submitted as evidence shall be checked as soon as possible for safety purposes.

7.2.4.2 A commissioned Forensic Scientist from the Firearm/Toolmark Identification Unit, a commissioned Forensic Scientist who has been trained by the Firearms/Toolmark Identification Unit, or other trained designee can perform this safety check.

7.2.4.3 Any firearm which the Forensic Scientist deems "at risk" and not obviously unloaded, must be pointed in a safe direction or pointed down into a bullet trap device when being checked.

7.2.4.4 After the firearm has been checked, the bottom of the request form will be initialed and dated by that individual. If the evidence was sealed prior to the gun check, the Forensic Scientist or designee will reseal the evidence and initial the seal.

7.3 Packaging of Evidence

The materials used to package the evidentiary items depend on the type of evidence recovered, the condition of the evidence, and the subsequent analyses to be conducted. All packaging materials shall be clean and unused.

7.3.1 General Evidence Packaging Guidelines

- Use appropriate packaging for the items being packaged
- Protect the evidence
- Protect yourself and others
- Package all evidence separately (whenever possible)
- Consider all analyses that may be conducted



TENNESSEE BUREAU OF INVESTIGATION

Forensic Services Division

Violent Crime Response Team Standard Operating Procedures Evidence Handling

- Allow moist evidence to air-dry before packaging (whenever possible)
- Sharp or smaller items of evidence, such as bullet fragments, hair, fibers, paint, etc., shall be placed into a petri dish, druggist fold, small plastic bag, envelope, etc. before being placed into packaging that may tear or have openings.

7.3.2 Marking Items of Evidence

All evidence packaging will be marked. These markings will include, at a minimum:

7.3.2.1 At the scene:

- Who collected the evidence
- What is in the package
- When it was packaged (e.g., date and time)
- Where was it collected from

NOTE: The “what” and “where” may be discerned by a marker number that corresponds to information recorded in the VCRT members notes.

7.3.2.2 Prior to submittal into the Evidence Receiving Unit

- Agency name (e.g., TBI – Middle, West, East, Upper East)
- Agency case number

7.3.3 Sealing Items of Evidence

7.3.3.1 Evidence should be under proper seal prior to transport from the crime scene to the laboratory.

7.3.3.2 There are some cases where evidence may not be suitable for proper seal in the field (e.g., large evidence or evidence that may require drying prior to submission). This evidence may be transported under temporary seal at the VCRT Leader’s discretion. A temporary seal is any measure that prevents loss or deleterious change during transport.

7.3.3.3 Evidence shall be under proper seal when submitted to the laboratory’s Evidence Receiving Unit. Large evidence items may be tagged in lieu of proper seal.

TENNESSEE BUREAU OF INVESTIGATION

Forensic Services Division

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7.4 Storage of Evidence

7.4.1 Upon returning to the laboratory, all recovered evidence will be placed into a secure limited access evidence storage site until such time as it can be submitted into the Evidence Receiving Unit.

7.4.2 A secure drying area will be used to dry clothing or other evidentiary materials contaminated with blood or other substances. Upon returning to the laboratory, the VCRT Leader (or designee) will place the damp items recovered at a crime scene in a secure drying area. Once secure, access will be limited to VCRT members only.