

**TENNESSEE BUREAU OF INVESTIGATION**  
*Forensic Services Division*

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Firearm/Toolmark Standard Operating Procedures Manual  
Evidence Handling Procedures

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**3.0 Evidence Handling Procedure**

**3.1 Scope:** This policy outlines the evidence handling procedures utilized by the TBI Firearm and Toolmark Identification Unit (FTIU). Adherence to these procedures will ensure the integrity of the evidence is maintained.

To minimize the risk associated with the mishandling of evidence by inexperienced personnel, competency testing in evidence handling will occur with mock samples prior to performing any examinations on evidence samples.

**3.2 Precautions/Limitations:** None.

**3.3 Related Information:**

- 3.3.1** TBI Quality Assurance Manual
- 3.3.2** Evidence Receiving Unit's Procedures Manual
- 3.3.3** FTIU Training Manual

**3.4 Instruments:** None.

**3.5 Reagents/Materials:** None.

**3.6 Hazards/Safety:**

**3.6.1** It is the responsibility of the firearm examiner to employ appropriate safety and health practices. Safe firearm handling procedures shall be strictly followed at all times.

**3.7 Reference Materials/Controls/Calibration Checks:** None.

**3.8 Procedures/Instructions**

**3.8.1 Chain of Custody**

The official Chain of Custody for evidence handling will be the electronic chain of custody housed in the Laboratory Information Management System (LIMS). Evidence transfers will be electronically recorded using the barcode system.

**3.8.1.1** Evidence received into the crime laboratory will be stored in the laboratory's main evidence storage in the Evidence Receiving Unit, known as the Primary Evidence Vault (PEV), until it is requested by the Forensic Scientist or Forensic Technician for examination. The PEV is a barcoded location and evidence will be scanned electronically into and out of this location.

**3.8.1.2** All evidence received by the Forensic Scientist or Forensic Technician in the FTIU will be scanned electronically to them from the Forensic Technician in the Evidence Receiving Unit. Evidence received from another unit will be scanned electronically from the Forensic Scientist or Forensic Technician assigned to that unit.

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**3.8.1.3** Once the evidence is scanned electronically to the Forensic Scientist or Forensic Technician in the FTIU, it is in their possession and no additional scanning is necessary. The evidence can then be stored in the Personal Storage Location (PSL) assigned to that individual or in the Unit Bulk Storage Location (UBSL) of the Nashville Lab. The PSL encompasses both the work station storage and evidence lockers. The PSLs are locked storage locations accessible by only the Forensic Scientist or Forensic Technician assigned to them as well as the FTIU Supervisor or his/her immediate supervisor. The Nashville Unit Bulk Storage Location is a secure storage area located in the Unit's Evidence Vault, and is accessible by card-key, combination lock, and keyed lock.

**3.8.1.4** Evidence in the process of being examined may be left out at work units for short periods of time (lunch, breaks, etc.), but must be stored and locked in the PSL or UBSL overnight.

**3.8.1.5** Evidence submitted to another Forensic Scientist for verification does not have to be scanned electronically. If the verification takes more than one day, the evidence must be stored overnight in a secured storage location.

**3.8.1.6** Evidence transferred between Regional Crime Labs for verification must be sealed and initialed for transport, with all transfers recorded electronically. If the LIMS system is disabled or unavailable, the Chain of Custody will be handwritten on an Evidence Transfer Log, and this information will be added to the electronic Chain of Custody when LIMS becomes available. The handwritten record will be retained in the original case file.

**3.8.1.7** While examination is in progress, the case is considered active. Active casework evidence can be in the possession of a Forensic Scientist or Forensic Technician for ninety (90) days. This includes storage in both the PSL and UBSL. After ninety days, the evidence must be returned to the PEV, or documented in a departure from protocol memorandum.

**3.8.1.8** Although the LIMS generated electronic Chain of Custody will be the official Chain of Custody for the case, it is at the examiner's discretion to also maintain a written Chain of Custody in his or her case notes. In the event of LIMS failure, this unit will utilize hand written Chain of Custody records as outlined in the Evidence Receiving Unit's Procedure Manual.

### **3.8.2 Evidence Handling**

Prior to handling evidence within the Firearm and Toolmark Identification Unit, any individual who performs laboratory activities involving evidence shall successfully complete a competency test in the proper handling of evidence. Completion of this competency test will be documented by the FTIU Supervisor/Technical Leader or designated Training Officer and will remain on file within the Firearm and Toolmark Identification Unit.

**3.8.2.1** All cases received into the FTIU will be logged into a log book that will contain the submitting agency, lab number, victim and/or subject's name, date entered, date completed, examiner, and administrative reviewer (Nashville Lab Only).



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**3.8.2.2** All evidence received by a Forensic Scientist or Forensic Technician will be recorded electronically as stated above.

**3.8.2.3** All evidence packaging will be identified by laboratory number, exhibit number, and initials.

**3.8.2.4** Proper safety precautions are to be used when handling evidence with possible biological hazardous materials, such as bullets and clothing. Proper PPE should be worn.

**3.8.2.5** Proper safety precautions are to be used when dealing with firearms and ammunition. Safe Firearm Handling Procedures will be followed.

**3.8.2.6** All evidence, including sub-divided items, will have a unique exhibit number and will be tracked in the LIMS system.

**3.8.2.7** At a minimum, all evidence will be marked with initials for identification purposes unless it is too small to mark. If an item (bullet/bullet fragment) is too small to mark, the proximal container may be marked. This should be noted in the case file.

Exceptions to the above are:

- Law enforcement firearms and other firearms under special circumstances (stolen, wildlife, etc.).
- NIBIN-only firearms at the request of the submitting agency.
- Multiple cartridges received as evidence. The proximal container may be marked and sealed.

**3.8.2.8** After completion of testing, and before returning the firearm(s) to the Evidence Receiving Unit, make the firearm visually safe. This can be accomplished by placing a cable tie through the action or other suitable means.

**3.8.2.9** When examination is completed, all evidence packaging will be placed under proper seal and initialed.

**3.8.2.10** Evidence will be returned to the Evidence Receiving Unit, or another Forensic Scientist or Forensic Technician, with that transfer recorded electronically.

**3.9 Records:** The electronic version of the Chain of Custody housed in the Laboratory Information Management System (LIMS) is the official Chain of Custody. It is at the examiner's discretion to supplement this in the form of handwritten or computer generated notes.

**3.10 Interpretation of Results:** None.

**3.11 Report Writing:** The Chain of Custody may be printed and added to the case file. Evidence receipt information will be included in the administrative portion of the Official Laboratory Report.