



TENNESSEE BUREAU OF INVESTIGATION

Forensic Services Division

Forensic Chemistry Standard Operating Procedure Manual

Evidence Handling Procedures

9.0 EVIDENCE HANDLING

9.1 *Forensic Chemistry Receiving Procedures*

- 9.1.1 The primary evidence vault (PEV) is located in the Evidence Receiving Units. In Nashville, a secondary evidence vault (SEV) is located in the vehicle bay area of the laboratory. These vaults are maintained by the Evidence Receiving Units. Forensic Technicians or designated Forensic Scientists (in Knoxville and Memphis) in the Evidence Receiving Unit will retrieve requested evidence for analysts from the vaults. The Forensic Scientists may choose to retrieve more than one case at a time.
- 9.1.2 The chain of custody for all evidence transfers within the laboratory will be recorded in the Laboratory Information Management System (LIMS). The employee retrieving the evidence from the vault will generate a list of evidence being transferred by scanning the barcodes of each piece of evidence or generating a LIMS evidence container. Once the list of evidence to be transferred is generated, it will be logged from the vault to the Forensic Technician or designated Forensic Scientist and then to the Forensic Scientist who requested the evidence. The employees involved in the evidence transfer will acknowledge the transfer by scanning their personal barcodes and entering their personal identification numbers (PIN) into LIMS. It is the responsibility of the examiner to ensure that the computer transfer is correct at the time of this evidence transfer.
- 9.1.3 Evidence transfers between examiners will be documented in LIMS by scanning barcodes of the evidence or evidence containers in conjunction with the examiners' personal barcodes and PINs.

9.2 *Evidence control during examination*

- 9.2.1 All evidence received from the Evidence Receiving Unit will be secured in the Forensic Scientist's personal storage location (PSL). A Forensic Scientist's PSL is a lockable storage area assigned to them and cannot be accessed by other Forensic Scientists or Forensic Technicians. The Forensic Chemistry Units in Nashville and Knoxville have a unit vault which has additional personal storage locations and a unit bulk storage location (UBSL). The Memphis laboratory does not have a specific unit vault and will use their Primary Evidence Vault. Transfers to and from a PSL do not have to be documented in the Chain of Custody. Nashville and Knoxville's unit bulk storage locations are the lockable cage areas in the unit vault and cannot be accessed by other scientists in the unit unless the key has been checked out to a scientist requiring storage for large items. This procedure is documented by use of a key log. Only one scientist may have access to the UBSL at a time.
- 9.2.2 Transfers to and from the UBSL must be recorded into the LIMS system by electronically scanning the bar codes of the evidence being transferred. All evidence must be stored in locked PSL or in the UBSL overnight. Evidence may be left out in unit work areas while analyses are being performed and for short periods of time such as breaks and lunch periods since these areas are only accessible to laboratory personnel who have been given access to the unit work area by the Regional Crime Laboratory Supervisor. Any evidence transferred to the unit should be limited to 90 days of active examination. If



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any active examination exceeds this time frame, explanation for this extended examination will be documented in the case file.

- 9.2.3 The Forensic Scientist will re-seal the evidence once the examination is complete. The evidence will be sealed in such a way that it will be obvious to the scientist if it is opened at a later date. Outer seals will consist of TBI crime laboratory evidence tape and additional tape if needed. Evidence can be heat-sealed in plastic with evidence tape across the seal. This seal is not considered a “safety seal” as outlined in the Safety chapter. The seal will be marked with the Forensic Scientist's initials and date as well as the laboratory number somewhere on the outer packaging at a minimum.
- 9.2.4 Evidence that is submitted in packaging containing outer zippers will be sealed with uniquely numbered red evidence tie(s). These numbers will be recorded in either the case folder or in the “Notes” section of LIMS.
- 9.2.5 Other case information may be placed on the outer evidence packaging as the supervisor or Forensic Scientist deems necessary. The evidence will be placed in the Forensic Scientist’s locked personal storage location or unit bulk storage location until it is returned to the Evidence Receiving Unit.

9.3 *Returning evidence to the Evidence Receiving Unit*

- 9.3.1 When all analyses are completed, the evidence is returned to the Evidence Receiving Unit. The evidence transfer from the examiner to the individual returning the evidence to the appropriate vault will be documented in LIMS using evidence barcodes and employee PINs and personal barcodes.
- 9.3.2 An electronic chain of custody will be generated for each piece of evidence received by the laboratory. In addition to electronic transfer records, the examiner may also choose to manually record any evidence transfers in his/her case file notes.