

TENNESSEE BUREAU OF INVESTIGATION

Forensic Services Division

Quality Assurance Manual

Process Requirements-Handling of Test and Calibration Items



7 Process Requirements

7.4 Handling of Test/Calibration Items

7.4.1 The TBI Laboratory maintains practices for the transportation, receipt, handling, protection, storage, retention, and/or disposal of items of evidence or calibration instruments. These practices pertain to all items of evidence received into the TBI Laboratory and gives guidance for protecting the integrity of all evidence. Following these practices allows laboratory personnel to protect the interests of the TBI Laboratory and the interests of the submitting agency.

7.4.1.1 Requirements for the handling of evidence received into a TBI Laboratory:

- a) All items received as evidence will be properly sealed and handled appropriately to maintain the integrity of the evidence. The laboratory recognizes large bulky items may not be packaged or properly sealed, but will be stored in a secure, limited access area.
- b) The TBI Laboratory will ensure the integrity of evidence and calibration items by protecting them, or portions concerned, from loss, cross-transfer, or deleterious change during storage, handling, and preparation. Refer to unit specific SOP's or the Evidence Receiving Unit's SOP's for specific or special evidence handling procedures.
- c) Any evidence not in the process of examination must be packaged to protect it from loss, cross-transfer, or contamination and will be stored under proper seal. Where appropriate, temporary seals may be used. Large bulky items may not be packaged or properly sealed, but will be stored in a secure, limited access area. Unattended evidence, which is in the process of examination, must be secure.
- d) The TBI Laboratory uses an electronic chain-of-custody log to document all internal transfers of evidence. This documentation illustrates the evidence received, examined and reported. The electronic chain-of-custody log identifies each person taking possession of an item of evidence or the location of the item. This log includes, at a minimum:
 - an electronic identification of the person/location receiving evidence;
 - the date and time of receipt or transfer;
 - the unique identifier of the evidence. Items created within the lab for immediate or future testing will also be uniquely identified;
 - all evidence transfers between lab personnel are secured by a personal identification number;
 - when evidence is sub-divided in the TBI Laboratory, sub-items will be tracked in the electronic chain-of-custody log; and
 - items collected or created and preserved for future testing will be tracked in the electronic chain-of-custody log.

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- e) It is the responsibility of the examiner to ensure the accuracy of all internal transfers of evidence. During the process of examination, evidence transfers into temporary secure, limited access locations from an examiner need not be noted in the chain-of-custody. For chain-of-custody purposes, the evidence will be considered in an examiner's possession at this time.
- f) Caseworking Units using individual characteristic databases (ICD) shall have a procedure for the operation of the ICD in the Unit SOPs. Caseworking Unit SOP's will address whether individual characteristic database samples are treated as evidence, reference materials, or examination records.
- g) ICD samples treated as evidence shall meet applicable evidence handling requirements.
- h) ICD samples under the control of the laboratory but not treated as evidence shall be:
 - uniquely identified;
 - protected from loss, cross-transfer, contamination, and deleterious change;
 - handled to ensure their utility as comparison materials; and
 - restricted to those persons authorized by the Assistant Director of Forensic Services, the Crime Laboratory Regional Supervisor, and/or the Unit Supervisor.
- i) Communication must take place with the customer regarding:
 - the disposition of all items of evidence received; and
 - items collected or created and preserved for future testing.

This communication may be the Official TBI Report or other form of communication outlined in the applicable Unit SOPs.

Instances may occur when items of evidence are submitted to the laboratory without proper seal (e.g. mailed evidence). A seal will be placed on the evidence as soon as practicable and the incident will be fully documented in the case file.

7.4.2 The TBI Laboratory will uniquely identify items of evidence with an identification barcode. The identification barcode will remain in place while items of evidence are in the TBI Laboratory. Subdivided and secondary evidence will also be uniquely identified. Evidentiary items will be transferred to and from the TBI Laboratory and within the TBI Laboratory following these chain-of custody procedures. The chain of custody will be maintained for each item of evidence.

7.4.2.1 Each item of evidence received into the lab will be marked to ensure that it is uniquely identified and traceable to the TBI Laboratory number. If the evidence does not lend itself to marking, its proximal container or identifying tag will be marked.

7.4.3 Upon receipt of the evidence or calibration items, the condition will be evaluated. Any conditions adverse to quality will be recorded in the case file or instrument

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calibration file. When the suitability of an item for examination/calibration is questionable, when an item does not conform to the description provided, or the method of testing is unclear, the forensic technician or examiner will contact the submitting agency for clarification prior to proceeding with any testing/calibration. There may be times when communicating with the submitting agency prior to the start of casework may be impossible or questions may arise after casework has begun. Documentation of all attempts at communication shall be retained in the case file. The examiner may proceed with examination/calibration after reasonable attempts have been made to resolve the issue. All communication will be documented in the case file or instrument calibration file.

7.4.4 Appropriate handling instructions provided with an item will be followed, when applicable. When evidentiary items have to be stored or handled under specified environmental conditions, these conditions will be maintained, monitored, and recorded.

7.4.5 Evidence collected by TBI Laboratory personnel from a crime scene will be protected from loss, cross-transfer, contamination, and/or deleterious change whether in a sealed or unsealed container during transportation to the TBI Laboratory or other appropriate evidence facility. Where relevant, further processing to preserve, evaluate, document, or render evidence safe will be accomplished prior to final packaging. Additionally, crime scene evidence will be properly identified, packaged, and entered into the TBI LIMS as soon as practicable.

7.4.6 Evidence, such as latent prints and impressions, that can only be recorded or collected by photography or digital capture and the print or impression itself is not recoverable, the photograph, negative, or digital image of the print or impression will be treated as evidence.