



ARKANSAS STATE CRIME LABORATORY



Evidence Receiving Quality Manual

**Executive Director:
Kermit B. Channell, II**

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SECTION 1: PURPOSE/INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this manual is to establish guidelines for maintaining the integrity of the evidentiary chain of custody, to ensure that evidence in its custody can be properly secured and stored, readily retrieved, and that any changes in its custody have been properly and fully documented.

Evidence may be submitted by any law enforcement agency or governmental agency having authority to conduct criminal investigations or by any authority having specific right to do so by state statute. The Executive Director of the Arkansas State Crime Laboratory may however make exceptions to this rule as may be deemed necessary.

This manual does not address every possible facet of evidence handling. However, it is intended to provide information sufficiently specific that, if adhered to, will result in a more effective and efficient process. If a subject is not mentioned in this manual or further clarification is necessary, the Evidence Section Chief or the Section Chief of the area concerned shall be contacted.

SECTION 2: DEFINITIONS

Chain of Custody:

The continual custody of physical evidence from the time it's received to the time of its release from the State Crime Laboratory.

Physical Evidence:

Any substance, material or object submitted that is connected to a criminal investigation.

Evidence Section Chief:

Agency member that has the responsibility for supervision of the evidence technicians and is responsible for the section operating within the guidelines of the QM and helps formulate policies.

Forensic Technician:

Agency member accountable for control and maintenance of all evidence accepted by or stored in the agency's evidence room and must answer to the Evidence Chief.

Evidence Room:

Facilities utilized by the State Crime laboratory to store evidence which have a limited and controlled access.

Evidence Container:

All evidence must be placed inside an approved evidence container for storage while at the Arkansas State Crime Laboratory unless the size or shape of the item makes this impossible.

All containers used to transport and store evidence must be made of suitable material for the placement of barcode labels and marking with a permanent type marker.

All evidence containers except those for biological samples should conform to the following standards:

- Envelopes should measure 4" x 8" or larger (legal size).
- Boxes should not be any larger than 15" x 24" x 46" except firearm boxes which should measure 4 ½" x 9 ½" x 60" or less.
- Paper sacks are strongly discouraged for most submissions but will be accepted as long as the sack is at least 4" x 8" and allows for enough room for repackaging the evidence once it has been removed. This will be determined on a case by case basis and the Forensic Tech shall make this determination.
- Whenever practical, containers should weigh no more than twenty five (25) pounds.
- Sharps, such as a syringe, knife or ice pick should be packaged in a hard puncture resistant package.
- Suitcases, duffle bags, backpacks, knap sacks, pillow cases, garbage bags or other similar type containers are not acceptable as evidence containers.

Properly Sealed:

The condition of an evidence container in which the contents cannot readily escape and if opening the container would result in obvious damage or alteration to the container or its tape seal. All evidence must bear a proper seal which shall include the initials or other identification of the person sealing the evidence.

Tamper proof:

A tape seal that will be destroyed or altered if tampering occurs.

Barcode:

A computer generated identifying group of bars used to identify an item of evidence that can be read by a barcode reader.

Barcode scanner:

An instrument, in the case of the crime lab, that is attached to a computer or is portable and is able to identify an item of evidence by its barcode number.

Transfer:

The change of possession of an item of evidence by use of the computers tracking system in which the time and date of the transaction is recorded.

Computer system:

The network of computers located in the crime laboratory.

Compliance seal:

A piece of Arkansas State Crime Laboratory evidence tape placed perpendicular across the seal or opening of the evidence container which display the initials of the person having received the evidence in a condition which did not meet with the required standards. To be used on evidence received via the United Postal Service or other commercial carrier.

SECTION 3: EDUCATIONAL REQUIREMENTS

Evidence Section Chief:

Must be a high school graduate although some college is desirable. The chief must have a good working knowledge of state law governing the handling and disposition of evidence; see Title 12 Chapter 12 of the Arkansas State Statues. The chief must be able to type and be computer literate.

Forensic Technician:

Must be a high school graduate, be familiar with chain of custody as it applies to the criminal justice system, and must be computer literate and able to type accurately.

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SECTION 4: DUTIES

Evidence Section Chief: Ray Harrison

- Supervise the daily activities of the technicians.
- Maintain records of all personnel assigned to the evidence section including time sheets, vacation and overtime requests.
- Schedule work assignments and review work of the technicians.
- Responsible for the storage and safekeeping of all evidence and the management of the section.
- Responsible for maintaining an effective and efficient system for the management and security of evidence.
- Must be ready to testify in court to the evidence receiving and storage procedures.
- Must be able to handle all personnel problems within the section.
- Must be able to perform all duties required of the technicians.

Evidence Quality Assurance Manager: Andrea Swift

- A Forensic Tech whose job duties shall include those as outlined in Section 1.3.1 of the Lab Quality Manual and shall assume the responsibilities of the section in the absence of the Section Chief.

Forensic Technician:

- Responsible for receiving evidence, data entry of all evidence into the computer, attaching barcode(s), storage and retrieving of evidence.
- The transfer of evidence to analysts or examiners.
- Pick-up, mail-out, and distribution of mail for the agency.
- Available to testify in court.
- Keep evidence receiving and storage area clean.
- Correct errors in the computer.
- Correct storage of evidence.
- Perform inventories.

SECTION 5: PROCEDURES

Receiving Hand Carried Evidence

Step 1:

Check Submission Sheet:

Forensic Technicians should make sure that the person submitting the evidence has signed their name in the appropriate place if applicable. The person signing is responsible for the accurate accounting of the contents of the container as listed on the submission sheet, it should be filled out legibly in ink and contain the minimum required information for data entry.

The Forensic Technician will determine if a new laboratory case number is needed or if there has been a previous submission on this case. The submitting agency/officer should indicate in the appropriate area as to whether previous submissions exist.

All corrections or changes to the submission sheet made by ASCL personnel shall be done with a single line striking through the mistake and initialed by the person making the correction. Information on the submission sheet may not be obliterated or erased and the use of correction fluid or tape shall be prohibited.

Suspect and victim names will be entered into LIMS-plus only if both the first and last names of the individual are supplied on the submission sheet. Individuals referred to by aliases or without both first and last names will not be entered.

Check Evidence Container:

Make sure that the evidence is properly sealed in an approved container. If not, have the person submitting the evidence to correct the problem or correct it for them.

Step 2:

Take in the evidence according to the JusticeTrax® manual(s). Once this has been completed, place the proper barcode label on the evidence.

Step 3:

Make copies of all submission sheets if applicable for the submitting person which shall serve as a receipt of evidence or follow procedures in the JusticeTrax® manual.

Make copies of all submission or evidence report sheets and affix to the corresponding piece of evidence if required. Place the evidence in the appropriate area of the evidence room.

Step 4:

Make case files with labels if that section requires case files and place it in the appropriate basket. Some sections such as Drugs,

Illicit Labs and Latent Prints do not require any type of case file. Place only the submission sheet in their basket.

When additional evidence comes in on an existing case, one of the following must be done: mark the submission sheet with the letters **AE** next to the appropriate section or print out a request report and place those sheets in the proper place.

Receiving evidence by mail:

If the submission sheet is not affixed to the outside of the package, the forensic technician will open the package, remove the submission sheet and reseal the container as prescribed.

If a submission is found to be improperly packaged, the forensic technician will make every attempt to correct the problem. If this is impossible to do or is unsafe, the submitting agency will be contacted, and the evidence will either be returned to them by mail or held for them to pick up. This shall be determined by the Section Chief.

Follow Steps 1 through 4

Receiving evidence from an analyst:

Follow Steps 1 through 4.

Receiving evidence from the ME's office:

Step 1:

Check Evidence Containers

Make sure that they are properly sealed and have barcode labels attached, as well as evidence reports.

Step 2:

Transfer the evidence as per the JusticeTrax® manual.

Step 3:

Make case file folders as needed using labels provided by JusticeTrax®

Step 4:

Put evidence and ME returns in their proper place in the evidence room.

Transferring evidence to an analyst:

Step 1:

The analyst will notify the forensic technician or evidence receiving section of the case work they wish to obtain by means of case file folders or other documentation.

Step 2:

The forensic technician will then pull the requested items from the evidence room making sure that the items pulled match the lab case number listed on the case file folder or other documentation.

Step 3:

Follow the transfer procedures as set forth in the JusticeTrax® manual.

Transferring evidence from an analyst:

Step 1:

The analyst will present to the forensic technician the piece(s) of evidence to be transferred.

Step 2:

Follow the transfer procedures as set forth in the JusticeTrax® manual.

Step 3:

The forensic technician will take the evidence into the evidence room and place it in its proper place.

Releasing Evidence:

All evidence is considered the property of the investigating agency of record. Evidence should be released in person to the submitting agency only. Evidence to be released to someone other than an employee of the submitting agency such as representative requires written permission from the original submitting agency authorizing such action. Once this authorization is on file, other letters of authorization will not be required.

Under certain extenuating circumstances, a verbal request, if approved by the Section Chief or higher authority, will be sufficient to allow such a release for that one time.

The accurate release of agencies evidence is of the utmost importance and certain steps and guidelines must be followed to ensure that the release is correct and proper. Anyone picking up evidence is subject to presenting proper identification and/or authorization.

A copy of the release sheet will be made for the officer.

Special requests from an agency to mail completed evidence will be allowed only if authorized by the Scientific Operations Director or Executive Director.

Procedure for releasing:

Follow the transfer procedures as set forth in the JusticeTrax® manual.

Releasing money:

All money should be hand released, NEVER MAILED.

The officer/person picking up money over \$100 will open the sealed package, count the money, and sign a release form for the exact amount of money received. **AT NO TIME WILL MONEY BE RELEASED WITHOUT IT FIRST BEING COUNTED BY THE FORENSIC TECH RELEASING IT AND THE PERSON SIGNING FOR IT.**

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SECTION 6: STORAGE AREAS

The evidence room is divided into two main parts, the first part is the front work area which is used for the release of evidence back to agencies, houses the Toxicology refrigerator and the Flammable storage cabinets. Located off of the front work area are the firearm and tool mark storage area and the decomposition room. The second part is the main evidence storage area which holds the majority of the evidence either waiting to be worked or waiting to be returned.

Evidence to be worked:

Body fluids and tissues are to be stored in the appropriate refrigerator in the evidence room.

Flammable liquids are to be stored in the flammable cabinets provided.

Personal effects from decomposed bodies are to be stored in the decomposition storage room and case number listed on the roster attached to the door. **The door is to remain closed at all times unless storing or retrieving evidence from the area.**

Each section of the laboratory will have their own plastic bins that will contain evidence that can be contained and sealed in envelopes.

The drug section will have a section of shelves that will contain only drug evidence. **All evidence will be stored in numerical order except that evidence which due to size or other factors would make this impractical.**

Exceptions to the above storage rules can occur (example: a case that has numerous of different items of evidence can be stored in a special area or evidence contained in large boxes that will not fit on the shelves) with permission of the evidence supervisor and is known by all employees in the section.

All evidence put into boxes by lab personnel, forensic technicians, or morgue technicians will be put into boxes that fit on the shelves.

Evidence to be released:

Evidence which has been worked will be stored in the following areas for release to the agencies and/or officers:

- County Sheriff's Departments
- Municipal Agencies
- Federal Agencies
- Fire Departments
- D. T. F.'s

- Miscellaneous City, County and State Agencies
This evidence will be stored in alphabetical order when possible.

Long Term Storage:

As per a verbal agreement between the Arkansas State Crime Laboratory Executive Director and the commanding officer of the Arkansas State Police, their completed evidence will be temporally stored together in the north end of the evidence storage area until such time as it may be picked up. The long term storage of evidence will apply only to this agency and is contingent on the fact that space for such storage exists.

SECTION 7: INVENTORY

The evidence receiving section shall conduct an inventory approximately every six months. This inventory shall apply to and include all evidence held by the Evidence Receiving Section whether waiting to be analyzed or awaiting release. This shall not include those items held by the laboratory if the status of such evidence is “**Retained**” or items currently in possession of or being held by the other sections or the Medical Examiners office.

A written detailed report of the inventory shall be made to the Executive Director upon completion.

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SECTION 8: EVIDENCE ROOM ACCESS

No person(s) other than Evidence Receiving personnel shall enter the secured area of the evidence room without first obtaining authorization from the Section Chief, the Scientific Operations Director, the Assistant Director or the Executive Director. All persons other than Evidence Receiving personnel entering the secured area will first sign in the access log and shall be escorted at all times by someone from the Evidence Section or someone listed in the following paragraph.

The following people shall not require an escort while inside of the secured area: Executive Director, Scientific Operations Director, Asst. Director, Quality Assurance Manager, Health & Safety Manager, Information Technology Manager or any other lab personnel as may be deemed necessary by the Executive Director for the operation of the section.

SECTION 9: HAZARDOUS MATERIAL

Any evidence known or suspected to be contaminated by communicable diseases is to be marked with a biohazard sticker or stamped with the words bio-hazard on the packaged evidence and also on the attached paper work.

Body fluids:

All blood and urine samples are to be marked with a biohazard sticker or stamped with the words bio-hazard on the packaged evidence and also on the attached paperwork. If the body fluid has leaked out of mailed evidence and contaminated the submission sheet, it shall be repackaged if possible and contained in heat sealed plastic and copies made so that they may be handled safely. If hand carried, the evidence will be refused until such time as it is made safe.

All blood and urine samples are to be stored in one of the refrigerators located in the evidence room.

Fetal Tissue:

All fetal tissue samples submitted shall be placed in one of the freezers located in the evidence room until such time that it is transferred. **Fetuses that are older than 12 weeks old must be submitted through the Medical Examiners office.**

Rape Kits:

All rape kits submitted after the year 2004 can be placed on the shelves along with other items of evidence on the case. All rape kits currently being held in the refrigerators located in the evidence room shall remain there until such time as they are completed by the appropriate section.

Firearms:

All firearms submitted as evidence must be unloaded and that information must be attested to on the submission data sheet.

If the firearm is mailed in and the submission data sheet is not marked "unloaded", then the evidence personnel will call the firearms section and request that one of the examiners come down and inspect the weapon. The examiner will then attest that the firearm is unloaded and place that information on the submission data sheet.

Explosives:

Allowed:

Molotov cocktails will be received into the laboratory only if the wick is removed and a small amount of the flammable liquid put into a sealed container for analysis.

Black powder or smokeless propellant may be submitted only in safe containers (such as the original container) and after being approved by the Physical Evidence section of the laboratory.

Not Allowed:

High or low explosives, other explosive devices such as grenades, smoke grenades, explosive chemicals, blasting caps, detonators, detonating cord, fuses, post-blast debris or residues from explosives will not be received into the laboratory. Anyone wishing to submit this type of evidence should contact the local ATF office regarding possible testing.

Flammable liquids:

Small amounts, one pint or less, of flammable liquids that have been properly packaged will be received for analysis. Any amount greater than one pint will have to have a representative sample taken by a analyst from the appropriate section.

Clandestine Labs:

Hand carried - Labs delivered by police officers will not be received into the laboratory until inspected by the Illicit Lab Section or other qualified personnel and rendered safe.

Mailed – At the present time, it is illegal to mail clan labs or samples.

In any case where the Forensic Technician suspects or has reason to believe a case is clan lab related or unsafe, a chemist will be consulted.

The evidence section will not accept clan labs under any circumstances until they have first been checked by a chemist for safety.

The chemist will check the evidence in the presence of the officer in the designated area of the evidence section.

If the submission contains items that will not be retained, that evidence should never leave the officers possession or custody. If a representative sample is to be taken, the chemist will take the officer and the evidence to the appropriate area to retrieve the sample. The submission sheet should be amended to properly

reflect what action was taken. The sample should then be turned over to the officer at which time the chemist will bring the officer back to the evidence section where the officer will then submit the sample(s) that the chemist has rendered safe.

The chemist will not be allowed to take a piece of evidence from the evidence receiving area for any reason once that piece of evidence has been bar-coded without having that piece of evidence transferred to him or her.

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SECTION 10: MONEY

Any money in excess of one hundred dollars (\$100.00) shall be secured in the vault while being held by the evidence receiving section. Any lesser amount can be placed in the proper place on the shelves. Any submission or release of money in excess of one hundred dollars will require an actual count and two signatures of verification by those involved in the transfer, lesser amounts do not.

If the evidence supervisor is not available, the Crime Laboratory Director, Scientific Operations Director, Assistant Director will take possession of the money and lock it in the vault.

Hand carried:

If money is to be tested for the presence of drug residue, the Forensic Technician is to call a drug chemist immediately and the chemist is to assist the officer in shaking down the money. Only the paper containing the shakedown will be submitted to the Drug section. At no time will the chemist take sole possession of the money, nor will it be submitted to the laboratory unless some type of test other a drug test are needed. After the shake down is completed, the officer may then make the submission for latent prints or other testing if required.

Mailed:

If money is submitted by mail, the technician logging in the evidence is to immediately inform the Section Chief or higher authority without delay that money has been received. The money, regardless of the amount, is to be counted in the presence of another technician or the evidence supervisor and will require double initials on the seals. The money will then be assigned a case number and stored in the proper place.

Transferred:

After being worked, money being transferred back to Evidence will require an actual count and two signatures or initials on the seal. This will be done by the analyst and the technician conducting the transfer.

NOTE: If a shortage of money *is discovered on a submission that has been received in the mail*, the submitting officer or their agency *is to be contacted immediately* and informed of the shortage. The shortage is to be documented and signed by the *technician and section supervisor or higher authority*. A copy of the signed documentation is to be sent to the investigating officer *and the original will be stored in the proper place*.