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1. PURPOSE

This procedure outlines the process for the submission and transfer of evidence. FSQA-M2-7.41, [Evidence Examination](#), documents general examination procedures.

2. SCOPE

This procedure applies to all members of Forensic Services that process examination requests and collect or examine evidence.

3. POLICY

See Quality Policies Manual, section 7.4, [Evidence Handling](#).

4. DEFINITIONS

Case Management Terms:

Active: Analyst checks out or signs over evidence; alternatively, member arrival at a crime scene.

Assigned: Request assigned in LIMS and/or evidence is checked out.

Completed: Request is released, usually after administrative review.

Inactive: Request that has not had work performed in six months or longer.

In progress: The period from Assigned to Completed.

Start: Analysis of evidence or observation has begun, and six-month clock begins.

Department Case Number (DR# or GO#): A unique case identifier, whether the MPD *department report number*, an outside agency's case identifier, the Forensic Services LIMS FSS number or a combination of the preceding, together with an item number, which is used to identify evidence.

DPM (Department Policy Manual): The Mesa Police Department (MPD) policy manual.

LIMS (Laboratory Information Management System): Primary Forensic Services system for the management of cases and case records. The vendor is JusticeTrax.

PIN (Personal Identification Number): The PIN is a confidential four-digit number selected by the employee that is used to make evidence transfers secure or to electronically sign or initial.

Proper Seal: A seal that prevents loss, cross transfer, or contamination while ensuring that attempted entry into the container is detectable. A proper seal may include a heat seal, tape seal or a lock. The initials or other identification of the person creating the seal will be placed on the seal or across the seal onto the container when possible.

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5. RESPONSIBILITIES

Unit Technical Leader and Supervisor: Documents Unit-specific evidence handling procedures and ensures procedures are followed.

Administrative Support Assistant (ASA): Processes examination requests and enters them into LIMS. Protects evidence from loss, cross transfer, contamination or deleterious change and ensures that there is a documented chain of custody.

Analysts and Technicians: Protects evidence from loss, cross transfer, contamination or deleterious change and ensures that there is a documented chain of custody.

6. PROCEDURE

Evidence must be handled in such a manner that any changes in its original condition are prevented or minimized to the greatest extent possible. These changes include loss, cross-transfer, contamination and deleterious change.

1. Processing of Requests for Analysis

1. Forensic Services should not routinely initiate an analysis without a Request for Forensic Examination, DPM 3.4.5F1 or electronic equivalent. Exceptions include submissions to the Controlled Substances, Toxicology Units, submissions for the state and national Automated Fingerprint Identification Systems (AFIS) and National Integrated Ballistics Information Network (NIBIN) programs and requests to respond to the Office of the Medical Examiner. Unit manuals will document exceptions to this policy.
2. Outside agencies submitting a request for an examination should submit the Outside Agency Scientific Examination Request, FSQA-F138 or the Gilbert P.D. Request for Forensic Examination FSQA-F143.

2. Receipt of Evidence

1. Evidence from outside agencies submitted directly to Forensic Services should be received using the procedures described in the Laboratory Technician Manual, section FSLT-M1-51, Gilbert Cases, or directly to an examiner.
2. Received evidence should be properly sealed (e.g., heat seal or tape seal) to ensure that its contents cannot be lost or contaminated. Entering the container should result in obvious damage/alteration to the container or its seal.
3. All MPD evidence seals should have a member's initials, ID # and date to document the identity of the person sealing the evidence. The date is only needed if it is not

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already printed on the seal (DPM 3.2.45). Evidence from outside agencies should have a proper seal, although the information on the seal may differ from that required by the MPD.

4. Analysts may refuse to accept evidence that is not properly sealed. Describe the evidence packaging in examination records.
5. If the member chooses to accept improperly sealed evidence, they must properly seal it, unless the evidence is going to be processed immediately. Describe the evidence packaging in examination records.
6. Ensure that the evidence is properly protected from loss, cross-transfer, contamination, and deleterious change, and is sealed and marked. Refer to [*Impounding Evidence and Property*](#), DPM 3.2.45, and the information in this section.
7. If the evidence packaging is damaged, the member should take steps to repair the damage in regard to preventing contamination or loss of the evidence. Describe the damage and repair in the examination records.
 - Alternatively, the complete package can be placed into another container, sealed and marked with the DR number or Forensic Services number, and the LIMS evidence barcode.
8. When items of biological evidence are received in an unsealed condition and require additional drying time (e.g., items obtained from crime scenes or the medical examiner's office) the Forensic Services member will place the evidence in a drying room or cabinet, protecting it from loss, cross transfer, contamination and/or deleterious change.
9. Drying rooms or cabinets will be secured electronically or by lock. Use of the drying rooms is located in the Crime Scene manual, FSCR-M1-12, [*Evidence Handling and Storage within Forensic Services*](#).
10. Evidence too large to be placed in a sealed container, e.g., a door or tire, must be marked for identification with a DR and item number, and an agency barcode. Suspected bullet holes, tool marks, blood spatters, latent prints or other areas of interest should be covered using a suitable packaging material and secured with tape, whenever possible.
11. Document in the case record any sealing or packaging abnormalities, as described in this section.

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12. Unit manuals will indicate when abnormalities or departures in receipt of evidence require work to be halted and the customer contacted prior to beginning or completing the analysis. The discussion with the customer will be documented in the case record.

3. Transfer of Evidence and Chain of Custody

1. Forensic Services chain of custody documentation for internal transfers is maintained in the Laboratory Information Management System (LIMS). The electronic chain of custody began on April 17, 2007. Prior to that date, chain of custody was maintained on paper. After that date, in some circumstances, a chain of custody record might be on paper. In such a case, the paper record(s) is scanned into LIMS and becomes part of the administrative records.
2. A chain of custody record provides a comprehensive and documented history of each case submission. A laboratory chain of custody record shall be established upon transfer of all evidence submissions. Transfer of evidence may be between:
 1. Persons
 2. Storage location and person or vice versa
 3. Crime scene and person
 4. Mail delivery service and person
3. LIMS records transfers of evidence within Forensic Services using a barcode system to identify the unique laboratory and submission numbers on evidence. Barcodes also identify individuals and locations. LIMS automatically records the date and time of the receipt or transfer.
 - Transfers of evidence should be recorded in LIMS contemporaneously with the physical transfer of evidence to a location or person. The evidence transfer must be recorded in LIMS prior to breaking the seal on the evidence package and before the end of the analyst's workday.
4. Evidence transfers within Forensic Services must be secure. This may be established by using an electronic transfer using a PIN (Personal Identification Numbers) in LIMS or documented by a handwritten transfer on the chain of custody.
 - Members may change their PINs at any time using the "Utilities" menu and selecting "Change Your PIN."
5. If LIMS is not operational, all paper chains of custody will be retained on file until such time as the data can be entered into LIMS. Use the [Chain of Custody](#) form, FSQA-F120.

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6. Scan a paper chain of custody from an outside agency into LIMS on the appropriate request.
7. When evidence (parent items) is subdivided, the sub-items (LIMS child items) will be tracked to the same extent that the original items of evidence are tracked.
8. The chain of custody in LIMS documents the transfer of evidence to the MPD Evidence Section (final Forensic Services LIMS storage location), or an outside agency courier or shipping company.
9. The LIMS chain of custody may differ from the MPD Report Management System (RMS) chain of custody due to the evidence check-in procedure used by the MPD Evidence Section.
10. Temporary placement of evidence in a personal locker is considered under the control of the analyst and will not require documentation on the electronic chain.
11. Evidence stored in a storage location, other than a personal locker, should not remain in the custody of the analyst in LIMS. Exceptions to this policy must be documented in Unit manuals.
12. The chain of custody can be corrected when needed by a LIMS Administrator. The changes are recorded in the LIMS Correction Reporting Log.

4. Safety

Forensic Services members handle potentially hazardous evidence including biological fluids, firearms and unknown chemicals. Proper handling of evidence is paramount for the safety of staff. Consult the Technical Leader, Forensic Services *Safety Manual*, FSQA-M5 and Safety Officers or Manager regarding the safe analysis of specific items of evidence.

1. Handle *all* blood, body fluids and other potentially infectious materials using universal precautions. Refer to the Safety Manual, FSQA-M5-07, [*Bloodborne Pathogens Standard*](#).
2. Package contaminated evidence packages into a clean external package for subsequent safe handling. Seal the external package.
3. Recognizing the potential for serious injury or death, *safety* must be of paramount concern for personnel handling firearms. Members will follow these firearms procedures:
 1. Members required to handle firearms during any aspect of their duties will be trained in the safe handling of firearms.

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2. When working with firearms evidence, refer to the Firearms Unit Manual, FSFA-M1.
3. When in doubt, obtain assistance from a member of the Firearms Unit on the proper handling of a particular firearm and/or consult the Safety Manual, section FSQA-M5-09, *Hazards Specific to Individual Units/Duties*.
4. Ensure that chemicals, including any known carcinogens, mutagens, toxic substances, and volatile or malodorous compounds are properly labeled and packaged according to safety policy and SDS recommendations, and handle only in a fume hood, using personal protective equipment.
5. Ensure any sharp item (syringe, knife, glass, etc.) is packaged in a fashion that prevents the item from puncturing the package and potentially injuring members.
6. Do *not* accept explosive or incendiary devices as evidence or bring them into the laboratory without permission of the Unit Supervisor or Forensic Services Administrator. The MPD Hazardous Devices Team must render these devices safe.
7. Chemical, Biological, Radiological, and Nuclear Materials (CBRN)
 1. Forensic Services is not equipped to handle or analyze radioactive material, biological or chemical warfare agents.
 2. Forensic Services members will not accept CBRN material for either transport or analysis.
 3. Notify the Unit Supervisor or Technical Leader, Forensic Services Administrator, and Safety Manager or Safety Officer if evidence is suspected CBRN.
 4. Call 911 immediately if a member is exposed to possible CBRN and notify Forensic Services management.

5. Storage of Evidence

1. Evidence will only be left in secured areas. Do not take evidence into office areas. The Latent Print Unit and Admin Business Unit offices are exempt from this requirement.
2. Never leave evidence alone with anyone who is not a member of Forensic Services.
3. Freezers and refrigerators used to store evidence are secured and the temperatures are monitored.
4. Biological stain evidence for DNA typing (excluding metal items) will be retained in frozen storage when not being processed.

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5. Blood or urine samples for blood alcohol or toxicological analysis will be stored under the appropriate conditions (refrigeration, freezer) pending analysis.
6. Evidence under active analysis may remain unsealed during the examination.
 1. While unattended during breaks or overnight the evidence must be secured in a manner that protects it from loss, cross contamination and/or deleterious change.
 2. Larger items of evidence (vehicles, doors, bikes, etc.) will be appropriately labeled and stored within the unit using “Evidence, Do Not Touch” signs.
 3. Evidence, as much as possible, will be stored in a sealed condition.
 4. Opened evidence containers (e.g. bags, baggies, etc.) held in secure areas should be closed during temporary storage to prevent accidental cross-contamination.
7. Evidence in active cases that are subject to frequent requests for examination may be treated as “evidence in the process of examination.”
 1. Such evidence may be stored unsealed in a secure, limited access area, as long as the evidence is protected from loss, cross-transfer, contamination and/or deleterious change.
 2. A request that has not had any work performed for six months or greater is inactive. Inactive cases are no longer in the process of examination and should be closed in LIMS and the evidence properly sealed until analysis resumes or a new request is received.
8. Evidence in inactive cases will be returned to the MPD Evidence section, originating agency, or final storage location if there are no pending requests after assignment to an analyst.

6. Entry into a Locked Evidence Storage Location by Another Member

In the circumstance where an evidence locker must be opened and evidence removed by a person other than the member who placed the evidence in the locker (as shown by the chain of custody), the Unit Supervisor will follow the procedure in FSQA-M2-7.42, [Evidence Storage Access](#).

7. Transportation of Evidence

1. Forensic Services members will not transport evidence to court, except for latent lifts and latent photographs.

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2. Evidence movement within the Forensic Services building is not considered transportation. Transportation occurs when evidence is transferred between Forensic Services and the MPD Evidence Section or is transferred to an outside agency.
3. Transported evidence must be properly sealed and transported in a way to prevent loss, cross transfer and/or deleterious change with the exception of some crime scene evidence.
4. Evidence transported from a crime scene to Forensic Services may be unsealed but must be transported in a way to prevent loss, cross transfer and/or deleterious change. Refer to the Crime Scene Unit Manual, FSCR-M1-34, [Evidence Collection and Preservation](#).
5. Evidence transported to another facility will not be left in an unoccupied vehicle overnight.

8. Release of Evidence

1. Upon completion of the analysis:
 1. Ensure that the evidence is properly sealed to protect it from loss, cross-transfer, contamination, and deleterious change, and is properly marked. Refer to [Impounding Evidence and Property](#), DPM 3.2.45, and the information in this section.
 2. Return the evidence to:
 1. MPD Evidence Section
 2. Submitting agency
 3. Forensic Services long-term storage locations:
 - Latent Print File
 - Photo Archives
 - Digital Image Management System
 - Shoe Tire File
2. Outsourcing: Examination of Evidence by an Outside Laboratory
 1. Police Department members can request scientific examinations not performed by Forensic Services such as gunshot residue, trace evidence, or document comparisons by following the procedure described in DPM 3.4.5, [Forensic Services – Case Acceptance Criteria](#), and completing form DPM 3.4.5F1, [Request for Forensic Examination](#).

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2. The Forensic Services member releasing the evidence must maintain the appropriate documentation and chain of custody for each of the items released.
3. Refer to the Laboratory Technician Manual, FSLT-M1-16, [Outsourcing Requests](#).
3. Evidence released from Forensic Services should be performed through LIMS, but if LIMS is unavailable, use form FSQA-F120 [Chain of Custody](#). The member releasing the evidence must sign the receipt as does the person receiving the evidence. Scan the form into LIMS on the appropriate request.
4. Forensic Services does not dispose of or destroy evidence. Evidence is transferred back to the MPD Evidence Section or submitting agency for disposal or destruction. Any exceptions to this policy must be documented in a Unit manual.

7. RELATED DOCUMENTS AND LINKS

FSQA-M1-7.4, [Evidence Handling](#)

FSQA-M2-7.41, [Evidence Examination](#)

FSQA-M2-7.42, [Evidence Storage Access](#)

FSCR-M1-34, [Evidence Collection and Preservation](#).

DPM 3.4.5, [Forensic Services – Case Acceptance Criteria](#)

DPM 3.2.45, [Impounding Evidence and Property](#)