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7.4.1 Evidence Handling Procedures

The integrity of test items (evidence) will be protected through strict adherence to MPD and Forensic Services policies and procedures related to the handling of evidence. Forensic Services has procedures for the transportation, receipt, handling, protection, storage, retention and/or disposal of test items (evidence). The procedures include all provisions necessary to protect the integrity of the test item, and the interests of the laboratory. They are found in FSQA-M2-7.40, [Evidence Handling](#) and FSQA-M2-7.41, [Evidence Examination](#), and DPM 3.2.45, [Impounding Evidence and Property](#).

7.4.1.A Non-Evidentiary Items

Forensic Services processes documents, records and firearms that may appear like evidence. The following items are not evidence: Friction ridge exemplars, shoe and tire test impressions, court documentation, citations, misdemeanor print cards, booking sheets and firearms that have been dispositioned for destruction, auction or department use. Test reports are not required on these items.

7.4.1.1 Evidence Handling Requirements

Forensic Services policy requires that all evidence accepted and stored in the laboratory is properly sealed. It is recognized that not all evidence can be sealed, for example, bulky items like furniture. See FSQA-M2-7.40, [Evidence Handling](#).

For all items considered to be evidence, the procedure shall:

7.4.1.1.a Storage, Packaging, and Sealing Requirements

Maintain all evidence not in the process of examination, in a secure, limited-access storage area under proper seal, or return it to the MPD Evidence Section or submitting agency. Short term, in-progress evidence storage areas are available in each laboratory suite.

Forensic Services members will protect evidence collected from a crime scene from loss, contamination, or deleterious change, whether in a sealed or unsealed container, during transportation to the laboratory. Where appropriate, further processing to preserve, evaluate, document, or render evidence safe will be accomplished prior to final packaging.

7.4.1.1.b Storage of Unattended Items

The Quality Procedures Manual, section 7.40, [Evidence Handling](#) and Unit procedure manuals describe the measures taken to secure unattended evidence which is in the process of being examined.

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Forensic Services policy concerning how evidence is stored in the process of examination over an extended period of time is based upon a justifiable expectation of frequent examination. Refer to section 6.5.7 of FSQA-M2-7.40, [Evidence Handling](#).

7.4.1.1.c Chain-of-Custody

In order to satisfy the rules of criminal procedure, an unbroken chain of custody must be maintained which allows the laboratory to demonstrate that the evidence received and reported on was that submitted to the laboratory. A chain of custody must also be maintained for all items that are collected or created and preserved for future testing (e.g., ESDA lifts, test-fired ammunition, latent print lifts, trace evidence, DNA extracts). Items that are subdivided in the laboratory will be tracked through the documented chain of custody to the same extent that the original items are tracked.

If evidence, such as latent prints or impressions, cannot be recovered, but can be recorded by photography, then treat the photograph, negative, or original digital image file as evidence, identified by a unique number that is traceable back to the laboratory case number.

7.4.1.1.d Chain-of-Custody Requirements

The laboratory will have a written or secure electronic chain of custody record for all items received, which will document all internal transfers from the time of receipt to the final disposition. The chain of custody will indicate each person by signature or equivalent identification taking possession of an item of evidence, or the location of that item, the date and time of the transfer, and a description, or unique identifier, of the evidence (case number/item number).

7.4.1.1.e Disposition of Items

The disposition of all items received will be communicated to the customer.

7.4.1.1.f Communication of Items

All items received, collected or created and preserved for future testing will be communicated to the customer.

7.4.1.1.g Individual Characteristic Databases

The procedures for the operation of individual characteristic databases (ICDs) will be in the unit procedure manuals. Refer to FSQA-M2-7.43, [Individual Characteristic Databases](#) for the following requirements.

- a. Individual characteristic database samples must be treated as evidence, reference materials, or examination records. Refer to the appropriate unit procedures manuals.

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- b. Individual characteristic database samples treated as evidence will meet chain-of-custody (7.4.1.1.d), evidence sealing and protection (7.4.1.1.a), evidence storage (7.4.1.1.b), and evidence marking (7.4.2) requirements.
- c. Individual characteristic database samples not treated as evidence will meet 7.4.1.1.g.d through 7.4.1.1.g.f
- d. Each individual characteristic database sample under the control of the laboratory will be uniquely identified.
- e. Individual characteristic database samples under control of the laboratory will be protected from loss, cross transfer, contamination and/or deleterious changes. Treat samples in a manner that ensures their utility as comparison material.
- f. Access to individual characteristic database samples under the control of Forensic Services will be restricted to those persons authorized by the Forensic Services Administrator. The Forensic Services Administrator reviews authorizations annually.

7.4.1.1.1 Evidence Storage Access

The policy of Forensic Services is to:

1. Recognize the need to open secured evidence storage in the absence of the person who secured the storage.
2. Authorize management to open an evidence storage location while another member of Forensic Services or the Mesa Police Department witnesses the opening.
3. Document the opening of a locked evidence storage location in the absence of the person who originally secured the locker.
4. Notify the member whose locker was opened.
5. Refer to section 6.6 of FSQA-M2-7.40, [*Evidence Handling*](#), and FSQA-M2-7.42, [*Evidence Storage Access*](#).

7.4.2 Marking of Evidence

Each item of evidence shall be marked for identification with the laboratory case number or Agency Case number (DR or GO) number and item number in such a manner as to ensure that it is uniquely identifiable and traceable to the unique laboratory case number. If the evidence does not lend itself to marking, its proximal container or identifying tag shall be marked.

All evidence will be itemized and referred to with the agency number (DR or GO number), and/or LIMS FSS number, and an appropriate numeric or alphanumeric item designator that

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is unique from other items in the same case. The combination of the DR or GO/FSS number(s) and item designator serves as a unique test item identifier that will be retained throughout the life of the item in the laboratory. The unique test item identifier will be utilized in all subsequent testing, documents and records to avoid the test item being physically confused with another item.

If testing requires that uniquely identified items be subdivided within the laboratory, the analyst will assign appropriate sub-item identifiers so that the sub-item may be tracked and identified as having originated from a particular item.

Evidence collected from a crime scene will be appropriately identified, packaged, and entered into the Evidence Section as soon as practical.

7.4.2.1 Identification System

They system used to identify items covers all items received.

7.4.3 Test Item Discrepancies and Packaging Deficiencies

Evidence submitted to the laboratory should be properly packaged, labeled and sealed to prevent contamination, loss or deleterious change. A Forensic Services member may refuse to accept evidence that is not properly sealed.

When evidence is received, the analyst or laboratory technician will record any packaging deficiencies. If there is any concern that the packaging deficiency has affected the integrity or identity of the test item, record the condition, and notify the Unit Supervisor or Technical Leader, and the customer. Customer notification of minor discrepancies can be accomplished in the test report.

Record all remedial actions taken to correct packaging or evidence deficiencies and discussions with the customer regarding those deficiencies in the case record (e.g. submission form, analyst's notes or communication log).

When the customer requires the items to be tested acknowledging the deviation from specified conditions the lab report shall include a disclaimer indicating which results may be affected by the deviation.

7.4.4 Safeguarding the Integrity of the Evidence

Evidence shall be maintained under appropriate conditions to prevent deterioration, loss or damage to the evidence during storage, handling or the testing process. Handling instructions provided with the item shall be followed unless they conflict with Forensic Services policies or procedures for preserving evidence. When items must be stored or conditioned under specified environmental conditions, these conditions shall be maintained, monitored and recorded.

Where a test item or a portion of an item is to be held secure, Forensic Services has provisions

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for storage and security that protect the condition and integrity of the secured items or portions concerned.

Related Policies and Procedures

FSQA-M2-7.40, [*Evidence Handling*](#)

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

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

FSQA-M2-7.43, [*Individual Characteristic Databases*](#)

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