

Alaska Scientific Crime Detection Laboratory

Procedure for Evidence Management

Issued: 05/17/2016
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Purpose

To establish the procedures for the submission, receipt, protection, accountability, marking, transfer, and return of evidence for the Alaska Scientific Crime Detection Laboratory.

The Laboratory shall ensure the integrity of evidence by following procedures for receiving, handling, storing and returning evidence, and by documenting the chain of custody to provide for the generation of legally admissible chain of custody records. All evidence receipts, transfers, and returns shall be documented in the LIMS. External transfers may be documented on the RLS and the RLS scanned into the LIMS. This policy is set forth to prevent contamination, to prevent the possibility of altering evidence, and to ensure the maximum evidentiary value.

All evidence accepted by the Laboratory for scientific analysis shall be accompanied by the current version of the Request for Laboratory Services form (RLS).

Processing a Request for Examination

A LIMS-generated laboratory number shall be assigned upon receipt of the first RLS. Only one Laboratory number shall be assigned to the same criminal event in a single jurisdiction regardless of the number of submitting agencies, suspects or victims. Submissions involving criminal events committed by a suspect in more than one jurisdiction may be assigned a unique Laboratory number for each criminal event. Any supplemental submission(s) shall be assigned the same Laboratory number as the original submission.

Laboratory numbers shall be formatted as follows in the LIMS:

- **YY-#####**, where
- **YY** is the two digits of the calendar year
- **#** is the five digit number assigned consecutively by the LIMS, beginning with the number one (00001) assigned to the first case submitted in the calendar year.

Laboratory file numbers are unique identifiers and shall be placed on all documents. Upon submission to the Laboratory, evidence shall be described in the LIMS utilizing the RLS as a guide. Administrative (typographical) errors, and information deemed more appropriate to the tracking of information may be changed in the LIMS by the Forensic Scientist/Technician performing the analysis. The technician shall inventory the sealed evidence packages and compare the evidence with the RLS to ensure all evidence is present. If there is a discrepancy, the submitting officer/agency shall be contacted and the discrepancy shall be clarified. Any changes to the submission information shall be documented in the LIMS. No further processing of the evidence shall occur until the discrepancy is reconciled. The condition of evidence packaging shall be evaluated and any condition(s) adverse to quality shall be recorded in the LIMS. When the suitability of an item of evidence for examination is questionable, or the request for examination is unclear, the Technician or Forensic Scientist who has custody of the evidence shall contact the submitter for clarification prior to testing. This shall be documented in the LIMS.

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The LIMS shall generate barcode labels for each item of evidence submitted. Laboratory employees shall maintain the item number designation assigned by the submitting agency. No duplicate item numbers shall exist within a case.

An investigating officer may request that evidence from his/her case be compared to evidence submitted in another case and the request may involve a different jurisdiction. To establish uniformity, the cases shall be cross-referenced in the LIMS.

Protection of Evidence from Loss, Cross-contamination, and Deleterious Changes

It is the responsibility of Laboratory staff to ensure, insofar as possible and reasonable, that evidence does not experience loss, cross-contamination, or deleterious change while in the possession of the Laboratory.

When a Forensic Scientist or technician recognizes that evidence has been contaminated so as to alter or affect the results, the employee shall notify their Supervisor and initiate the appropriate corrective action.

All evidence received by the laboratory must be properly sealed in a package with initials on the seal(s). Outer evidence packaging without proper seal received by Laboratory personnel shall be remediated immediately by placing the evidence in a laboratory provided package and initialing and dating the seal.

All evidence seals applied by laboratory personnel will be marked with the initials of the person sealing the evidence and the date sealed. Whenever possible these markings should cross the barrier between the evidence tape and the container.

Evidence which may experience deleterious change without refrigeration shall be placed in an evidence refrigerator as quickly as possible and remain refrigerated until examined or transferred.

Any questions regarding the proper storage and/or packaging of evidence shall be directed to the discipline to which the evidence shall be assigned.

Evidence received by mail or personal delivery

Evidence delivered to the Laboratory shall be checked and recorded in the LIMS in the same manner as evidence received by mail. A detailed process of this procedure is found in the Evidence Working Instructions.

Evidence shall be received by Evidence Technicians or the Evidence Supervisor, except in rush cases or situations when the Forensic Scientist(s) assigned to the case is/are involved directly with the submitting officer in a review of the evidence.

At the time the evidence is opened, the Forensic Scientist/Technician shall check the packaging and contents against the items listed on the RLS or equivalent. If a discrepancy with the evidence is noted by the Forensic Scientist/Technician, it shall be noted in the LIMS by the Forensic Scientist/Technician.

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If tampering is suspected, the discipline supervisor shall be immediately notified. The discipline supervisor shall notify the Forensic Laboratory Manager or Quality Assurance Manager who shall determine the appropriate course of action.

Containers/items shall be re-sealed upon completion of analysis and retained securely until transferred.

Evidence received via electronic submission

The Laboratory accepts digital images (for example footwear impressions, latent images) via email. The agency will submit an RLS with each submission. The Laboratory member receiving the RLS and digital images will create a case in the LIMS and enter the email in case activities. To begin the chain of custody the digital image is transferred to the "E-Evid" storage location. The digital images will then be transferred to the digital asset management system.

Evidence storage and maintenance

Evidence in the process of being examined shall be maintained in a manner to avoid loss, contamination and/or deleterious change but still allow easy access by the examiner during the examination process. All other evidence shall be sealed properly.

Evidence in the custody of Forensic Scientists/Technicians shall be stored in evidence storage rooms or personal evidence storage areas when not actively being examined.

Access to Laboratory and discipline evidence rooms/areas is limited to designated personnel. In the event that the Forensic Laboratory Manager or designee enters a Forensic Scientist's/Technician's evidence storage area and removes evidence, the transaction shall be documented in the LIMS.

The evidence should be replaced in the original container when possible unless a discipline manual specifies an alternate method. Evidence shall be returned with the original container in a laboratory provided package in the event that the evidence is not replaced in the original container. The agency identifiers/barcode should be visible through the replacement packaging that is used.

Documentation of Case Transactions

All receipts, transfers and releases shall be documented in the chain of custody in the LIMS each time an evidence transaction takes place. If an item of evidence is located in a location different from that listed in the chain of custody, the Evidence Supervisor will be notified.

If seals are not intact on evidence packages containing controlled substances or currency, the Forensic Scientist or technician shall document the condition of the package using the LIMS. A witness shall attest to the condition of the package in the LIMS.

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Accountability and Inventory of Laboratory Evidence

A complete inventory of the Evidence discipline shall be conducted no less than every 12 months (except long term biological storage areas) and documented by the respective Forensic Scientist/Technician/Supervisor. Using the inventory module in the LIMS, the inventory shall be conducted in a manner to confirm the location of evidence. The Procedure for Corrective Action and Non-Conformities shall be followed for all unresolved issues. The results of each inventory shall be documented in the annual management review to the Forensic Laboratory Manager.

Return of Evidence from a Laboratory Employee

Laboratory personnel shall return sealed evidence to the evidence vault, another discipline of the laboratory, the submitting agency, or long term storage location, and record the transfer electronically in the LIMS. If it is impractical to seal the evidence, the evidence shall be tagged securely and the tag shall contain all required identifying information.

Evidence to be mailed shall be placed in a container of sufficient size and strength to contain the evidence. Openings shall be sealed properly with tape so as to prevent evidence loss, cross transfer, and/or contamination. A detailed process of this procedure is found in the Evidence Working Instructions.

The Laboratory shall return evidence via traceable delivery. The Forensic Scientist/Technician packaging the evidence is responsible for determining the most appropriate, cost effective, and lawful method of return.

If a Laboratory employee becomes aware of evidence which has been lost in transit to or from the Laboratory, the employee shall immediately notify the Evidence Supervisor.

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2016 R0	2016 R1	Section	Changes
-	-	Throughout	Updated spelling, grammar, and spacing as needed
2	2	Definitions	Removed definitions/convenience package
2	2	Purpose	Removed "or electronic equivalent." after RLS and added "by the current version of" prior to RLS.
2	2	Process a Request for Examination First Paragraph	Removed "or equivalent" after RLS in the first sentence.
3	3	Protection of Evidence from Loss, cross-contamination, and deleterious change, Fourth Paragraph	Removed "All initials placed on seals by Laboratory personnel shall be partially on the seal and extend onto the package." and Replaced with second paragraph from section 5.8.4.3 in the QAM.
3	3	Protection of Evidence from Loss, cross-contamination, and deleterious change, Fifth Paragraph	Removed "Convenience packages do not need to be sealed as evidence but may be closed using tape/staples. Convenience packages may be labeled or marked with the phrase "Convenience Package" and the assigned Laboratory case number. Only sealed containers and/or items shall be placed in convenience packages."
-	3	Evidence received by mail or personal delivery	Added "A detailed process of this procedure is found in the Evidence Working Instructions." to the first sentence.
-	3	Evidence received by mail or personal delivery	Added "or the Evidence Supervisor" to the second sentence

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-	3	Evidence received by mail or personal delivery	Added "packaging and" to the third sentence/
4	4	Evidence storage and maintenance, Fourth Paragraph	Changed paragraph to read "The evidence should be replaced in the original container when possible unless a discipline manual specifies an alternate method. Evidence shall be returned with the original container in a laboratory provided package in the event that the evidence is not replaced in the original container. The agency identifiers/barcode should be visible through the replacement packaging that is used."
-	4	Documentation of Case Transactions	Added "If an item of evidence is located in a location different from that listed in the chain of custody, the Evidence Supervisor will be notified."
-	5	Return of Evidence From a Laboratory Employee, Second Paragraph	Added "A detailed process of this procedure is found in the Evidence Working Instructions."
-	-	All	Changed issuing authority to the Evidence Supervisor