

Alaska Scientific Crime Detection Laboratory

Procedure for Evidence Management

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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.

Definitions

- **Convenience package** – A container, which is used to facilitate storage and/or transfer of sealed containers or items, but is not part of the chain of custody.
- **RLS** – Request for laboratory service
- **Evidence** – Equivalent to “test item” as described in ISO/IEC 17025:2005 / Section 5.8 Material, regardless of form, which is received by a laboratory for the purpose of gaining information relevant to a criminal investigation through examination/analysis by one or more the laboratory’s testing procedures.
- **LIMS** – Acronym for Laboratory Information Management System.
- **Intact seal** – Closure of a package containing evidence by a taped, heat or other tamper-proof means in order to prevent loss, contamination or deleterious change while ensuring that attempted entry into the container is detectable.
- **Proper seal** – An intact seal with initials.

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 LIMS. External transfers may be documented on the RLS and the RLS scanned into 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 shall be accompanied by an RLS or electronic equivalent. Chain of custody receipts from other departments shall not be signed by Laboratory personnel.

Processing a Request for Examination

A LIMS-generated lab number shall be assigned upon receipt of the first RLS or equivalent. 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.

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Laboratory numbers shall be formatted as follows in LIMS:

- **YY-#####**, where
- **YY** is the two digits of the calendar year
- **#** is the five digit number assigned consecutively by 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 LIMS as stated on the RLS or its equivalent. Administrative (typographical) errors may be changed in 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 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 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 LIMS.

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 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.

Evidence shall be sealed properly. Personnel shall check for proper seals whenever evidence is received. The seal on evidence being submitted shall bear the initials of the individual placing the evidence under seal. The initials may be under the tape, on the tape, or spanning the tape onto the

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evidence package. All initials placed on seals by Laboratory personnel shall be partially on the tape and extend onto the package.

Outer evidence packaging without proper seal received by Laboratory personnel shall be remediated immediately.

All evidence stored in the Laboratory shall be sealed properly or remediated unless work is in progress.

To remediate a seal which fails to bear the initials of the individual sealing the evidence, Laboratory personnel shall place a piece of tape perpendicular to the seal and initial across the tape.

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.

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.

It shall be the responsibility of Laboratory staff to educate submitting agencies in proper packaging procedures. When an agency delivers evidence packaged in a fashion or in a container that may cause the evidence to deteriorate, the submitter shall be asked to repackage the evidence, or notified of the corrective procedure applied at the laboratory.

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

Only evidence shall be stored in a locker, drawer, cabinet, etc. that has been identified as an approved evidence storage area. Items used to aid in the identification, storage or protection of evidence (such as empty convenience containers, pens, markers, tape guns/dispensers, post-its, etc.) may be stored with evidence in a manner which would not contribute to the loss, cross-contamination, or deleterious change of evidence.

Evidence received by mail or personal delivery

Evidence delivered to the Laboratory shall be checked and recorded in LIMS in the same manner as evidence received by mail.

Evidence shall be received by Evidence Technicians, 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.

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The Forensic Scientist/Technician shall retain evidence in his/her designated evidence storage area at all times the evidence is not being examined.

At the time the evidence is opened, the Forensic Scientist/Technician shall check the 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 LIMS by the Forensic Scientist/Technician. If tampering is suspected, the discipline supervisor shall be immediately notified. The discipline supervisor shall notify the Laboratory Manager or QM who shall determine the appropriate course of action.

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

Upon finalization of the Laboratory Report, all evidence shall be transferred either to an Evidence Technician (unless the evidence needs to be transferred to another Laboratory Forensic Scientist), retained for additional examination, returned to the submitting agency, or retained by the laboratory, if appropriate.

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 LIMS.

Evidence shall be replaced in the original container when possible.

Documentation of Case Transactions

All receipts, transfers and releases shall be documented in the chain of custody in LIMS each time an evidence transaction takes place.

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 LIMS. A witness shall attest to the condition of the package in 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 six months (yearly for retained biological evidence storage areas) and documented by the respective Forensic Scientist/Technician Supervisor. Using the inventory module in 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

Forensic Scientists shall return sealed evidence to an Evidence Technician, submitting agency, or long term storage location, and record the transfer electronically in 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.

All seals placed on the package by the Forensic Scientist or technician shall be initialed. In addition, the date the evidence was sealed and the barcode shall be placed on the package.

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.

Evidence received at a crime scene

Upon request, a Forensic Scientist (s) or Technician (s) may assist with the examination of a crime scene and/or collection of evidence.

Items seized as evidence by a Forensic Scientist/Technician shall be annotated appropriately with unique identifying information.

Evidence collected from a crime scene by a Forensic Scientist/Technician shall be protected from loss, cross-transfer, contamination, and/or deleterious change whether in a sealed or unsealed container during transportation to the Laboratory or other appropriate evidence facility.

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Evidence Garage

Laboratory garages shall be used to process evidence such as vehicles, trailers, large items, bulk drug cases, etc. The evidence shall be processed as soon as practical upon receipt and the evidence removed from the garage to other storage. The garage shall not be used for long term storage of evidence by any Laboratory discipline.

A Forensic Scientist/Technician with evidence in the garage shall maintain limited access to the garage area.

Laboratory safety procedures and precautions shall be used while working in the garage area.

Employees unfamiliar with the use of mechanical equipment (specifically hoists and lifts) which may be located in the garage shall not use the mechanical equipment under any circumstances.

Each Forensic Scientist/Technician who uses the garage shall ensure the facility is cleaned, disinfected, and the equipment/tools organized prior to vacating.

Revision History

No changes were needed to the PEM 2013 R0 after review. It was only updated to the current year.

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