
	ROSENBERG POLICE DEPARTMENT	
	General Order 7.41 Crime Scene Processing	
	Effective Date: 04-05-2013	Replaces: N/A
	Approved:  Chief of Police	
Reference: TBP 12.02		

I. POLICY

Proper documentation, collection, preservation, and submission of physical evidence to forensic laboratories may provide the key to a successful investigation and prosecution. Through evidence located at the scene, suspects are developed or eliminated, investigative leads are established, and theories concerning the crime are substantiated or disproved. It is imperative, therefore, that each officer carefully process a crime scene not to overlook or contaminate or destroy evidence. Physical evidence appears in many shapes, sizes and forms, thereby necessitating various recovery, preservation, and submission techniques. The officer or investigator shall be prepared to collect, identify, and package the evidence so that it will not be changed in form and value when it reaches the laboratory. The officer collecting the evidence shall maintain a chain of custody of that evidence in order to ensure that it is presented to the court professionally and in compliance with the law.

II. PURPOSE

To establish responsibilities for officers/investigators in processing crime scenes and to establish guidelines for the proper documentation, collection, packaging, and submission of physical evidence to the forensic laboratory.

III. DEFINITIONS

- A. Chain of custody - The chain of custody is the series of documented links between the time the evidence was obtained until presented in court. The links are officers who handled the evidence, and where and when they did so.
- B. Exclusionary rule - The exclusionary rule requires that evidence seized or discovered in violation of the suspect's Fourth, Fifth, and Sixth Amendment rights cannot be admitted in court.

- C. Evidence - Any substance or material found or recovered in connection with a criminal investigation.
- D. Evidence custodian - The evidence custodian is the employee designated by the Chief to have administrative oversight over all found or confiscated property which comes into departmental possession.

IV. PROCEDURES - General crime scene processing

- A. Depending on the nature of the crime and the type of evidence present, patrol officers will normally collect and submit physical evidence to the extent they have been trained and have the equipment to do so. Normally patrol officers will collect and submit evidence on misdemeanor offenses and some felony offenses where a document and or video evidence is the only physical evidence present.
- B. The department has a number of detectives trained and equipped to collect physical evidence. Patrol officers will contact dispatch and request a Crime Scene Officer when the offense is a felony, any sex crime, and child abuse, where photographs are needed, or where the evidence present is beyond the capabilities of the officers training or equipment.
- C. The officer/investigator responding to a crime scene shall make a determination of equipment needed for processing. The department maintains a complete evidence collection kit to include a camera, film, sketching equipment, fingerprint recovery tools, blood recovery materials, tweezers, scissors, boxes, bags, envelopes, tape, marking tools, evidence tags, and materials for lifting impressions (footprints, tire tracks).
- D. The property and evidence form shall be used to document all property and evidence coming into custody of the department.
- E. ID investigators shall use the following general order of processing crime scene unless reason dictates otherwise.
 - 1. Before moving objects or collecting evidence at major crime scenes (except where necessary to help a victim, apply first aid, or handle a suspect), officers will photograph the scene. Photographs should start at the edge of the property and progress into the scene as needed to show the scene and relationship of the evidence present. Close up photographs of each piece of evidence will be taken with and without a measuring device in the picture.
 - 2. At major crime scenes, investigators will also prepare a sketch of the scene. Sketches of any crime scene will be done if it will show relationships or locations of where evidence is collected.

3. Before collecting any item of evidence, take measurements using triangulation or the coordinate method and record.
4. Collect perishable evidence first. Perishable evidence such as fresh blood, blood-stained objects, physiological stains and tissue, or biological material shall be collected only by a trained evidence technician who shall arrange to submit the material to a lab.
5. If the immediate destruction of evidence is not a concern, work through the scene systematically, collecting in a logical sequence, trying to avoid disrupting other items of evidence.
6. Collect comparison samples: The forensic laboratory can only compare known items with those showing similar characteristics. Sufficient specimens or controls must be submitted for comparisons of such items of hairs, fibers, paint, glass, soil, and tool marks.
7. Once perishable and other evidence has been collected, fingerprints shall be identified and lifted where possible. If transporting evidence may damage or destroy the latent prints on it, then the evidence shall be processed for prints at the scene.
8. Take overall measurements, obtaining wall, room, and building measurements is one of the last operations to be performed in processing the crime scene. The overall measurements are vital in the production of the final crime scene sketch but must be obtained last so as not to damage or destroy items of evidence.
9. Conduct a final organized search. Conduct a final, thorough search of the crime scene in case evidence may have been overlooked. Wherever possible, on a final search use an officer who has not participated in processing the scene.
10. The officer processing the crime scene shall list each item collected on the evidence recovery log. Note the following information for each item.
 - a. A complete description of the item (including make, model, and serial numbers, if any);
 - b. The source (from whom or location from which the item was obtained); and
 - c. The name of the person collecting the item.
11. The officer/investigator processing a crime/incident scene shall prepare a report giving an accurate account of events. This information shall be placed in a supplement to the offense/incident report.

12. All evidence shall be properly and prominently tagged or identified. In addition to the property and evidence form, the recovering officer shall complete a chain of custody form for the property custodian.
13. Officers shall observe principles regarding the legal use of physical evidence. Officers shall rigorously maintain the chain of custody of all evidence and shall always remain mindful of constitutional safeguards. If officers are not scrupulous in observing these safeguards, then the exclusionary rule may prohibit key evidence from being introduced at trial and the case may be lost or dismissed.

V. PROCEDURES - Evidence and property control

A. Collection of evidence

1. When collecting evidence, the officer shall use tongs or tweezers where possible. The officer shall avoid touching the evidence with his hands or anything that might contaminate the item.
2. Officers shall wear latex gloves while processing any crime scene. When collecting and tissue or bodily fluid evidence, officers shall discard the gloves and put on a new set after collecting each separate evidentiary item.
3. In collecting evidence, officers shall remain mindful about the possibility of contagion if the crime scene contains body fluids. Further, some evidence may consist of hazardous chemicals or waste products, explosives, or highly combustible materials. The evidence custodian in consultation with an evidence technician shall decide the best disposition of such items.
4. If a firearm is present at the crime scene, do not unload it. The evidence technician shall unload the weapon: the evidence technician must examine the weapon in its exact condition as when it was discovered.

B. Marking evidence

1. In many instances, marking and labeling evidence may represent a single process. In instances where the evidence is large, complete identifying data may be recorded directly on the evidence to include the officer's name, date, time, location of recovery, item number, and case number.
2. In other instances, the small size or nature of the item collected will not permit complete information to be noted directly on the item. In these instances, the container or attached tag shall be marked with appropriate information.

3. The evidence technician or the officer searching the crime scene shall mark similar items in the same place to save time and embarrassment in looking for the identifying marks when asked to identify the evidence in court.
4. Instruments which may be used for marking physical evidence include permanent markers (felt tip pens), scribes (diamond tip or awl), or where labels are used, ballpoint pens.
5. The officer who collects the evidence shall mark it.
6. Each officer or investigator shall develop his own identifying mark, normally his or her initials.

C. Packaging items of evidence

1. The officer who collects the evidence shall choose a container suitable to the type of evidence for packaging. Considerations in choosing the proper container include:
 - a. The size and weight of the item.
 - b. Whether the item is moist or wet (which could rot or deteriorate if packaged in plastic or an airtight container for an extended time).
 - c. Avoid any contamination of evidence by packaging all items separately.
 - d. Pack the item to minimize interior movement within the package.
 - e. Seal the package with evidence tape and initial or sign across the seal.
 - f. Label the exterior of the package before placing the evidence within it.
2. Special circumstances
 - a. Weapons
 - i. No officer shall, under any circumstances, personally retain custody of any found or confiscated weapon.
 - ii. Officers bringing weapons into custody shall inspect them to ensure their safe storage. All firearms shall be unloaded before storage.
 - iii. The recovering officer or investigator shall check all confiscated or found weapons against NCIC/TCIC files.
 - b. Drugs and narcotics see Policy 12.1.
 - c. Alcohol
 - i. All containers of alcoholic beverages shall be sealed or contained to avoid any chance of leakage.

- ii. The only alcoholic beverages that are considered contraband are those seized from underage persons whose possession is in itself illegal. If not destroyed at the scene on video, the contraband alcoholic beverages shall be destroyed upon conclusion of legal proceedings.
- iii. Alcoholic beverages seized or recovered which are not contraband or evidence shall be returned to the owner.

D. Preservation and submission of evidence to the forensic laboratory

1. Under normal circumstances, the officer or investigator who processed the crime scene is responsible for submitting evidence to the forensic laboratory.
2. Where more than one officer processed the scene, the on-duty supervisor shall choose an officer to take custody of all collected evidence and submit it to the laboratory for analysis.

E. Preservation of perishable or deteriorating items:

1. When a rapidly deteriorating item of evidence has been collected (for example, a liquid sample of semen, a blood-soaked shirt), it shall be transported to the forensic laboratory the same day, if at all possible.
2. Any time an officer transports a perishable item to the laboratory for immediate analysis, the laboratory shall be called first so they will be ready to receive it.
3. In cases where immediate transport to the forensic lab is not possible, air dry (no more than one week) and transport to lab.
4. Where appropriate, submit known specimens of evidence so that comparisons can be made. The investigating officer shall be responsible for obtaining any required known specimens and submitting them, along with the items of evidence, to the forensic lab for analysis and comparison.