

COVINGTON POLICE DEPARTMENT

STANDARD OPERATING PROCEDURE

Subject: CRIME SCENE PROCESSING

Date of Issue: 02-08-2003

Number of Pages: 12

Policy No. I060

Review Date: 06-01-2007

Distribution: Departmental

Revision Date: 01-25-2017

I. Purpose

To define the responsibilities of persons who process a crime scene and to establish procedures for the proper collection and preservation of evidence.

II. Statement of Policy

It shall be the policy of the Covington Police Department that proper collection, documentation, preservation and submission of physical evidence is handled in an efficient, effective and professional manner. Crime scene technicians are on call on a 24 hour basis.

III. Discussion

Through evidence discovered at the scene, suspects are developed or eliminated, investigative leads are established and theories concerning the crime/incident are substantiated or disproved. Officers must always be cognizant that any physical evidence collected might someday have to be presented in a court of law. Therefore, it is imperative that each officer exercise care in the processing of a crime scene so as not to overlook valuable evidence or contaminate or destroy collectable items.

Physical evidence appears in many shapes, sizes and forms, thereby necessitating various recovery, preservation and submission techniques. The officer or technician processing the crime scene should be properly trained and equipped to collect, identify and package the evidence so that it will not be changed in form and value when it reaches the laboratory.

It will be the responsibility of the officer collecting the evidence to maintain a chain of custody of the evidence to ensure that it is presented to the court in a professional manner and in compliance with all legal requirements.

IV. Crime Scene Protection

A. Primary officer's responsibility

1. Upon arrival at the scene of a crime, patrol officers shall:

a. Secure the scene to protect valuable evidence.

- b. Provide aid and comfort to the victims.
 - c. Keep unauthorized persons away from the scene.
 - d. Rope off the scene with crime scene tape, if necessary.
 - e. Request a supervisor to respond.
2. Do not touch, move or disturb anything. Leave the scene exactly as found, prevent contamination and preserve for fingerprints. If extenuating circumstances arise and it becomes necessary for the officer to remove a piece of evidence (that will need processing) prior to the arrival of the investigator or evidence technician, he should attempt to preserve the item for fingerprints and note the location where it was found. The item will then be turned over to the investigator or technician upon their arrival at the scene, along with a completed property receipt.
3. If an investigator is called to the scene, the officer should be prepared to supply him with a full name and address of the victim, description of suspect(s) and suspect vehicle, case number and any other pertinent information available.
4. Attempt to locate entry and exit points, determine what has been moved or is out of its usual place or if any foreign object has been left behind. This information should be provided to the investigator and included in the incident report.
5. If the officer takes custody of any evidence prior to the arrival of the investigator, he/she should complete a property receipt.
6. The officer should remain at the scene with the investigator or technician to aid them in protecting the scene and supplying them with needed information, unless excused by the investigator or supervisor.

B. Investigative Responsibility

The Criminal Investigation Division shall have the primary responsibility of processing a crime scene. Whenever possible, the investigator or technician shall collect substances from a known sample for comparison with physical evidence by laboratory personnel. The investigator or technician shall also be responsible for the collection and preservation of evidence to include:

1. Fingerprints.
2. Blood samples.
3. Photographs.
4. Video taping.
5. Sketching the scene.
6. Weapons (knives, guns, axes, clubs, etc.).
7. Clothing.

8. Bullets.
9. Other items that may be relevant to the investigation.
10. Writing crime scene reports.

V. Evidence Processing

The following procedures shall be used when collecting and processing evidence in the field:

A. Fingerprints

1. Fingerprints may be recovered from a variety of surfaces including smooth surfaces, glass, paper, metal, plastic, desks, countertops, etc.
2. Where the possibility of latent prints exists, the investigator should use the best technique for developing the prints. The technique used will be determined by the surface type.
 - a. Black dusting powder may be the best for light colored surfaces.
 - b. White dusting powder may be the best for dark colored surfaces.
3. If there are fingerprints on an item that the investigator is unable to develop, the item shall be collected and submitted to the GBI Crime Lab for processing.
4. When a print becomes visible after dusting, the investigator shall lift the print using latent lifting tape, if it is determined to be the best collection method.
5. The lifted print shall be put on a fingerprint card and the investigator shall note on the back of the card the date, time, location of incident and print location, incident number and the investigator's name.

B. Blood Samples

1. When necessary to collect blood samples from a living or deceased person, the sample shall be collected by qualified personnel. The sample shall be placed in the evidence refrigerator at the police department until taken to the GBI Crime Lab for analysis.
2. Whenever blood stained clothing is collected, it will be air-dried and placed in a paper bag and submitted to the GBI Crime Lab.
3. Blood stains on floors, counters, walls, door facings or other surfaces may be collected by using water dampened cotton swab and placed in a swab box or brown paper evidence bag.

C. Rape Evidence

1. The clothing of the victim and suspect shall be placed in separate paper bags and properly tagged and marked.

2. Any evidence that is submitted to the Crime Lab for comparison shall be placed in the appropriate packs provided in the rape evidence kit and must be properly tagged and marked.

D. Other Evidence

All other evidence observed at the crime scene, needing further processing will be properly tagged, marked and brought to the Property and Evidence room. The evidence will be properly logged in for follow-up by the Evidence Technician.

E. DNA Collection

DNA evidence should only be collected or attempted to be collected by personnel who have been properly trained to do so.

1. First responder responsibilities

- a. Secure the scene to protect valuable evidence.
- b. Provide aid and comfort to the victims.
- c. Keep unauthorized persons away from the scene.
- d. Rope off the scene with crime scene tape, if necessary.
- e. Request a supervisor to respond to the scene.
- f. Do not touch or move anything. Leave the scene exactly as found, prevent contamination and preserve for DNA processing. If extenuating circumstances arise and it becomes necessary for the officer to remove a piece of evidence (that will need processing) prior to the arrival of the investigator or crime scene technician, he should attempt to preserve the item for DNA processing and note the location where it was found. The item will then be turned over to the investigator or technician upon their arrival on the scene, along with a completed property receipt.
- g. The officer should remain at the scene with the investigator or technician to aid them in protecting the scene and supplying them with needed information, unless excused by the investigator or technician.

2. First responder precautions

- a. The universal precaution is that all biological evidence (liquid or dried) must be considered as a potentially infectious biohazard.
- b. Adequate protective clothing and proper evidence handling techniques are essential.
- c. Since extremely small samples of DNA can be used as evidence, greater attention to contamination issues is necessary. Evidence can be contaminated when DNA from another source gets mixed with DNA relevant to the case.

- d. DNA evidence must be protected from contamination by the public, any other person at the scene and from inclement weather conditions.
3. Procedures for the collection, storage, and transportation of DNA evidence.
 - a. If removal or transport of an item is not possible, the stain(s) may be cut out or swabbed.
 - b. Stains should be collected on a water-dampened cotton swab that must be air dried in a swab box prior to submitting to the Crime Lab.
 - c. Due to the sensitive nature of DNA testing, care must be taken not to contaminate the sample by the individual collecting the sample.
 - d. Known reference samples from both the victim and suspect(s) may be required to initiate DNA testing. If other persons are suspected to be involved in a crime, their known samples should be submitted when relevant. In sexual assault cases, if recent voluntary sexual intercourse (within 72 hours) is indicated, a known sample from the consenting partner is also necessary.
4. Potential sources
DNA evidence includes, but is not limited to blood, saliva, semen, tissue, and fingernail scrapings.
5. Training
The Crime Scene Investigator(s) should have specialized training in the collection of DNA evidence and be familiar with GBI-DOFS laboratory policies. All CID personnel should be familiar with DNA evidence collection, packaging, and submission procedures.
6. Submission
All evidence collected and known samples will be submitted to the GBI-DOFS laboratory. Only the evidence custodian or his designee will submit evidence to the lab. Other accredited laboratories may be used when deemed necessary. All items will be submitted to the laboratory in accordance with the lab's policies and requirements.

VI. Evidence Packaging

- A. Drugs
 1. Must be double bagged in plastic bags with the exterior bag being no smaller than an 8 X 10 sized evidence bag.
 2. Drugs that must be submitted to the Crime Lab must be packaged separately from ones that are not being sent to the Lab and placed on separate property receipts.

3. Information on the plastic bag must match the information on the property receipt.
4. Do not package wet marijuana in plastic bags. Place wet marijuana in a paper bag and put it in a blue locker to dry out. Complete the property receipt and place it with the bag.
5. Place smoking devices in a separate baggie from drugs before placing into plastic evidence bag.
6. Complete and attach the Covington Police drug analysis form for marijuana tests.
7. Complete and attach the GBI Crime Lab analysis evidence submission form for testing of evidence such as drugs or fingerprints.
8. All needles and syringes needs to be placed in the biohazard containers for destruction. The Crime Lab will not test any needles, syringes, contents from syringes or razor blades.
9. Only drugs will be placed in the black mailbox.
10. All other evidence not in self-sealing plastic bags that need to be submitted to the Crime Lab will be sealed with "evidence tape" and initialed.

B. Forgeries and Paper Documents

1. Place into a manila envelope.
2. Attach the property receipt.
3. Place in evidence storage unit.

C. Photographs

1. Place digital photos on the "P" drive. They will be printed as needed.
2. Place collected photos into a manila envelope and attach the property receipt.
3. Place in evidence storage unit.

D. Videos

1. Videos, such as CDs, CDR, DVD, memory devices, etc., shall be placed in a manila envelope.
2. Attach to the property receipt.
3. Place in evidence storage unit.

E. Audio tapes

1. Package in small manila envelope.

2. Attach property receipt.
3. Place in evidence storage unit.

F. Weapons

1. Officer must secure guns with plastic ties.
2. All guns that must be sent to the Crime Lab for analysis will be packaged in gun boxes by the Evidence Custodian
3. Bullets and magazines will be packaged in a manila envelope with the case number recorded on the envelope. Clasp, tape or staple shut the envelope.
4. Knives will be placed in a plastic tube. Be careful with those items that need to be fingerprinted.
5. Do not drop any weapon into the mailboxes. Place weapons in a blue locker.
6. If there is blood or suspicion of blood borne pathogens on an item, use a biohazard label.
7. Attach property receipt and a GBI Evidence Submission form (if applicable).

G. Latent Print Cards

1. Cards should be completely filled out. If an index card is used, the following will be written on the card:
 - a. Date.
 - b. Case number.
 - c. Victim's name.
 - d. Address
 - e. Where the print(s) were lifted from.
 - f. Prints lifted by whom and badge number.
 - g. Sketch.

VII. Seizure of Computer Equipment and Systems

The nature of computer crimes and computer systems require specific techniques for the recovery of evidence. In order to preserve this evidence, the following guidelines are established when an officer has reason to believe that a computer or computer system contains evidence of criminal activity.

- A. Only investigators specifically trained in recovering evidence from computers are authorized to conduct searches of criminal activity.

- B. When officers come in contact with computers believed to contain evidence, the following procedures shall apply:
1. Immediately move all individuals away from the computer. Do not allow anyone, especially a suspect, to touch or go near the computer. Some systems have preprogrammed destruction commands that can be initiated with a single keystroke.
 2. If the computer is off, do not turn it on. If the computer is on, do not touch the keyboard or mouse. If there is a telephone modem line attached to the computer and it can be identified, unplug it from the computer. This will protect the system from outside commands.
 3. Do not transmit from a radio or cellular phone in the immediate vicinity of the computer.
 4. Contact a supervisor and request that an investigator respond to the scene to assist in the seizure of the computer.
 5. Photograph the system setup, to include cables, accessories, and the screen (if the system is on).
 6. If the investigator is not available, unplug the power cord from the computer. Clearly mark all cables and accessories and then disassemble the system.
 7. Seize all manuals, printer scanners, and other devices associated with the computer.
 8. When possible, place the devices on the seat of a vehicle during transportation to protect the system from vibrations.
- C. Current law requires specific wording when applying for a search warrant for computers and computer information. Officers should consult with a supervisor from Criminal Investigations prior to applying for a search warrant of this nature.

VII. Evidence Marking and Transfer

- A. Physical evidence including weapons, clothing, blood samples, fingerprints and photographs shall be collected and tagged using a property receipt. Information on the property receipt includes:
1. Case number.
 2. Date.
 3. Time.
 4. Address.
 5. Description of evidence including the location the evidence was located.
- B. Whenever evidence is transferred from one party to another, the chain of custody must be maintained. A record of the transfer must be noted on the property receipt in the chain of custody section. Information to be recorded includes:

1. Item number.
2. Date and time of transfer.
3. Relinquishing person's name.
4. Receiving person's name and signature.
5. Purpose of change of custody.

VIII. Crime Scene Sketches

When an investigator makes a sketch of a crime scene, he shall include, at a minimum, the following information on the sketch.

- A. Dimension (room size, length, width, height).
- B. Relation of the crime scene to other buildings, geographical features or roads.
- C. Address, floor or room number as appropriate.
- D. Location of significant features of the scene (victim, weapon, bullet, holes, etc.).
- E. Date and time of preparation.
- F. Name of person(s) preparing sketch.
- G. North direction.
- H. Location of items or physical evidence removed.

IX. Crime Scene Photography and Video

The officer/investigator assigned to a case shall be responsible for any photographs taken of the scene prior to the removal of any evidence. If officers utilize the digital camera assigned to their patrol unit, the photographs will be downloaded to the "P" drive on the department server by case number only prior to the end of the officer's tour of duty. Once the pictures are downloaded to the "P" drive, officers will delete the pictures from the memory stick. Officers can also attach pictures to their incident report in Spillman using the Imaging feature.

If a 35mm camera is used, officers will submit the film to the Evidence Custodian to have the film developed. Investigators will decide if they need copies of photographs in their case file. Requests for copies of photographs will be submitted to the Evidence Custodian.

- A. When taking photographs and or video, the officer/investigator shall include all major pieces of evidence.
- B. All photographs and or video shall be made using a scale to reflect the proper size and dimension of the object photographed. A photograph or video of the same object without the scale shall also be made from the same direction.
- C. Indoor photographs may require a flash to provide adequate lighting. Outdoor photographs may not require a flash unless the photo is taken at night. All video

shall be made with proper lighting techniques as required of the video equipment used.

- D. In a homicide investigation, the investigator shall photograph or video the victim from every direction when possible and shall photograph or video the room or area in relation to the victim.
- E. All photographs or videos taken at a scene shall be marked with the following information:
 - 1. Case number.
 - 2. Date.
 - 3. Officer/investigator's name and badge number.
 - 4. Property receipt.

X. Processing Stolen Vehicles

It shall be the responsibility of the investigator to notify the victim or appropriate agency of the recovery of a stolen vehicle.

- A. When a vehicle is recovered that was stolen in another jurisdiction, the investigator or officers shall have vehicle towed to a location to preserve any evidence and notify the appropriate agency.
- B. Any vehicle recovered that was reported stolen in our jurisdiction, the investigator shall process the vehicle at the location, whenever possible.
- C. When conditions are impossible to process the vehicle at the recovery site, the investigator shall have the vehicle impounded to preserve evidence until the vehicle can be processed.
- D. Only the assigned investigator shall authorize the release of any vehicle.

XI. Crime Scene Processing Equipment

All crime scenes processing equipment and supplies shall be maintained in the CID offices for access by all investigators. It is the responsibility of the Captain of CID or his designee to maintain an adequate supply of equipment needed for crime scene processing. Equipment maintained shall include:

- A. Equipment used for the recovery of latent fingerprints.
- B. Evidence collection kits.
- C. Camera and film.
- D. Legal pads.
- E. Measuring tapes.
- F. Video camera.
- G. Index cards.

H. Latex gloves

XII. Evidence Submission Procedures

- A. The Evidence Technician or designee has the responsibility for the submission of all evidence to the Crime Lab. Evidence will be transported to the lab on a timely basis, depending on the perishable nature of the evidence or the severity of the case.
- B. All items submitted into evidence must have the following attached:
 1. Property Receipt
 2. Evidence Submission Form – items going to the Crime Lab
 3. Marijuana Analysis Form – marijuana only
- C. Property should be placed in the smallest locker necessary to reserve larger lockers for larger items (e.g. a screwdriver should be placed in a small locker; a duffel bag should be placed in a medium or large sized locker). The same rule should be used when packaging evidence: small bags for small items; larger bags for larger items.
- D. Larger items that will not fit into any evidence locker will be taken to the Evidence Storage building. All paperwork will be attached. All vehicles taken to this building need to be backed in.
- E. Heavy items (e.g. firearms) should not be dropped in to the evidence drop mailboxes, as this may damage items already in the drop mailbox.
- F. Any property that needs to be destroyed, such as alcohol, found marijuana, etc., should not be submitted into evidence. If the item will be needed for court, the officer should photograph the item, fill out an evidence receipt and then destroy it in the presence of a witness. Both the officer and the witness should sign the evidence receipt.
- G. Flammable items will not be submitted into evidence.
- H. Personal property taken from an arrest individual should accompany that individual to the Newton County Detention Center. That property should not be submitted into evidence.
- I. Found property may be retrieved by the rightful owner. Property that is not claimed within ninety (90) days will be destroyed.
- J. The case officer requesting that evidence be submitted to the Crime Lab shall complete the GBI lab submission form prior to the Evidence Technician taking the evidence to the Crime Lab.
- K. Fingerprints may be submitted at any time before or after a suspect has been identified or taken into custody.
- L. The technician or investigator shall, whenever possible, collect materials and substances from a known source to be sent to the crime lab for comparison with other physical evidence that is already submitted. Examples include hairs, fibers, fabrics, paint, glass, wood, soil and tool marks.

All materials or substances submitted from a known source shall be marked with the following information:

1. Description.
 2. Location where source came from.
 3. Location of incident.
 4. Date.
 5. Time.
 6. Investigator's name and badge number.
 7. Case number.
- M. It shall be the responsibility of the investigator assigned to the case to request lab examinations of collected evidence.
- N. All evidence that is submitted to the Crime Lab for analysis shall be accompanied by the property receipt showing the proper chain of custody. The submission form and property receipt will be stamped with the date and time it is received at the lab.
- O. The investigator submitting evidence to the Crime Lab shall obtain a written report from the lab describing the results of the lab analysis. The written report will be maintained in the investigator's case file.

This SOP supersedes any SOP previously issued.

BY ORDER OF THE CHIEF OF POLICE:

Stacey L. Cotton
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Chief of Police