

	<b>Houston Independent School District Police Department Directives</b>	<b>DIRECTIVE: 460-003</b>
	<b>SUBJECT: Property and Evidence Control</b>	<b>EFFECTIVE DATE: April 16, 2003</b>  <b>REVISED DATE: February 13, 2022</b>

## **PURPOSE**

This directive aims to establish policies for property and evidence control. This directive applies to all Houston Independent School District Police Department personnel.

## **GUIDELINES**

A written report shall be completed that provides a descriptive inventory of all property into the control and custody of HISD Police Department Officers.

This report is the first step in maintaining an uninterrupted chain of custody. Case numbers shall be used to cross-reference the property.

The report shall list the property obtained and detail the circumstances associated with the custody.

Officers and other employees are prohibited from storing property in their desks, lockers, vehicles, homes, or other places that are not secure or would interrupt the chain of custody to maintain an accurate chain of custody.

Personal use of any property is strictly prohibited.

## **CHAIN OF CUSTODY**

All packages must be marked with the case number, item number, and date for a proper chain of custody and initialed across the seals.

The officer submitting the information will enter their name, unit number, and other identifying information necessary to complete the chain of custody.

The officer submitting the evidence shall immediately document the chain of custody in their report or supplement.

## **EVIDENCE COLLECTION AND PACKAGING GUIDELINES**

Employees will adhere to the following guidelines when handling evidence;

- a) Use clean gloves for collecting each item of evidence. Change gloves between the handling of different items of evidence.
- b) Each item of evidence must be packaged separately.
- c) Bloodstains, semen stains, and other stains must be thoroughly air-dried and packaged in sealed paper envelopes or paper bags.

- d) If stains must be transferred from an immovable surface (such as a window or sidewalk), sterile cotton swabs and distilled water may be used.

## **BIOLOGICAL EVIDENCE COLLECTION**

- a) Photograph the surface before swabbing.
- b) Place a ruler next to the evidence to provide the scale needed to determine size before taking a photograph.
- c) Moisten the swab with water and shake the swab to remove the excess water.
- d) Rub the stained area with the moist swab until all of the stains are transferred to the swab. If the swab is insufficient to collect all the stains, use additional moist swabs to collect all the stains.
- e) Two control swabs may also be collected as a control for other serological tests:
  - 1 . Using the first swab, swab an unstained area adjacent to the stained area using a moist swab.
  - 2 . Using the second swab, provide a moist swab with nothing else but the water used in the collection process.
- f) Prepare properly marked envelopes (coin envelopes) or paper containers for the swabs.
- g) Air- dry the swabs without permitting the swabs to touch one another. If time is critical, the swabs may be placed in their envelopes while they are still moist until they can be transported to a place where they can be properly air-dried.
- h) Place swabs in the appropriate separate paper containers, properly marked for identification.
- i) Scraping dried stains should only be used instead of swabbing if the surface is perfectly smooth and the scraping will result in almost no material loss. A stain on a smooth vertical surface can be collected ( after photographing it with a ruler in the picture) by folding a clean sheet of paper in half and taping the edge of the paper to the surface directly beneath the stain. The stain can be scraped into the paper with a sterile scalpel blade or a new single-edged razor blade. Then carefully remove the paper from the surface, remove the tape, fold the paper into a packet, seal with evidence tape, and initial properly.
- j) Evidence that is incapable of drying, such as pieces of tissue, organ, bone,

liquid urine, or other biological material, should be packaged separately in airtight containers, sealed and marked properly for identification, and immediately frozen and stored frozen until shipment. Never use formalin or formaldehyde to preserve biological evidence because these chemicals degrade DNA.

- k) Know blood samples from deceased or living persons should be transferred by syringe into a purple top tube (containing EDTA), properly marked for identification, placed in a paper container, properly marked, and sealed with evidence tape for proper chain of custody stored refrigerated until shipment. Use additional protection to avoid breakage during shipment.
- l) Blood samples (either liquid or dried stains) from persons diagnosed with HIV or Hepatitis should be shipped in special containers marked on the exterior containing HIV or Hepatitis infected blood.

## **EVIDENCE CONTROL**

Every item of property and evidence obtained by an officer during a shift shall be placed under the control of a property and evidence function before the end of the shift. After normal hours of operations, the property and evidence custodian is on call. If They are not available (vacation, leave, etc.), a secondary backup evidence custodian is available.

All property shall be tagged and booked into storage in compliance with the rules and regulations of the evidence storage facility, using their methods for preparing, labeling, and recording property.

Copies of all evidence documentation shall be attached to the original report and should be reviewed and verified by the immediate supervisor when approving the report.

All security measures for handling and receiving evidence by the receiving property room shall be complied with, especially with items considered sensitive, high in value, or otherwise constitute an increased security risk.

Guidelines from the separate property room shall be followed for handling items such as money, firearms and weapons, blood and other body fluids, and drugs.

## **RELEASE OF EVIDENCE**

A reasonable attempt should be made to locate property owners in the agency' s custody and notify them of its status. If possible, the release of the property back to the owner should be affected as expeditiously as is consistent with applicable law. The owner(s) may be contacted by (i.e., by telephone, in person, or by certified letter).

## **PROPERTY STORAGE FACILITY**

All in-custody property is stored within designated property storage facilities of the HISD Police Department.

## **TEMPORARY RELEASE OF PROPERTY**

The agency's authority governs the temporary release of stored property with the stored property. Temporary release may be for but is not limited to a court appearance, laboratory analysis, or further investigation.

## **FACILITY SECURITY**

All in-custody and evidentiary property are stored within designated areas. The HISD Police Department has limited access to authorized personnel only. All controlled substances used for training purposes, i.e., K-9 narcotics training aids, shall be stored in a secured storage cabinet (safe). A periodic accounting of items stored shall be made. K-9 officers must maintain an up-to-date log to ensure the accountability of seized property. An on-duty supervisor authorizes final approval for extracting all narcotics located in the secured storage cabinet. Secure lockers are provided to store in-custody or evidentiary property when the property room is closed.

## **FACILITY RECORDS**

The HISD Police Department has an automated recording system to reflect the status of all property held.

## **FACILITY AUDIT**

Property storage facilities operated by agencies with concurrent jurisdiction generally follow audit guidelines set by the International Association for Property and Evidence. These guidelines include procedures for:

- a) Internal audits; and
- b) External audits.

The property room's inspection is performed by the property and evidence custodian semi-annually.

An annual audit of the property and evidence room shall be conducted by a supervisor not routinely or directly connected with control of property and evidence.

The following methods shall be used:

- a) Selection and review of one HISD Police Department policy case file. The property and evidence are traced through the entire system to the current location. This method verifies the property and evidence, and accuracy of all related forms;

- b) Random selection of an item of property off the shelf was booked into the property room by an officer of the HISD Police Department. The auditor would trace it back through the case file again, verifying the file and associated documentation; or
- c) Selection of an inactive HISD Police Department case file. The auditor would trace the file through the system to the property or verify that all documentation is correct if purged. Before disposal, a physical inspection of the last storage place is recommended to ensure validity.

Comparisons of descriptions do not always address the internal contents. If the evidence seal is intact, the property system is presumed to be sound. If seals have been broken to verify contents, they should be resealed.

An audit of a particular piece of property, or the documentation remaining after the property is disposed of, should be able to tell the entire story of the property's contact with the agency.

Unannounced inspections will be conducted at least once a year as directed by the Chief of Police.

Approved By

  
Pedro Lopez Jr., Chief of Police