

Massachusetts State Police
Forensic Services Division



Evidence Submission Handbook



Massachusetts State Police Crime Laboratory
Evidence Submission Handbook
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Disclaimer:

The information provided in this document may be updated at any time.

Reference www.mass.gov MSPCL website to ensure use of the current revision.

Section 1 Key Considerations when Handling Evidence

1.1 Safety

- Use caution and treat all items as if they are hazardous
- Wear proper Personal Protective Equipment (PPE)
 - Gloves are sufficient for most scenes
 - Booties and/or Tyvek suits should be considered for bloody or dirty scenes
 - Goggles/eye protection and face masks should be considered for scenes that may involve potentially toxic substances
 - When determining proper PPE, consider the type and nature of the scene



1.2 Contamination

- Wear proper PPE to avoid contaminating items during collection
- Change gloves often
- Change gloves between collecting each item
- Package items individually to avoid item to item cross-contamination
- Avoid storing gloves in pockets (or anywhere on your person) before use



Section 2 Considerations Prior to Evidence Collection

2.1 Documentation

- Document the location of the item before recovering
- Use unique identifiers to ensure accurate records

2.2 Analysis Considerations

- Prior to collection, evaluate the type of testing and analysis that may be conducted to ensure the item is properly handled and packaged.

2.3 Preservation

- Use proper packaging depending on the examination/analysis needed (see Section 3)
- Air-dry items before packaging, when possible
- Avoid overhandling items
- Avoid comingling of items (**never** package items from separate locations together)
- Use new packaging materials
- Use appropriately sized containers for items
 - Do not overstuff
 - Items should have limited area within package to move around

2.4 Collection Timeframes

- Items should be collected as soon as possible
- Gunshot residue kits collected after 4 hours on a living individual will not be tested
- Food products and potential feces, vomit, or urine should be collected and frozen as soon as possible

2.5 Evidence Labeling

- Each item of evidence should be properly labeled with:
 - Case Number
 - Unique identifier (property room # or brief description)

Section 3 Packaging Materials

3.1 Evidence for Biological Testing (DNA)

- Items collected for DNA analysis should always be packaged in breathable packaging (paper bags, envelopes, cardboard boxes)
- Wet/damp items may be placed in plastic for short durations (i.e., transport) but should be dried as soon as possible and packaged in a breathable package for storage

3.2 Potential Drug Evidence

- Evidence submitted for drug analysis should be packaged in a heat-sealed packet whenever possible
- Exterior packaging such as plastic bags or wrapping, recovered with the drugs but not in contact with the potential substance, should be removed prior to submission (if safe to do so) if fingerprints and DNA will be requested
- Exterior drug packaging submitted for fingerprints/DNA should be packaged according to Section 3.1 above

3.3 Arson and Explosives Evidence

- When possible, consult the State Fire Marshal's Office for Arson Evidence prior to processing and/or collecting arson and explosives evidence
- All explosive devices/explosives must be rendered safe by the MSP Bomb Squad prior to submission
- Liquid samples
 - Small glass vials/bottles should be sealed and contained in a hardened plastic container to avoid breakage
- Fire Debris
 - Clean metal cans free of rust and dents



- Explosive Debris
 - Clean manila envelopes or paper bags
 - Static free bags
- Gunshot Residue Stubs
 - Adhesive stubs taken from a sealed GSR Kit, must have a questionnaire filled out

Section 4 Maintaining Evidence Integrity

4.1 Chain of Custody (COC)

- COC begins at time of collection
- Ensure proper documentation of date/time/location of recovery
- Seal evidence packages as soon as possible after collection to ensure integrity of evidence items and limit loss of transient evidence



4.2 Properly Sealed

- A package is “properly sealed” only if its contents cannot readily escape and if opening the container results in obvious damage/ alteration to the container or its seal
- Manufacturer seals do not need to be taped and sealed
- The individual sealing the item should initial and date the seal
- The initials/date should cross from the tape onto the packaging

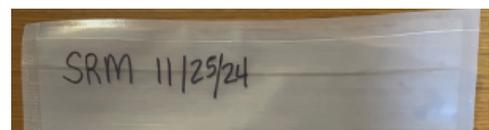


4.3 Metal Cans

- Sealed with a rubber mallet to make them airtight
- Evidence tape should be taped over the edges in a crisscross fashion and placed over the lid and “V” groove.

4.4 Heat Sealed Packets (Toxicology/Drug Items)

- Seal all openings using a heat sealer
- Initial/date across all seals created
- Manufacturer seals do not require initials/date



4.5 Bags/Envelopes

- Evidence tape should extend around all openings of a package
- Initials/date should extend across the tape onto the package



4.6 Boxes

- Evidence tape must wrap around all openings of the box
- Boxes submitted must form an “H” seal, cardboard boxes will have two “H” seals, one on the top and one on the bottom
- Knife/firearm boxes typically have one “H” seal
- Each “H” seal must include one set of initials/date that extend across the tape onto the box
- If you have a box that does not form an “H” seal, consult the Evidence Control Unit upon submission for sealing requirements



4.7 Vendor Purchased Pre-Assembled Kits

- Kits purchased/provided as one unit from a vendor and contain seal labels such as:
 - Buccal Kits
 - Sexual Assault Evidence Collection Kits (SAECKs)
 - Toxicology Evidence Collection Kits
 - Operating Under the Influence (OUI) Kits
 - Gunshot Residue Kits
 - Bloodstain Collection Kits
- These kits may be submitted to the MSPCL without the markings extending from the seal onto the package or with any additional tape, initials or date if the manufacturer provided seal is initial/dated by the collector and still intact
- If the seal provided with the kit is compromised, the package must be sealed per the guidance provided above in Section 4.5 or 4.6



4.8 Red Security Seals

- Drug evidence requires a Security Seal with a unique identifier
- Security Seals will be provided by the MSPCL at the time of submission
- Initials/date must be added to the package but cannot be written across the red security seal as marker ink does not adhere to the surface
- Heat-sealed packets - Security Seal and initials/date are required across the seal created
- Custom sized heat-sealed packets – Security Seal and initials/date are required across each non-manufacturer seal
- Boxes – Security Seals must be placed across each “H” seal
- All unique identifiers from the Security Seal(s) must be transcribed onto the submission form



Section 5 Comparison Samples

5.1 Known/Elimination Standards – Fingerprints/DNA

- The MSPCL requests known standards for comparisons, when possible, if submitting items for fingerprint or DNA analysis
- If items have been handled without gloves, the MSPCL requests elimination standards be collected and submitted
- Elimination standard(s) should also be requested if submitting items belonging to or commonly used by a victim, homeowner, or witness to assist with interpretation of results.
 - Example: steering wheel sample from a stolen motor vehicle case - request vehicle owner to submit a standard
- Elimination standard(s) should be submitted for consensual partners when the case involves a sexual assault to assist with interpretation of the results

5.2 Trace, Arson and Explosives

- Submit comparison samples, when available for paint, glass, explosive debris, fire debris and miscellaneous cases (poisons)
- Comparison samples are collections of evidence/debris recovered away from the blast site, fire, or damaged area that can be used as reference material for comparisons
 - Example: paint chip away from damage on a motor vehicle
 - Example: soil away from the blast site

Section 6 Inventory/Submission of Evidence

6.1 Evidence Inventory

- All items should be packaged and submitted individually
- Exceptions:
 - Evidence collected by a third-party agency (e.g., SAECK, OUI kit)
 - Drug evidence may be submitted as one item however the contents of the evidence should be described on the submission form (e.g., 2 bags of brown powder, 1 bag of white powder, bag of uncounted blue pills)
 - Firearms (see Section 7 for specific directives)

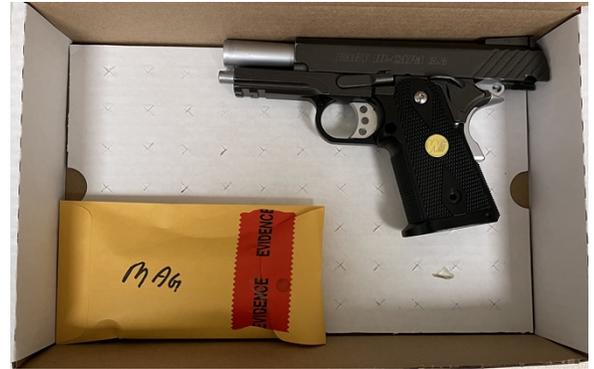
6.2 Evidence Submission Form (ESF)

- Items should be listed individually on the evidence submission form
- Item descriptions should include a recovery location
- When possible, reference the associated property room number on the form
- Agencies may list large quantities of items (e.g. ammunition, pills) as uncounted on the evidence submission form

Section 7 Specific Firearm Evidence Considerations

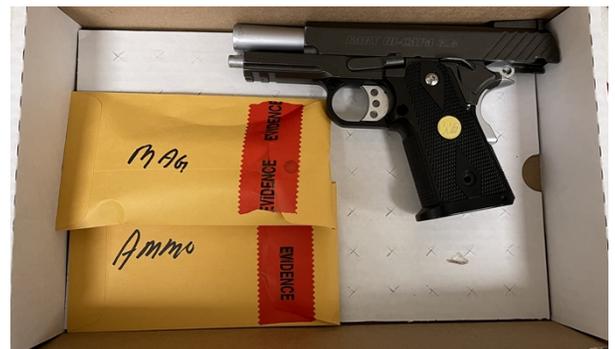
7.1 Items vs. Components

- Firearms recovered loaded will be considered one item with 3 components (firearm, magazine, and ammunition) and should be listed as one item on the ESF
- If a firearm is recovered with an empty magazine the firearm should be listed as one item with 2 components (firearm with magazine)
- If the firearm is a revolver with no magazine and the item is recovered loaded with ammunition it should be listed as one item with 2 components (firearm with ammunition)
- Separate magazines loaded with ammunition should be listed as one item with 2 components (magazine and ammunition)



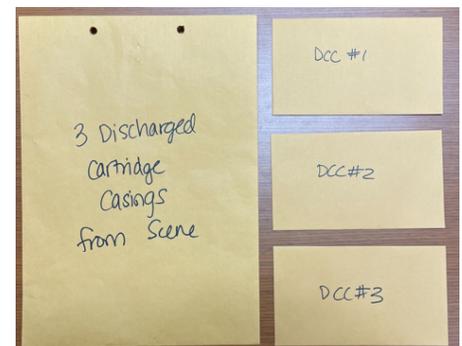
7.2 One Item Per Box/Container

- Each firearm/rifle box should contain only the components of an item as outlined in 7.1 above
- Avoid unloading ammunition from magazines; submit together
- The MSPCL will accept ammunition listed as uncounted on the evidence submission form
- Package and seal loose items such as the magazine and/or ammunition inside small manila envelopes
- Refrain from combining multiple firearms in one box, or packaging separate magazines (those not recovered loaded in the firearm) inside the same firearm box



7.3 Discharged Casings/Projectiles

- Avoid comingling discharged casings or projectiles
- Each casing/projectile should be packaged and sealed individually in coin envelopes but may be submitted on one line of the submission form if from a similar collection location



7.4 Stun Guns

- Remove the battery and package/seal inside an envelope or bag which can be placed inside the firearm box.
- If applicable, remove any cartridges from the item and package/seal inside an envelope or bag which can be placed inside the firearm box

Section 8 Considerations for Evidence Storage/Transport

8.1 General Evidence Storage Conditions

- Evidence should be kept in a temperature/humidity-controlled area when possible
- Evidence should always be sealed during storage or transport to prevent loss, contamination, or tampering

8.2 Specialized Storage Conditions

- Toxicology samples (liquids) should be kept refrigerated (2⁰C to 8⁰C)
- Bones and tissue samples should be kept frozen, if possible (<0⁰C)
- If firearms are recovered from water, the item should be kept in a sample of the same water during transport to the laboratory
- Evidence with potential insect activity should be placed into a sub-freezer (<-60⁰C) as soon as possible to avoid infestation

Section 9 Disposition of Evidence

9.1 Evidence Returns

- Upon completion of testing, the evidence items will be returned to the submitting agency
- If no analysis is required per the submitting or prosecuting agency, the evidence will be returned unanalyzed
- Drug evidence not court activated within two years of submission will be returned unanalyzed, however may be resubmitted for testing if the case becomes active in the court system

9.2 Evidence Retention

- 515 CMR 7.00 governs long term retention and preservation of evidence or biological material by any governmental entity as required by M.G.L. c. 278A, § 16(b)

9.2.1 Biological Evidence Retention

- The laboratory will retain known DNA standards, cuttings, and samples that have been created by an analyst during examination indefinitely unless otherwise directed by a court order

9.2.2 Toxicology Evidence Retention

- Human Performance Toxicology samples are kept for at least 6 months from the date of receipt
- Postmortem Toxicology samples are routinely retained for at least 9 months from the date of receipt
- Postmortem Toxicology samples associated with specific case types or investigations are stored for 3 years from the date of receipt
- Requests may be submitted to retain samples longer than the designated timelines provide above and should be sent to MSPCLCMU@mass.gov

Section 10 Additional Remarks

10.1 Items Currently Not Accepted

- Syringes – may be accepted with prior approval only
- Expressed contents of syringes
- Drug Field Test Kits
- Confidential Informant Buys (CI Buys)
- Firearms that cannot be rendered safe

10.2 Sexual Assault Evidence Collection Kits (SAECKs)

- Follow the guidance provided on www.mass.gov regarding the submission of SAECKs
- The MSPCL will accept all SAECKs, however analysis will follow state requirements and laboratory policies and SAECKs may be returned to your agency untested
- If your agency needs assistance with SAECK storage, please contact the Evidence Control Unit
- Questions about Track-Kit should be directed to kit_trackinginfo@mass.gov

10.3 Fingerprint Cards and Photo Disks of Fingerprint Evidence

- Fingerprint cards and CDs containing photographs of fingerprint evidence are considered evidence and should be sealed prior to submission per guidelines contained within this document

10.4 Firearm Destructions

- Contact the Firearms Identification Section directly regarding destructions by calling 978-451-3480

10.5 General Case Inquires

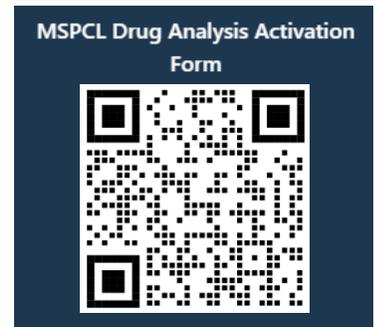
- Contact the Case Management Unit at MSPCLCMU@mass.gov or 978-451-3440

10.6 Expedited Analysis Requests

- Requests to expedite or prioritize testing should be submitted through the www.mass.gov MSPCL website
- Expedited Analysis Requests should be reserved for imminent threats to public safety or imminent trial

10.7 Drug Activations

- Drug evidence must be proceeding in the court system to be analyzed. The prosecuting agency may provide the investigating agency with an Activation Form to submit with the evidence or complete the Drug Analysis Activation on the www.mass.gov MSPCL website



10.8 Evidence Discrepancies

- If upon examination the MSPCL identifies a discrepancy in what was submitted versus what was received, the testing in progress on that item or case will be halted until confirmation by the submitting agency can be made on the item(s)

10.9 Court Documents

- If your agency receives court documents relating to evidence submitted to the MSPCL, please send them to the Case Management Unit at MSPCLCMU@mass.gov as soon as possible
- If your agency receives court documents prior to submission, ensure a copy is submitted along with the evidence

10.10 Notification of Closed Cases

- If a case is considered closed by your agency and no further testing is needed, please contact the Case Management Unit at MSPCLCMU@mass.gov or 978-451-3440 to assist the laboratory with dispositioning open assignments and returning the evidence

10.11 Additional Laboratory Resources

- Consult the www.mass.gov MSPCL website for the current laboratory policies, forms and guidance documents, including but not limited to the following:
 - Item Analysis Policy
 - Expedited Analysis Policy
 - Evidence Submission Form
 - Guidance Document on Evidence Submission



Laboratory Contacts

Inquiries regarding analysis options, testing status and timelines should be directed to:

Case Management Unit (CMU)

Main Phone Line: 978-451-3440

MSPCLCMU@mass.gov

Evidence Submission is by Appointment Only

Evidence Control Unit (ECU)

Sudbury ECU 508-358-3155

Lakeville ECU 508-946-1310

Danvers ECU 978-538-6111

Springfield ECU 413-205-1837

MSPCLECU@mass.gov

Inquiries for Missing Person and Unidentified Human Remains cases should be directed to the email below prior to submission:

mspcl.unsolved@pol.state.ma.us

