

INTERNATIONAL ASSOCIATION FOR PROPERTY & EVIDENCE

Property Room Standards

1. ORGANIZATIONAL PLACEMENT

Organizational Placement refers to authority lines and reporting relationships affecting the property unit. It recognizes the fact that managers hold some elements of formal and informal control over the supervisors reporting to them. The supervisors, in turn, have the same influences over their subordinates. The property unit's organizational placement can greatly impact its independence and credibility.

The size of a law enforcement agency ordinarily influences the organizational placement of its property and evidence function. There are however, compelling reasons – which apply to all departments – that the responsibility for safeguarding and processing property be assigned to a specific organizational unit which functions primarily for that purpose. The unit usually is placed organizationally in the Support Services or Administrative Division.

Separation of duties is paramount to maintaining organizational independence and integrity of the property unit. Centralizing the control and storage of property, and staffing the property unit with personnel, who are not involved in the collection or disposition of property or evidence, are precautions that will simplify control procedures and enhance the integrity of a property room.

When two or more persons or departments are involved in a transaction, the work of one serves as a check on the accuracy of the work of another. When two or more persons are involved in a transaction, the possibilities of fraud and the incidence of undetected error diminish considerably. No one person should handle any transaction from beginning to end. For example, a person receiving cash from officers should not post any ledgers accounting for the transaction. Obviously, segregation of duties becomes more difficult among a small staff. Some compromises may be necessary in small organizations due to staffing requirements.

The organizational placement of the property unit can be part of the overall checks and balances of the agency in two ways. First, the unit should be provided with limited authority. The unit is for property custody and documentation only. Ideally it should not be involved in decisions about what to seize, or in decisions related to property disposition. Second, the unit should be organizationally separate from the patrol and investigation functions. Patrol personnel seize and book most property, and detectives most often check out property and arrange for its final disposition. Using the property unit as a buffer between those two functions enhances accountability. In small and medium size departments, the property unit should be organizationally placed in an Administrative or Support Services Division. In very small departments without an

Administrative or Support Services Division, placement in the Investigative Division by default might be required.

Patrol personnel who collect evidence in the field, and who subsequently may authorize release of these items, should not be given the responsibility to store or process evidence. Investigative personnel who oversee criminal investigations, and are responsible for making decisions regarding the collected evidence, should not be involved in the property function.

In addition, having the unit independent of patrol and investigations reduces the appearance of conflict of interest.