

INTERNATIONAL ASSOCIATION FOR PROPERTY & EVIDENCE

Property Room Standards

2. STAFFING, SCHEDULING AND RESPONSIBILITIES

Staffing

Staffing refers to the selection of employees to work in the property function of the agency. It includes such things as hiring standards, background investigations, assignments, and employee turnover. It is important that the agency's selection criteria produce qualified employees, and a significant part of that is a thorough background investigation. Whether the employee is sworn or civilian is less important than that they are qualified, committed, and long-term employees.

Employees assigned to the property function may be non-peace officers, as peace officer powers are generally not required. The same reasoning may apply to supervisors or managers of the function. Important career ladders may be established by designating the Property Room supervisor and manager to be civilian positions in the organization, depending upon the size and structure of the agency.

Property Officer candidates should successfully pass both a qualifying exam and thorough background check in addition to meeting requirements set forth by the agency. Rotating personnel through the property unit should be discouraged, as it makes quality control more difficult and additional security measures should be undertaken each time that a "key-holding" employee leaves the assignment. If it is determined that rotation of "key-holding" personnel is absolutely necessary, a complete inventory is recommended to protect all employees involved in the rotation.

Scheduling

Accessibility by the public should be considered when determining scheduling. Whenever plausible, the property/evidence facility should be open during regular business hours. Some agencies may release property by appointment only. Smaller agencies may want to consider a flexible schedule for the release of property. Consideration may also be given to the possibility of allocating specific times when the property/evidence room is not open to the public to be set aside for the performance of specific tasks such as the processing and disposing of evidence.

Property Officer's Responsibilities

The major responsibilities of a Property Officer (also referred to as a Property Clerk, Property Controller, Property Technician, etc.) are to receive all incoming property, to store it properly, to preserve its condition, to maintain it securely, to prevent tampering,

to lawfully release or dispose of it, and to maintain documentation of the entire process that is sufficiently accurate and complete to satisfy any court which has reason to examine the process. The number of employees involved in this process will vary by agency size, but in any case, the person designated as the Property Officer has the responsibility for ensuring this process.

The task is made difficult because the Property Officer seldom has any functional authority over those who decide what property to submit, over those who package the property, over those who check property out for court, analysis, or any other reason, or over those who must make the decisions regarding the timing and method of the property disposition. The result is that the Property Officer has a very large and fairly clearly defined responsibility, but no specific authority to carry it out.

The recommended tool for giving the Property Officer the ability to live up to his or her responsibilities is department policy, clearly written and consistently enforced. The Property Officer should have the “**right of refusal**”, that is they should have the right to refuse to accept any property that is not properly marked, packaged, or documented, and the right to refuse to release any property which is not properly authorized.

Primary tasks and duties performed by a Property Officer are to:

- preserve all incoming property from contamination, theft, or loss
- maintain and update property documentation with tracking information, commonly referred to as the “chain of custody”
- ensure that all releases and dispositions of property are legal and properly documented
- arrange and document interim releases and returns of property for court, crime lab analysis, or investigative use
- operate computer terminals as needed
- prepare and forward property-related forms to requesting units and agencies.
- serve as liaison between the agency and other local, State, and Federal law enforcement agencies
- maintain current knowledge of Federal, State, and local laws related to property management
- provide for maintenance of the storage facility
- inventory property based on the policy demands of the agency. Ensure that all efforts are taken to make the property room as safe as possible for employees as well as property

The ultimate goal for any Property Officer is the appropriate disposition of property, whether in compliance with court order, through release to its rightful owner, or through other legal means such as auction, diversion, or destruction.

Both management and supervision need to closely monitor the Property Officer’s regular activities to ensure that priorities are established and properly implemented. Specific goals and objectives are needed to direct the Property Officer in completing certain tasks,

such as regular purging. The property room needs the full time attention of a manager, both as a leader and as a monitor of policy and procedure.