

INTERNATIONAL ASSOCIATION FOR PROPERTY & EVIDENCE

Property Room Standards

23. AUTOMATION

Careful consideration should be given to the automation of the property and evidence operation. In smaller agencies, it may not be cost effective to automate. Automated evidence systems must maintain the chain of evidence and ensure system integrity. At a minimum, it is suggested that a selected system provide the following:

- The capability for complete and accurate chain of evidence records
- One-time data entry into the system for both property and evidence items
- Cash management relative to property and evidence
- Management of “special/sensitive items”
- Bar coding of all items and storage locations
- Tracking of all transactions
- Providing disposition inquiries to necessary personnel on a scheduled basis
- Ability to generate basic reports, such as:
 - Firearms - Ready For Destruction with complete descriptions
 - Narcotics - Ready For Destruction with complete descriptions
 - Currency - Ready For Transfer with calculated dollar amounts
 - Auction Items - Ready for Transfer with complete description
 - Items Received (Time Range)
 - Items Released/Disposed (Time Range)
 - Change in inventory
 - Items out to court
 - Items out to lab

System integrity is essential. Each user should have predetermined access levels based on need. It is necessary to ensure that once data is entered into the system that the original record cannot be deleted, only modified and updated. The system should track information on changes made, the date and time of any changes, and who made them.

The following are recommended field items for a well-designed system:

- Case number

- Evidence or control number
- Name-suspect, victim, owner, finder
- Address
- Crime type - robbery, homicide, assault, etc.
- Crime code-statute number
- Crime class-felony, misdemeanor
- Date and time received
- Seizing officer
- Investigating officer
- Category-firearm, narcotics, currency, etc.
- Storage location
- Description of property
- Serial number
- Review date

Some departments may not find all of these fields necessary. It is highly recommended that the users be involved in the selection or design of the property system. A model system can vary depending on the size and needs of the agency. Bar coding, a common method to track evidence, has become particularly popular. Bar coding refers to any number of codes comprised of a series of alternating stripes, which represent alpha or numeric characters. There are two important reasons for agencies to add bar code systems - accuracy and speeding inventory capabilities.

Accuracy simply means that once evidence has been entered into the system, it can be flawlessly tracked. Transposing numbers, entering wrong numbers, and many other human errors are eliminated. A simple list of employees and locations can be printed by name and bar coded, allowing personnel to transfer property to other locations or employees by simply scanning the bar code. The computer can automatically date, time stamp, and track the transaction as the item moves through the process.

A well-designed system will make the inventory process much easier, allowing the user to scan items on the shelves for comparison with the records. The system should provide two exception reports: a list of items missing, and a list of items on the shelf that appear in the computer at another location (released, disposed, etc.)

It is recommended that any computer system be capable of performing the reporting functions that are required in the property operation.