

IAPE STANDARDS SECTION 1 - STAFFING

Standard 1.1: Staffing - Job Classification

Standard: Property unit personnel should have a job classification title that matches the duties and responsibilities performed by that person. This may be a sworn or civilian position.

Definition: Job classification refers to the name or title of the position that performs the property officer's duties.

Reasoning: Peace officer powers are generally not required to perform the property officer duties of receiving, storing, and disposing of property and evidence. The same applies to supervisors or managers of the property and evidence room. Using civilians generally lowers the cost to perform the duties; however, using a sworn position may permit retaining sworn personnel with permanent disabilities that don't impact their ability to perform the property officer's duties.

Standard 1.2: Staffing – Background Checks

Standard: Personnel should undergo a thorough background check prior to assignment to a position inside the property unit.

Definition: A background check is verification of information submitted by the applicant to determine an applicant's qualifications and suitability for a particular position. A thorough background check should include criminal history check, sex offender registries, prohibited weapons possession status, drug testing, financial disclosure and a polygraph exam (if permitted by local laws and collective bargaining agreement, if one exists).

Reasoning: It is important that the agency's selection criteria produce qualified employees. Assigning a person with a past or present drug problem to handle drugs, or with financial difficulties to handle money will greatly increase the possibility of theft or mishandling, and may also jeopardize the integrity of the evidence system.

The same reasoning applies to background checks for any employee transferring from another assignment within the agency, or another department within the umbrella organization, even if they have undergone a pre-employment background check.

Standard 1.3: Staffing – Adequate Number of Personnel

Standard: The number of personnel assigned to the property unit should be adequate to perform the assigned duties in the property room within the hours they are scheduled to work.

Definition: The adequate number of personnel needed to staff the evidence function is determined by the total number of labor-hours needed to perform all daily duties and responsibilities required by the unit. These daily duties should also include “other ancillary duties” that require time to be spent outside the property room.

Reasoning: There is no one formula that can be used to determine the ideal number of employees needed in the property room. Such considerations as the size of the agency; the hours/days of operation, the operating procedures of the department, etc. must be considered when determined the required staffing levels. The duties and responsibilities of the property officer should be completed in the daily work hours by the number of personnel assigned to the property room.

Additionally, in order to assess staffing needs, the property officer should maintain statistical data that can be used to evaluate workload, property room inventory levels, etc.

Standard 1.4: Staffing – Rotation of Personnel

Standard: Rotation of personnel into and out of the property room should be avoided.

Definition: Rotation of personnel refers to the routine or scheduled transferring of personnel in and out of the property unit assignment.

Reasoning: Rotating personnel through the property unit should be discouraged, as it makes quality control more difficult and additional security measures need to be taken each time that a “key-holding” employee leaves the assignment.

When an agency routinely rotates personnel through the property unit assignment, it generates a “lack of ownership” in the operation. When “ownership” is present, it generally tends to form personal motivation and collective interest, professionalism, and pride.

Standard 1.5: Staffing – Hours of Operation / Scheduling

Standard: The property room employee’s work schedules and public counter schedules should be established based upon public access, peak workload hours or demands, and the need for uninterrupted time to accomplish internal tasks, e.g. purging and disposition.

Definitions: “Hours of Operation” is the scheduled time allotted for the routine transaction of business to occur in the property room.

“Scheduling” is the specific hours assigned to individual employees during the time the property room is open for business.

Reasoning: Accessibility by the public should be considered when determining scheduling. Whenever practical, the property room should be open during regular business hours, as defined by the agency. Some agencies may choose to release property/evidence by appointment only. Consideration may also be given to the possibility of allocating specific time when the property 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. Additionally, an agency may want to consider opening one evening a week, a month, etc. so that citizens can come in to conduct business after regular work hours.

Standard 1.6: Staffing – Responsibilities of the Property Officer

Standard: The major responsibilities of a property officer are to receive all incoming property/evidence, to fully document it, to store it systematically, to preserve its condition, to maintain it securely, to lawfully release or dispose of it, and to maintain a complete chain of custody of the entire process that is sufficiently accurate and complete to satisfy any court requirements.

Definition: The designated tasks and duties of individual property officers assigned to the property unit.

Reasoning: Responsibilities for tasks and duties performed by a property officer are to:

- ensure that incoming property/evidence is packaged in accordance with agency guidelines
- preserve all incoming property/evidence from contamination, theft, or loss
- maintain and update documentation with tracking information, commonly known as the “chain of custody”
- enter necessary data into the property unit tracking system (automated or manual systems)
- ensure that all releases and dispositions of property/evidence are legal and accurately documented
- arrange and document interim releases and returns of evidence for court, crime lab analysis, or investigative use
- operate property management software and information systems, as needed

- prepare and forward property-related forms to requesting units and agencies
- serve as the liaison for property and evidence matters between the agency and other local, state, and federal law enforcement agencies
- maintain current knowledge of federal, state, and local laws related to property/evidence management
- provide for maintenance of the storage facility
- inventory property/evidence based on the policy demands of the agency
- ensure that all efforts are taken to make the property unit as safe as possible for employees as well as property/evidence
- store property/evidence in the designated storage area
- limit access to the Property Room to only authorized individual(s) and maintain access logs
- ensure that there is adequate security for the Property Room

Standard 1.7: Staffing – Promotional Opportunities

Standard: Advancement opportunities for civilian employees within the property unit/agency to the position of lead person, supervisor, or manager should be given to those that pass an established testing and selection process pertaining to the property and evidence function as well as supervision/leadership.

Definition: Promotional opportunity refers to the ability of property unit personnel to advance in career positions within the law enforcement unit/agency.

Reasoning: Advancement for civilian employees within the agency is important as a means to retain the best qualified personnel, and attract those that are interested in the property and evidence management as a career. Sworn supervisors and managers are generally not interested in an assignment working in a warehouse environment.

Career ladders should be established by designating the property unit supervisor and manager to be civilian positions in the law enforcement agency. The selection of the best-qualified person to become a property officer in an agency may be hampered if it is viewed upon as a “career dead end” with no obvious promotional opportunities.

Standard 1.8: Staffing – Training

Standard: Training should be provided to all property officers, supervisors and managers of the property unit. The training should be applicable to the duties and responsibilities of the property officer and should be provided by professional instructors in the field of property and evidence management.

Definition: Appropriate training involves receiving knowledge and enhancing skills in the field of property and evidence management.

Reasoning: Experts in the field of property and evidence recommend that all property officers, supervisors, and managers should be required to attend a property and evidence Management class. The two-day Property and Evidence Management classes provided by the International Association for Property and Evidence, Inc. (IAPE) for example, gives experienced personnel an insight into different ways of accomplishing the required duties. Additionally the training should provide new staff and supervisors a very detailed look at best practices, as well as issues and problems that will be encountered in the assignment.

Training should be timely, continual, and well documented. While attending training prior to beginning an assignment as a property officer is preferred, personnel should, if possible, attend the basic training previously described above within the first year in the assignment. Safety training should include hazardous materials, biohazards, blood-borne pathogens, and a basic firearm orientation on how to safely handle firearms. Training records should be accurately maintained.

Training should always include familiarization and on-going product support and upgrades for whatever software package is in use for the management of the inventory.

Familiarization with the evidence function should also be provided for new hires and especially for newly promoted detectives and investigators illustrating the need for timely authorization to dispose of unneeded items whenever possible.

Standard 1.9: Staffing – Professional Associations

Standard: Property unit personnel should make every attempt to familiarize themselves, and become involved, in professional associations that can provide training and develop additional skills in the field of property and evidence management.

Definition: Professional Associations are organizations that are made up of persons dedicated to providing training, expanding skills and increasing knowledge of property unit personnel.

Reasoning: Involvement in professional associations, such as IAPE, the American Society of Crime Laboratory Directors (ASCLD) and state, regional, or local property associations for networking and training updates is strongly encouraged. These associations can assist law enforcement agencies with the organization and the training of property unit personnel, as well as provide valuable resources to assist with solutions as potential problems arise.

Standard 1.10: Staffing – Organizational Placement

Standard: To prevent a perceived conflict of interest, as it pertains to the disposition of property or evidence, the property unit should be placed organizationally in a neutral arena, such as a Services or Administration Division. The property officer should be the guardian of the property, not the collector of evidence or the decision maker regarding the disposition of property or evidence.

An exception is necessary for smaller agencies that may not have an Administration or Services Division.

Definition: Organizational Placement refers to the authority lines and reporting relationships affecting the property unit.

Reasoning: Law enforcement agencies recognize 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 property unit should be organizationally separate from patrol and investigation functions. Patrol personnel seize and book most property/evidence, and investigating officers are generally responsible for the authorization to dispose of property or evidence.

Placing the property unit in a neutral arena between those two functions enhances accountability. The responsibility of the property unit personnel is to maintain custody and documentation, not to be involved in the collection or decision-making. If possible, the property unit should be organizationally placed in an Administrative or Support Services Division.

It is common practice for the property officer to make the final disposition of Found Property and Safekeeping items (excluding firearms) that by definition has no evidentiary value, but such authority should not extend to the disposition of items held as evidence.

A property officer may not be aware of the potential relationship of a piece of evidence to other criminal investigations. Therefore, the assigned investigator or officer should approve the final disposition. However, if an agency authorizes the Property Officer to make the decision regarding final disposition, that authorization should be memorialized in written policy.