

IAPE STANDARDS SECTION 4 – DOCUMENTATION

Standard 4.1: Documentation – Property Report

Standard: The law enforcement agency should develop and use a Property Report that meets its needs for identifying the owner/finder/suspect/victim, describing the property, and tracking items to document the chain of custody.

Definition: A property report is a computerized record or paper document used to record data as it pertains to the handling, tracking, and storage of property/evidence.

Reasoning: A property report or computerized property record is the basis for documenting the chain of custody of all items that enter the property room.

Suggested information needed on a Property Report form or Property Record:

- Booking officer name and badge/serial number
- Case number or incident number
- Unique control or tracking number
- Bar code/item number
- Description line for each item
- Category of items; i.e. firearm, drugs, etc.
- Type of item, i.e. Found, Safekeeping, Evidence, For Destruction
- Owner, Victim, Suspect box
- Address/Phone # of parties involved
- Type of Crime (i.e. Robbery)
- Felony/Misdemeanor/Infraction/Other
- Date / time item was submitted
- Receiving property officer name and employee/serial number
- Date / time received
- Location stored
- Chain of custody (tracking)
- Investigating officer assigned to case
- Investigating officer approvals to release/dispose
- Approval date
- Final Disposition
- Driver license/other identification (person released to)
- Released by property officer/Date/Time
- Destroyed by property officer/Date/Time

Each item of property or evidence should have its own unique tracking number as no two items in the inventory should have the same number.

Once received by the property officer, the location the items are assigned for storage should be placed on the Property Report, or in the computer Property Record.

If a manual system is used, consider filing the corresponding paperwork of the items that are physically present in the property room together by control number in one “Active” file, and items that are no longer present in another “Closed” file. This may later facilitate the inventory process. The property reports for Found Property and Safekeeping should also be segregated because of their shorter turnover time.

Standard 4.2: Documentation - Computerization

Standard: Computer systems should enhance the ability of the property officer to track and manage the inventory with greater efficiency and accuracy.

Definition: Computerization permits organizing data to provide useful records and reports.

Reasoning: Computer software must provide the ability to track and manage the inventory of the Property Room.

The following are recommended fields for a well-designed system:

- Case number
- Control number or tracking number
- Date and time received
- Booking officer name and badge/serial number
- Name: Suspect, Victim, Owner, or Finder
- Addresses: Suspect, Victim, Owner, or Finder
- Telephone number
- Investigating officer
- Type: Evidence, Found Property, Safekeeping, and For Destruction
- Crime code-statute number
- Crime type - robbery, homicide, assault, etc.
- Crime class - felony, misdemeanor, infraction, etc.
- Category - drugs
- Description of item, make, model, serial, etc.
- Storage location
- Purge review date

The software should provide standard and custom reports that allow the routine review of all items on a scheduled basis. Computerized evidence software must maintain the chain of custody to ensure system integrity. At a minimum, it is suggested that a selected system provide the following:

- The capability for complete and accurate chain of custody records.
- Cash management and accountability relative to property and evidence.
- The ability to print barcodes for all items and storage locations.
- Providing purge review data
- Ability to generate basic reports, such as:
 - Firearms – Pending Destruction with complete descriptors, such as make, model, serial numbers, caliber, etc.
 - Drugs – Pending Destruction with complete descriptions of substance, weight, packaging type, etc.
 - Money - Pending Transfer with total calculated dollar amounts and by case.
 - Auction Items - Pending Transfer with complete description, make, model, serial number, etc.
 - Items Received (between specified times).
 - Items Released/Disposed (between specified times).
- Tickler Files:
 - Items out to court.
 - Items out to crime lab.
 - Items to other agency
 - Items out for investigation

Barcoding, a common method used to track evidence, has become particularly popular. There are two important reasons for agencies to add bar code systems - accuracy and speed when conducting inventories.

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

The selection of any system for use in the property room should be made in consultation with the property unit personnel to ensure that the needs of the property officer(s) are being addressed. It is extremely important that old data, either from a previous computer system, or from an existing paper-based system, be integrated into any new property system. Placing old data into the new system will permit management of the oldest items on the shelf. These are the items that generally hamper the operation.

Standard 4.3: Documentation – Forms

Standard: Forms should be used to: properly track movement, provide disposition notices and approvals, provide pickup notifications to property owners, document access to restricted areas, and document property releases.

Definition: Forms are an official document used to record data.

Reason: Forms are needed for documentation of the handling, submission, tracking and disposition of the items. Forms should be developed to meet the needs and record the data for the Property Unit.

The following forms are suggested to document the various actions, movement, and authorizations needed to manage and track the inventory. Many of the forms may include multiple components of the listed items.

- A Property Report is used to identify the booking officer, why the property was seized (evidence, found property, safekeeping, etc.), identify the item, and assign a control number. This form may also be used to document other tasks, such as tracking movement, approvals, releases, etc.
- A Chain of Custody Report is used to document the movement of evidence from the time it is seized, signed out to the crime lab, signed out to court, and eventually authorized for disposition. This could be included in the Property Report above.
- A Property Receipt is used to document the receipt of property by the department and a copy should be given to the owner/finder with information on how to claim the item.
- A Currency Report is information that is generally captured on the face of the currency envelope, but may be included with a package of money that documents the count by denomination, who counted the money, and who verified the count.
- A Property Release Notification may be a letter or postcard that notifies the owner of property that an item is ready for release, and contact information to obtain the item. This may also contain time constraints (drop dead date) that requires action to be taken prior to a specified date.
- A Court Receipt is used to document that an item of evidence has been retained by the court and entered as court evidence. This form is used to capture the name of a person who is receiving the evidence for the court.
- A Court Receipt Not Returned is used to notify an officer that evidence that was checked out by him/her has not been returned in a timely manner and that the evidence must be accounted for as soon as possible.
- A Firearms Receipt is used to document the seizure of a particular firearm for safekeeping. The form provides the owner with the reason for the seizure and the process needed to reclaim the firearm.

- An Evidence Correction Notice notifies the booking officer that the item submitted does not comply with department packaging standards and must be corrected before it can be received by the property room.
- The DNA Destruction Notification Letter notifies a defendant and attorney that biological evidence pertaining to the case will be destroyed by a specified date unless a motion is filed requesting the retention for future testing.
- The Property Release Authorization Form documents the authorization of the investigating officer to release evidence for its ultimate disposition: release to owner, divert, auction, or destroy.
- The Access Log documents the entry of persons, who are not assigned to the property room, into the restricted areas of the property room, when, for what reason, and who accompanied the visitor.
- The Property Transfer Form documents that the described property or evidence items were released to a specified person and agency. This information may be included with the Chain of Custody form.

Unofficial forms that are created by individuals in small work groups to solve specific problems should be referred to a management committee for departmental approval. Supervisors should be aware of unofficial forms that are created by well-intentioned employees, as these forms may be subject to Discovery in a court case.

Standard 4.4: Documentation – External Movement

Standard: Whenever evidence is transferred from the property room to an external location, such as court, the crime lab, or other agency, its destination and the person responsible should be tracked and monitored by either a paper or electronic tickler file until it is returned, or its final disposition is documented.

Definition: Tracking and monitoring refers to documenting who is responsible for taking possession and delivering evidence from the property room to an external location, such as the crime lab or court.

Reasoning: The external movement of evidence needs to be closely monitored to ensure that it is returned in a timely manner. Items that are signed out for court should be returned by the end of business on the same day unless it is received by the court as an exhibit. Evidence that is not returned should be inquired about on the next business day. When evidence has been entered as a court exhibit, policy should require that the evidence be signed for by an official court representative and the receipt returned to the property officer.

Evidence signed out to the crime lab should be periodically inquired upon to ensure that the item has not been lost and is still in the custody of the lab. The status and date checked should be documented.

Departmental policy should also provide directives for any officer signing out evidence for investigative purposes as to whether the item can be stored outside the evidence room for what length of time, and how it should be secured to protect its integrity.

Department policy should prohibit permitting evidence to be signed out for investigation or to another agency without the knowledge of the investigating officer or supervisor.