

IAPE STANDARDS SECTION 5 – FACILITIES

Standard 5.1: Facilities – Construction

Standard: Property facilities should be constructed to provide levels of security that will deny unauthorized entry, and provide a safe work environment.

Definition: Facilities construction refers to how evidence storage areas are constructed, what materials are used, and what special considerations are necessary.

Reasoning: The following criteria should be considered when constructing an evidence storage facility:

Exterior Walls

The building materials should ideally consist of concrete blocks with concrete filled cells, poured concrete walls, tilt-up concrete walls, or other similar material. Other types of prefab or modular construction *may* be suitable under some conditions, such as metal or brick buildings.

Interior Walls

It is best to avoid sheetrock or drywall, as it can easily be penetrated. In the event drywall is used, it should be backed with plywood, wire mesh, a double layer of drywall, or laminated gypsum board. All interior walls should extend from the floor to the roof, or the floor pan of the next level. This prevents access into a controlled area by climbing over a wall through a suspended ceiling.

Windows

The room(s), if possible, should be designed without windows. In the event windows are present in an existing structure, they should be fitted with bars or mesh to enhance security and discourage entry.

Roof

The exterior roof should be constructed of materials that are resistant to entry and meets current disaster resistant building codes for the risks associated with the location, i.e.: tornado, hurricane, earthquake, or wild fire.

Doors

Exterior doors should be metal clad with metal frames. The hinges to these doors should always be located on the inside unless they are special security hinges.

Interior doors should be solid-core or metal clad. Half-doors or Dutch-doors, where permitted by code, should be dead-bolted on both halves.

Ventilation

The property room should be ventilated in a manner that controls heat, cold, humidity, and odors. Special consideration should be given to DNA related storage areas to control heat and humidity that tends to degrade biological evidence. Maintaining the room temperature in a controlled environment (60 to 75 degrees, with relative humidity that does not exceed 60% is recommended).

Any area that is used for storing drugs should be independently ventilated in a manner that noxious fumes are removed from the building, and not re-circulated into the building's heating, ventilation, and air conditioning (HVAC) system. The proper design of a drug storage area should include a "negative pressure" ventilation system that changes the air in the storage room approximately 10-12 CPH (changes per hour).

Heating, air conditioning, and ventilation system duct or registers should be constructed to prevent unauthorized entry into the secure storage area.

Standard 5.2: Storage Facilities – Layout

Standard: The property room layout should take into consideration adjacencies between work areas, workflow, temporary storage, long-term storage, high profile items, bulk or oversize items, biohazards, hazardous materials, cold storage, destruction area, administrative area, and release areas.

Definition: The floor plan used to make the workflow systems merge efficiently together within the property unit.

Reasoning: The property room should be located in a convenient place within the department for submittal and release. A basement area is an acceptable location for a property room if loading dock or access to the parking lot for loading/unloading is available.

Vertical movement between floors may create both logistical and efficiency issues.

Many agencies have found that placing the property room adjacent to an area set aside for report writing and packaging is most efficient. In this configuration, pass-through lockers may be used by employees to submit property and evidence into the property room after packaging the item.

The design of a public release counter should be as close to the department's front lobby as practical to limit public access to secure areas within the building. In larger departments where numerous transactions routinely occur between officers and the property officer, consider having a separate service counter that is out of view of the public. This is important to protect the identity of undercover officers.

A well-designed property room will provide office space for the property officer located outside the actual evidence storage area. Having the office adjacent to the storage area provides a workstation that is not within the confines of the secure storage area.

The layout of the long-term storage areas should include enhanced security areas for firearms, drugs, and money. Storage areas for general evidence should include specifically designated storage areas for envelopes, paper bags, boxes, long items, bulky items, biohazards, flammables, hazardous materials, items pending destruction, items pending auction, Found Property, and Property for Safekeeping.

Standard 5.3: Storage Facilities – Storage Schemes

Standard: An orderly system for numbering and storing property/evidence being retained by the property room should be provided.

Definition: A system of numbering or labeling the building(s), room(s) and shelves/bins that store property/evidence held in the custody of the law enforcement agency.

Reasoning: By developing a packaging standard around the shelving and bin configuration, or vice-versa, an agency can maximize the efficiency and space of its property/evidence storage, and minimize the effort it takes to store and retrieve it. A suggested scenario for developing an overall organization pattern would be:

- Review the historical record of the types and quantities of property/evidence that are regularly booked into the property rooms.
- Designate particular areas of the storage facility for particular categories of property/evidence. For instance, Property for Safekeeping should be nearest the public counter, and homicide evidence in the farthest away location due to the frequency that these locations are accessed.
- Design standard packaging containers based on the size of the most commonly found items.
- If shelving is fixed, design your containers around the shelving sizes. If shelving is adjustable, use containers that are standard sizes to minimize costs. If several standard size envelopes were designated, then the appropriate containers, drawers, and bins could be designed to store selected envelopes in specific shelving locations.
- The use of high-density (mobile) storage shelves is the most effective method to significantly increase storage space. All rooms, bays, bins, shelves, racks, and containers need to have a clearly readable address.
- Being able to specifically identify and document each storage location used by the agency is a critical step in efficient storage and retrieval.

Standard 5.4: Storage Facilities – Safety / Environment

Standard: The property unit should provide a safe and environmentally friendly work environment that addresses such concerns as:

- fire, flood, earthquake, tornado, and hurricane hazard mitigation
- fire-life safety equipment
- ventilation
- lighting

Definition: Safety/Environment refers to the necessity to provide a work place free of uncontrolled physical hazards and a plan for storing potentially dangerous items.

Reasoning: The property unit should provide the necessary equipment and tools to ensure a safe working environment in all property and evidence storage and work areas. The property office and storage areas should be equipped with all currently required safety equipment, including a fire alarms, fire sprinklers, smoke detectors, fire extinguishers, emergency lighting, and close access to an eyewash location.

Older existing structures should be upgraded to current regulations any time improvements that require a building permit are made. All existing structures should all be equipped with smoke detectors and fire extinguishers regardless of whether or not they are legally mandated.

Consider providing larger evidence rooms with a communication device to permit summoning assistance, if needed, from deep within the storage areas. The property officer's efficiency is also enhanced because he/she would not need to walk to the office area to communicate.

Other protective supplies and equipment such as gloves, goggles, paper masks, and disposable aprons/jumpsuits/hats should be provided and be available for use as an option by individual employees.

The storage of departmental supplies and equipment, such as uniforms, vests, holsters, tactical gear, flashlights, batteries, etc. are often included with evidence storage duties. While the Quartermaster or Supply Sergeant duties have many similarities with evidence retention, and are compatible as a related duty, the two functions are separate and should not be grouped together in one area. Supplies are not evidence and should not be commingled.

Ventilation of noxious fumes is extremely important and is addressed in Section 5.1 Facilities - Construction.

Adequate lighting is very important in helping to prevent avoidable injuries. The lighting should be sufficient for an average person to easily read the labels and numbers on packages located on the lower shelves. This is often a problem when shelves are retrofitted to a room where they were not originally intended. This is a special problem with high-density mobile shelving. Heavy shadows are created any time lights are covered by a moving shelf. This may be easily mitigated by running a florescent tube light perpendicular to the moving shelves, instead of parallel.