

## IAPE STANDARDS SECTION 7: LONG-TERM STORAGE

### **Standard 7.1: Storage Locations - Long Term**

**Standard:** Buildings, rooms and shelves/bins should be provided for the long-term storage of property/evidence for the duration of time it is held in the custody of the property room.

**Definition:** A long-term location is designated to keep items retained in the custody of the agency until they are diverted, sold, released or destroyed.

**Reasoning:** Appropriate storage facilities are needed to accommodate the long-term storage of property and evidence. Building(s) or rooms should be large enough to secure all evidence. Additionally, enhanced security storage should be acquired for the storage of high profile items such as firearms, money and drugs.

### **Standard 7.2: Storage Locations - Evidence**

**Standard:** Evidence held in the custody of a law enforcement agency should be stored in a manner that facilitates efficient use of space, permits quick retrieval, minimizes safety hazards, prevents cross-contamination and facilitates conducting an inventory.

**Definition:** A long-term storage of evidence is a place designated to keep evidence items segregated from other types of property retained in the custody of the agency until they are disposed, sold, released or destroyed.

**Reasoning:** Evidence may be held in the property room anywhere from just a few days to years. Most items need to have a long-term location designated for various categories of evidence, until the item reaches its final disposition for release, destruction, auction or diversion.

**Envelope Storage:** Storage space should be allocated for various sizes of envelopes designated for small items. These envelopes should be filed by the tracking number. Providing shelves for different size envelopes make for easy storage, retrieval and inventories.

**Paper Bag Storage:** Storage space should be allocated for various sizes of bags designated for medium size items. These bags should be filed by the tracking number that is visible without having to move the bag. Providing shelves for different size bags that are only one bag deep makes for easy storage, retrieval and inventories.

**Box Storage:** Storage space should be allocated for various sizes of boxes designated for larger items. These boxes should be filed by the tracking number.

Providing shelves for different size boxes makes for easy storage, retrieval and inventories.

Drugs, Money, and Firearms should have specialized storage locations with enhanced security. (See Section 9, Section 10, and Section 11 respectively regarding those items.)

Homicide Evidence: By its very nature, homicide evidence has no statute of limitations and is frequently retained for decades, and in some cases forever by statute. Given the lengthy storage requirement, homicide evidence should be grouped together and relegated to those areas that are least accessible in the property room. Otherwise, the property officer will walk past the homicide evidence to get to other items that need to be accessed more often.

A large percentage of homicide evidence may contain DNA and trace evidence. Special attention should be given to ensure that all biological and trace evidence is preserved in a manner that protects it from cross-contamination and degradation. Each agency should obtain a written protocol from the forensic lab that it utilizes on how to store and preserve biological and trace evidence.

If the evidence is submitted to the forensic lab for analysis and returned, property room policy should define how the returned item(s) should be stored for long-term preservation.

Homicide related firearms, drugs, and money should be stored in the respective designated storage areas, not with the homicide evidence. The reason for segregating these items from other homicide evidence is to place them in enhanced security (see Sections 9, 10, and 11 regarding enhanced security) and to permit the items to be routinely accounted for in an inventory.

Magnetic Tapes: Audio and video tapes should be placed in a location that is temperature and humidity-controlled, and free from magnetic fields. High voltage wires, transformers, speakers, and electric motors may generate strong magnetic fields that could harm the magnetic data.

Hazardous materials and flammables: These items generally do not belong in the confines of the property room; however, small quantities and samples may be stored in adequate containers in an area designated for such storage. Hazardous and flammable storage may be in a specially designed cabinet that is placed in a location where fumes would not pollute the air in the room or the building.

Syringes and Sharps: Syringes and sharps should only be stored in an approved sharps container and should be stored in a designated area for employee safety. Sharps containers should not be commingled with other items of evidence to prevent accidental cuts or needle sticks.

Syringes and needles are generally being booked into evidence less frequently due to the potential hazard of a needle stick injury. Agency policy may permit syringes and needles to be photographed and destroyed in lieu of being booked as evidence. Any liquid present in a syringe should be emptied into a small glass vial for subsequent analysis, if appropriate. Always dispose of the syringes and needles in a manner approved for medical waste, which differs by state.

Cold Storage: Items that need refrigeration or freezing should be placed in a respective refrigerator or freezer designated for evidence storage only, depending upon the requirements of the type of evidence and the crime lab's recommendation. Any refrigerators or freezers used to store evidence should be equipped with a temperature monitoring and recording device that can provide storage temperature fluctuation information to the forensic lab for their quality control requirements.

Liquids should generally not be frozen in any glass or hard plastic containers, as the container may break.

Evaluation criteria should be developed to ensure that only those items that require refrigeration or freezing are in fact being stored in those locations. Once the item has been tested, consult with the crime lab to determine if it can be stored at a room temperature controlled environment. This may alleviate the need to acquire additional refrigerator or freezer space in the future.

Future crime lab requirements may direct collecting agencies to freeze larger amounts of evidence than is presently needed, and this may lead to an increase in the demand for freezer space. In the event that a new facility is being designed, it is suggested that the servicing crime lab be consulted to determine their evidence preservation recommendations for long-term storage.

Bulky Items: A bulky item can be defined as any item that cannot be conveniently stored readily on shelves and bins due to size or shape. Bulky items may include tires, vehicle parts, carts, lawn equipment, large TVs, hydroponic grow equipment, etc.

Storing bulky items on the floor within painted grids is an acceptable option. The use of cargo containers, pallet racks, or a satellite facility may be required depending upon the size and quantity of items.

Long, Slender Items: The storage of long items such as poles, clubs, shovels, sticks, and similar items are difficult to store in an organized manner. Three ways to make these items easily retrievable are:

- 1) items can be stored vertically by constructing a box with a wire crosshatch at the top and near the bottom to allow items to stand up in an identifiable grid section;
- 2) items may be stored vertically in a container made of large diameter agricultural PVC pipe; or
- 3) items may be stored horizontally on a deep shelf with hang tags on one end making them easy to identify.

Bicycles: Bicycles should be stored in a manner that is both space efficient and permits easy retrieval of individual items while not compromising the safety of the property officer. The use of hooks on an overhead rack from which to hang bicycles is one of the most space efficient methods commonly used. Separate bikes by evidence, found property and safekeeping to facilitate the timely purging of the bikes. Interior storage should be provided to avoid potential liability for damage due to weather exposure.

Latent Fingerprints: Latent fingerprints that are stored inside the property room should be segregated from other evidence and filed in a systematic manner.

There is no specific standard or requirement that latent fingerprints must be stored inside the property room, only that they should remain secure, tracked, and documented as evidence. Storing fingerprints in some type of locked file cabinet in a location outside the property room, such as an agency's Identification Section, is an acceptable practice.

Photographs: Photos, film canisters, negatives, and prints should ideally be packaged in a uniform size envelope, and store in a drawer, bins, or on a shelf, that only contains photographic evidence.

Digital Images:

(See additional information in Digital Evidence Management, Standard 16)

Digital images do not need to be stored inside the property room if they are stored in a dedicated, password-protected computer/server. It is imperative that access to the photos is limited in order to protect the chain of custody and unauthorized access to photos. A backup copy of the digital image may be downloaded onto a CD or DVD and stored in the property room as a duplicate or multiple original.

Electronic Media:

When storing CDs and DVDs:

- Keep dirt or other foreign matter away from the disc.
- Store discs upright (book style) in plastic cases specified for CDs and DVDs.
- Leave discs in their packaging (or cases) to minimize the effects of environmental changes.
- Store discs in a cool, dry, dark environment in which the air is clean.

Computer equipment, flash drives, and hard drives should be protected from dust, moisture, sunlight, heat, and static electricity. Consider wrapping computer equipment in anti-static bags prior to placing on shelves.

Electronics: Large bulky items, such as TVs, sounds systems, computer towers, printers, speakers, etc. may require tall and deep shelves. Consider placing all like items together to best utilize space.

Cell phone data (See additional information in Digital Evidence Management, Standard 16)

Cell phone data is a frequent source of vital evidence in major cases. Many cell phones have the ability to wipe the data clean upon receipt of command from a remote source. Consider storing all phones seized as evidence in a protective Faraday bag, or other shielded location that prevents a command from being received to destroy all data.

Vehicle Storage: A vehicle held as evidence should be stored in a secure location where it is protected from potential tampering and from the outdoor elements, whenever possible.

In the event that vehicle storage cannot be accommodated, a contract with a reputable tow yard for towing and storage may be acceptable; however, the site must remain secure from the public and tow yard employees. Periodic inspection to ensure the preservation of this evidence is suggested. An alternative is to have a cargo container for the temporary storage of a vehicle used in a major crime. This will ensure controlled access, but containers do have the possibility of extreme temperature variations.

### **Standard 7.3: Storage Locations - Found Property**

**Standard:** Found property should be segregated from items of general evidence and placed in a location that is easily accessed and close to the public release area.

**Definition:** Found Property storage is distinguished from general evidence by its short turnaround time and by designating its location where it can easily be viewed and retrieved.

**Reasoning:** Found Property storage is needed because law enforcement agencies are generally required by statute to temporarily take property into custody when citizens and public officials report finding items that belong to others. A copy of the receipt provided to the finder should accompany the found item to permit the property officer to notify the finder if an owner cannot be located.

When found property is turned into the property room, the items should be held the minimum amount of time mandated by laws and policy/procedures. For this reason, Found Property should generally be kept segregated from evidence due to its short-term storage requirements and the possibility of commingled items being overlooked for years.

**Exception** – Firearms should be stored with other firearms, but conspicuously labeled as Found Property. Found money should also be stored in a segregated location along with other packages of money, but conspicuously labeled as Found Property.

#### **Standard 7.4: Storage Locations - Property for Safekeeping**

**Standard:** Property for Safekeeping should be segregated from items of general evidence and placed in a location that is easily accessed.

**Definition:** Property for Safekeeping consists of non-evidentiary items of personal property that have value and are temporarily stored for the owner due to incapacity or arrest.

**Reasoning:** Safekeeping storage is distinguished from general evidence by its short turnaround time and by designating its location where it can easily be viewed and sorted according to time retained.

When Safekeeping items are submitted to the property room, the items should be held the minimum amount of time mandated by laws and policy/procedures. Safekeeping should generally be kept segregated from evidence due to its short-term storage requirements and the possibility of commingled items being overlooked for years.

**Exception:** Firearms held as Safekeeping should be stored with other firearms, but conspicuously labeled as Safekeeping. Money held for Safekeeping should also be stored in a segregated location along with other packages/envelopes of money, but conspicuously labeled as Safekeeping. Drugs are generally not held for Safekeeping, but temporarily storing prescription medication is a possibility and should also be conspicuously marked.