

Maine State Police Crime Laboratory

Evidence Storage and Handling

1. Scope

This policy outlines the laboratory's policies on evidence handling and storage. All evidence in the laboratory will be stored and handled in a way to protect the integrity of the evidence, to prevent against loss, contamination, and deleterious change. Evidence storage and processing facilities are limited access. The laboratory defines a "proper seal" as one that prevents the contents from readily escaping and if entering the container results in obvious damage/alteration to the container or its seal. A proper seal consists of tape sealing the opening of each evidence container with initials across the seal.

2. Incoming Evidence Storage

2.1 Evidence to be processed is stored in the following locations:

2.1.1 Most evidence will be stored in the Incoming Evidence locker. The Forensic Chemist Technicians and Laboratory Sergeant have access to this storage location.

2.1.2 Fire Debris evidence is stored in the Fire Debris Locker, the Incoming Chest Freezer, or the Incoming Evidence Locker. Only the Fire Debris Analysts have access to the Fire Debris Locker. The Forensic Chemist Technicians and Laboratory Sergeant have access to the Incoming Evidence Locker and Chest Freezer.

2.1.3 Incoming Forensic Biology evidence that needs to be frozen or is small in size is placed in the Forensic Biology Freezer. This includes evidence transferred from other laboratory sections. All laboratory staff members, except the clerical staff, have access to this storage location.

2.1.4 Known DNA samples are stored in the DNA Evidence Refrigerator.

2.1.5 Other storage locations may be used as space or special storage requirements dictate.

2.1.6 Refer to section specific policies and temperature charts regarding temperature monitoring requirements for refrigerators and freezers.

2.2 Some evidence requires special handling and packaging for storage.

2.2.1 Biological evidence that cannot be air-dried should be packaged in a plastic container and stored frozen.

2.2.2 Firearms evidence will be stored in a safe condition inside cardboard rifle and handgun boxes. If a firearm is reported to be loaded and firearms personnel are not immediately available to take notes and make a weapon safe, then the ECT (Evidence Control Technician) shall place the weapon in a box clearly labeled

Maine State Police Crime Laboratory

Evidence Storage and Handling

with the word “LOADED”. The ECT shall keep such loaded weapons separate from the other incoming firearms in a secure location clearly identified as “LOADED FIREARMS” until such time as a firearms examiner can render the firearms safe. Firearms that are for reference only do not need to be placed in boxes unless reported to be loaded, in which case, the above does apply.

- 2.2.3 Evidence going to the Latent Print Section will be packaged in a manner to protect potential prints from being obliterated.
- 2.2.4 The garage area of the Crime Laboratory shall be maintained as a limited access area and an extension of the evidence storage and processing areas, if necessary. All vehicles should be logged in as evidence.
- 2.3 Evidence storage locations are inventoried on a regular basis to ensure that LIMS is accurate.
 - 2.3.1 Room temperature evidence storage locations and refrigerated evidence storage locations are inventoried approximately every six months.
 - 2.3.2 Freezers are inventoried when defrosted, which may be approximately every six months or once a year, depending on the freezer.
 - 2.3.3 The inventory includes checking what is physically in the location against the LIMS accounting of that location and correcting any discrepancies.
- 3. **Evidence in Progress**
 - 3.1 Evidence that is “in progress” must be stored in such a way to prevent loss, cross transfer, or deleterious change.
 - 3.2 “In progress” evidence must be protected against unintended change. The examiner may choose to either repackage and seal the evidence container at the end of each work day or place the evidence in a locker if one is available. Convenience containers do not need to be sealed when “in progress”.
 - 3.2.1 Circumstances may dictate, based on the nature of the evidence or the type of analysis that the evidence be left in an unpackaged / unsealed condition.
 - 3.2.2 For evidence that needs to be stored in the limited access garage area, the chain-of-custody in LIMS will reflect when the evidence is “in progress”. The chain-of-custody must be checked prior to another examiner or agency accessing the evidence.

Maine State Police Crime Laboratory

Evidence Storage and Handling

- 3.3 Evidence should not remain “in progress” indefinitely. Cases should be processed and reports completed within 90 days from the time the case is assigned. Exceptions may be granted on a case-by-case basis through the Section Supervisor.
 - 3.3.1 Exceptions should be requested in writing, e-mail is sufficient, and include an expectation as to when the case will be completed.
 - 3.3.2 If additional examinations are necessary or re-examinations are requested, the examiner will have an additional 90 days to complete the examinations and requisite reports.
- 3.4 Completed evidence will be returned to Evidence Receiving as soon as practicable after examinations are complete and the case has been administratively reviewed.
- 3.5 Each section has evidence storage locations for work in progress:
 - 3.5.1 Forensic Chemistry Section:
 - 3.5.1.1 Evidence may be stored at the laboratory bench of the examiner. Storage in common areas should be left to a minimum.
 - 3.5.2 Forensic Biology Section:
 - 3.5.2.1 Each examiner has a storage location within the Main Laboratory.
 - 3.5.2.2 Extracts that are still in progress are stored in the refrigerator in the Main Laboratory.
 - 3.5.3 Latent Print Section:
 - 3.5.3.1 Evidence may be stored at the laboratory bench of the examiner. Storage in common areas should be left to a minimum.
 - 3.5.3.2 The Latent Print Laboratory has shelving available for “in progress” evidence.
 - 3.5.4 Firearms Section:
 - 3.5.4.1 Evidence may be stored at the laboratory bench of the examiner or on shelving units located in the laboratory area. Storage in common areas should be left to a minimum.

Maine State Police Crime Laboratory

Evidence Storage and Handling

4. Evidence Handling

- 4.1 If an examiner opens an item of evidence and finds significant discrepancies between the item description and the evidence item, the examiner will stop processing the evidence until the discrepancy can be rectified with the submitting officer or agency.
 - 4.1.1 The examiner will document the conversations in the case record along with any remediation that takes place.
- 4.2 If an examiner opens an item of evidence and determines that examination(s) requested do not seem appropriate, the examiner may determine the proper examinations. A discussion with the submitting officer or agency is recommended, but not required. Records of those discussions must be maintained in the case record.
- 4.3 Evidence will be handled in such a way as to prevent loss, cross contamination, or deleterious change.
- 4.4 Only one item of evidence is to be handled at a time.
 - 4.4.1 Latent Prints and Firearms may process multiple pieces of unpackaged evidence in one batch. Prior to any processing, Latent Prints and Firearms will take any necessary DNA swabs.
 - 4.4.2 For latent processing, if the DNA swabs will not be taken until after the processing is complete, only one item of evidence will be processed at a time.
- 4.5 Due to the sensitivity of current DNA technology and the nature of the samples that the laboratory is testing, each section is responsible for outlining contamination prevention procedures in the section protocols.
- 4.6 Each laboratory work area will be cleaned prior to use. This includes utensils such as forceps, scissors, scalpels, measuring tools, and pens. Additionally, microscopes that are used in areas where biological evidence may be collected will also be cleaned prior to use.
- 4.7 Disposable laboratory coats will be worn when processing evidence. The frequency with which these coats will be disposed is section-dependent. **Cloth laboratory coats are not to be worn when processing evidence.**
- 4.8 Disposable gloves will be worn when handling evidence at all times.

Maine State Police Crime Laboratory

Evidence Storage and Handling

- 4.9 Proper PPE will be worn by lab staff and individuals from other agencies when processing evidence in the garage area. Food and beverages are not allowed in the garage area.
- 4.10 The examiner is to never assume that the evidence is finished with processing. Re-examinations may be requested at any time, even after trial.
- 4.11 Some evidence will not be processed for DNA evidence after certain examinations due to the likelihood of cross contamination during the course of normal examination procedures. These will be identified in each section's protocols.
- 4.12 If contamination has been identified either before or after DNA analysis:
 - 4.12.1 The examiner will immediately notify the Section Supervisor.
 - 4.12.2 A Quality Assurance Report must be generated in Paradigm.
 - 4.12.3 The area identified as the source of the contamination will immediately be thoroughly cleaned.
 - 4.12.4 Any reagents, water, or other consumables thought to be potential sources of contamination will be discarded.
- 4.13 Evidence collected by laboratory staff at a crime scene will be handled with the same precautions as utilized in the laboratory whenever practicable. Staff will enter the evidence into LIMS as soon as possible upon returning to the laboratory.

5. Evidence Marking

- 5.1 All evidence analyzed or inventoried by the examiner must be marked in order to identify items before and after analyses and to establish the integrity of all items.
- 5.2 Marking will consist of the laboratory case number, item number, and examiner's initials.
- 5.3 Each examiner should be consistent on where and how they mark their evidence.
- 5.4 If an item of evidence is too small, cannot be marked, or if the evidence is to be examined by additional scientists, and marking the evidence would interfere with the additional examinations, then the most proximal container will be properly sealed and marked.

6. Completed Evidence

- 6.1 Prior to returning evidence to Evidence Receiving the examiner shall check for additional requests in LIMS. If there are additional requests the analyst shall notify the appropriate

Maine State Police Crime Laboratory

Evidence Storage and Handling

section and then make arrangements for transfer to the section or return the evidence to the incoming evidence locker.

- 6.2 When examination and testing of the evidence has been entirely completed and the report has passed review, the examiner will bring the properly sealed evidence items that are to be disposed or returned to the agency, to Evidence Receiving.
- 6.3 Evidence to be returned will be stored in the Evidence Receiving Outgoing Evidence storage location.
- 6.4 The ECT is responsible for returning the evidence to the submitting agency.