## Purpose

To outline the procedures for the transportation, receipt, handling, protection, storage, retention and/or disposal of test items.

To outline the procedures and appropriate facilities for avoiding deterioration, loss, or damage to the test item during storage, handling, preparation, and testing.

## Scope / Field of Application

This procedure applies to all test items.

The objective is to provide the laboratory analyst with an unaltered and correctly documented test item.

## Definitions and Acronyms

**Convenience package –** A container which is used to facilitate storage and/or transfer of sealed containers or items, but is not part of the chain of custody. This package shall not be sealed but may be closed.

**Evidence -** An item submitted for analysis. An item of evidence is equivalent to a "test item" as described in ISO 17025.

**Records Management System (RMS) -** The Forensic Service Unit's information management system.

**Intact seal –** Closure of a package containing evidence by a taped, heat or other tamper-proof means in order to prevent loss, contamination or deleterious change while ensuring that attempted entry into the container is detectable.

**Master Case File –** All-encompassing documentation stored in RMS, image/data drives and hard case file for case documents, Images, charts and supportive data cross referenced by master case number.

**Case File-** Hard file which normally contains printed documents, recordable media with supportive data and administrative documents related to case.

**Proper seal –** An intact seal with initials. Initials shall appear across seal in some manner touching the seal and the package and shall be demonstrative of any persons who open and reseal the test item.

**Repackaging of test item-** When necessary to repackage due original packaging being unsuitable after testing the original packaging shall be included with the test item and proper intact seals and date shall appear on the packaging.

**Identifying markings-** Markings that are appropriate on the outside of the packaging to demonstrate identity/ownership, safety precautions and special handling instructions such as "keep refrigerated etc."

**Voucher –** Property and evidence submittal sheet. Required for all submissions for lab testing.

**FS1 Forensic Services Request-** Laboratory examination request form. This form shall be submitted with any test item that requires Forensic Examination.

**Temporary Locker-** Assigned secure storage for test items in the possession of an analyst.

**Evidence Control-** Unit under the Pitt **C**ounty Sheriff's Office tasked with long term storage for the agency.

**Analyst-** Title to represent all Laboratory Personnel (chemists, technicians, examiners) responsible for testing of items of evidence.

## Responsibility

Laboratory personnel
Analyst

## Materials Required

Refrigerator / freezer
Shelves / racks/storage cabinets

## Procedure

1. The Laboratory shall ensure the integrity of the test item by following procedures for receiving, handling, storing and returning Test Item, and by documenting the chain of custody to provide for the generation of legally admissible chain of custody records. All Test Item receipts, transfers, and returns shall be documented in RMS. External transfers shall be documented in RMS and signed custody sheet placed in master case file. Test Item as referred to throughout this document shall be synonymous with the term Evidence.

2. It shall be the responsibility of Laboratory staff to educate submitting agencies in proper packaging procedures. When an agency delivers Test Item packaged in a fashion or in a container that may cause the Test Item to deteriorate, the submitter shall be asked to repackage the Test Item.

3. The Laboratory shall not permit any action that may compromise the integrity of Test Item or breach confidentiality or safety.

4. Test Item (including partially examined Test Item and verifications of previously completed cases) shall not be accepted for analysis if it has been previously examined in any manner unless prior approval by the Laboratory Director or Quality Manager is obtained.

5. Test items are packed to prevent spillage or breakage. Labels/written notes on package bearing the test item identification, and the word "FRAGILE", "BIO HAZARD" etc. must be attached to each container. The top of the package is clearly identified as "THIS END UP" if applicable.

6. Test Item shall be sealed properly. Personnel shall check for proper seals whenever Test Item is received. The seal on Test Item being submitted shall bear the initials of the individual placing the Test Item under seal. The initials shall be on the tape, or across the tape onto the Test Item package Initials shall appear across seal in some manner touching the seal and the package and shall be demonstrative of any persons who open and reseal the test item.

7. Packages of evidence shall be closed by a taped, heat or other tamper-proof means in order to prevent loss, contamination or deleterious change while ensuring that attempted entry into the container is detectable.

8. A Test Item accepted by the Laboratory shall be accompanied by a Forensic Services Request (FS1). The FS1 shall be signed by the submitting person prior to acceptance. The signature may be an appropriate digital signature. A test item can be submitted in person or to the temporary Lockers in the Deputy Room. The submitter shall receive a copy of the Forensic Services Request Form or RMS Chain of Custody. Chain of custody receipts from other departments may be signed only by laboratory personnel that are present at the time of transfer.

9. A RMS-generated case number shall be assigned upon receipt of the first submission. Laboratory receiving personnel shall make every effort to assign the same Laboratory number to a criminal event regardless of the number of submitting agencies, suspects or victims. Submissions involving criminal events committed by a suspect shall be assigned a unique Laboratory number for each criminal event. Any

supplemental submission(s) shall be assigned the same Laboratory number as the original submission. Laboratory cases in which a RMS-generated lab number has been allocated shall be assigned to an Analyst by Lab Director or Quality Manager or his/her designee.

10. Laboratory numbers shall be formatted as follows in RMS: YYYY are the four digits of the calendar year number, followed by a five digit number assigned consecutively by RMS.

11. Laboratory case numbers are unique identifiers and shall be placed on all submission documents.

12. RMS generates consecutive item numbers for each item of Test Item submitted. Laboratory employees shall maintain the item number designation assigned by RMS. No duplicate Laboratory item numbers shall exist within a case.

13. Test Items shall be described in RMS as stated on the Forensic Services Request Form (FS1). Administrative (typographical) errors should be corrected in the case documentation prior to submission to the PCSO Forensic Services Unit.

14. For Acceptance all evidence outer packaging shall display at a **Minimum**:

    - Agency Case Number
    - Agency Item Number
    - Seizing Officer/Agent
    - Date Sealed/Packaged

15. The evidence manager or designee performs a series of checks and inspections to ensure all necessary requirements have been met, item integrity has been maintained, and that all necessary information has been supplied.

16. When a Test Item is initially accepted into the possession of Evidence Control or another Laboratory employee on behalf of evidence control , it should be marked or labeled for identification stating the Laboratory case number and item number assigned by RMS. Receiving personnel shall document the date the Test Item is received.

17. Test Item packages should be compared with the FS1 to ensure Test Item is present. If there is a discrepancy, the submitting officer/agency shall be contacted and the discrepancy should be corrected. Any changes to the submission information should be documented on the FS1.

18. After receipt of the case file the Analyst shall retrieve evidence for testing from general evidence by signing a chain of custody form and verifying the correct test items are present per packaging description prior to taking control of the test items.

19. Upon receipt of latent lifts the analyst shall document on the individual latent card or photo as practical, the analyst initials, date, PCSO case and item number.

20. All latent lifts or photos shall be stored in an envelope with a custody label affixed to or written on it. Internal transfers between analysts for review shall be documented on this envelope.

21. Convenience packages do not need to be sealed as Test Items. Convenience packages may be labeled or marked and assigned a Laboratory case number. Only sealed containers and/or items shall be placed in convenience packages

22. The condition of Test Item packaging shall be evaluated and any condition(s) that would affect the quality shall be recorded. When the suitability of Test Item for examination is questionable, or the Forensic Services Request (FS1) is unclear, the Analyst who has custody of the Test Item shall contact the submitter.

23. At the time the Test Item is opened, the Analyst shall check the contents against the items listed on the Forensic Services Request Form (FS1). If a discrepancy with the Test Item is observed by the Analyst, it shall be noted in master case file.

24. Cases that require witness documentation:

    - Discrepancies in Specific Quantities listed on FS1 that are not present in evidence that cannot be explained.

    - Discrepancy in US Currency more than 10 Dollars.

    - Items that are totally different than what is described.

***Note** – The witness shall not be anyone who has previously been involved with the handling of the test item. The laboratory employee who witnesses the discrepancy shall be documented in the master case file.

25. The assigned Analyst shall ensure that items are maintained in such a way to ensure limited and authorized access only. Large and/or cumbersome items may be stored in a limited access area.

26. Test Items shall only be stored in a locker, drawer, cabinet, etc. that has been identified as an approved Test Item storage area. Items used to aid in the identification, storage or protection of Test Item (such as empty convenience containers, pens, markers, tape guns/dispensers, post-its, etc.) may be stored with Test Item in a manner which would not contribute to the loss, cross contamination, or deleterious change of Test Item.

27. Each Analyst has personal storage lockers and cabinets for the storage of test items while in their possession.

28. The Analyst shall retain Test Item in his/her designated Test Item storage area at all times the Test Item is not being examined. Test items that are not in storage should not be left for any extended period of time without properly securing the work area.

29. A sub-item may be created by an Analyst and shall be documented in case notes and on sub-item, only when a part, portion and/or component of the original item is separated for analysis. Sub-item numbers shall be generated by using an alpha and/or numeric sequence.

30. If the processing or analysis of an item develops new evidence then that item shall be assigned a unique control number in RMS according to paragraph's 10, 11 and 12 above. The new item(s) shall be handled appropriately according to this procedure.

31. An investigating officer may request that a Test Item from his/her case be compared to a Test Item submitted in another case. The case shall be cross-referenced in RMS and noted on the report. The request shall be documented in the master case file.

32. Any test item that is subsequently transferred to another analyst for additional testing or other disposition shall be documented in Master Case File and chain of custody shall be signed.

33. Test Items which may experience deleterious changes without refrigeration shall be placed in a refrigerator as quickly as possible and remain refrigerated except during examination.

34. Any questions regarding the proper storage and/or packaging of a Test Item shall be directed to the Section to which the Test Item shall be assigned.

35. Containers/items shall be re-sealed with a minimum of the date and the initials of the analyst.

36. In the event a Forensic Scientist/Technician or Examiner leaves employment with test Item(s) remaining in his/her secure storage location, the Quality Manager shall take and ensure custody of the Test Item. Custody should be documented in RMS from Quality Manager to appropriate Evidence Storage Location or appropriate personnel.

37. An Analyst receiving test item submissions containing any cash or coins greater than ten dollars shall be opened and counted in the presence of a witness at the time of testing. The Analyst shall document the verification in the master case file.

38. During the internal audit, all case evidence/test items in the custody of an Analyst shall be checked by the Quality Manager or designee and audited to ensure compliance with existing policies and procedures.

39. When analysis is complete, all Test Items shall be transferred to General Evidence for retention or other disposition. An Analyst shall return sealed Test Item directly to the Evidence Control and sign chain of custody. If it is impractical to seal the Test Item, the Test Item shall be tagged securely and the tag shall contain all required identifying information.

40. All Evidence/ Test Items tested for outside agencies shall be hand to hand transferred back to the appropriate entity. The receiving entity shall be given a copy of the analytical report and all appropriate chain of custody documents.

## Documentation

Each test item is uniquely identified and labeled upon receipt at the laboratory. Storage and transfer records are maintained in the master case file according to QSP 4-3-1.

Complete records are kept of every transfer of test items to an individual, laboratory, or storage facility.

Transfer documents are maintained in the Master Case File and on evidence packaging and include:

- Evidence Voucher
- FS1 (chain of custody)
- RMS Chain of custody
- RMS Property Report

- Property custody label

## Reference Procedures

QSP *5-7-1* – Sampling

## References

Garfield, F.M., Kleska, E., Hirsch, J. 2000. Quality Assurance Principles for Analytical Laboratories.

| REVISION HISTORY | | |
|---|---|---|
| **CURRENT VERSION** | **EFFECTIVE DATE** | **SUMMARY OF CHANGES** |
| 1 | 2016/07/01 | Original Version. |
| 2 | 2018/02/15 | Change Revision Table, Rev# to Ver#, Add and define temporary locker, Change issue date to effective Date. |
| 3 | 2018/04/01 | Add definition of "Analyst" to document, Change effective date, remove "office of program manager" Remove number eighteen redundant. |
| 4 | 2018/10/18 | Added sections 19 and 20 to address specific handling of Latent Lifts. |