

# Alaska Scientific Crime Detection Laboratory

## Procedure for Evidence Management

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**Purpose:** To establish procedures for the protection, marking, submission, receipt, transfer, inventory, and return of evidence for the Alaska Scientific Crime Detection Laboratory (ASCDL).

### Evidence Life Cycle in Laboratory

Evidence is received at ASCDL via in person, carrier, or electronic submission

Evidence is accepted into ASCDL in the evidence section

Evidence is protected during storage and/or analysis

Evidence is logged into the Laboratory Information Management System (LIMS)

Evidence is marked with a unique identifier

Electronic chain of custody, for each evidence item received by ASCDL, is maintained in the LIMS

Evidence is returned to the submitting agency or placed in long term storage at the laboratory

Evidence is inventoried

### Laboratory Case Numbers

Laboratory case numbers are assigned as per the Quality Assurance Manual in 7.4.2. The laboratory case number shall be formatted as follows in the LIMS:

- YY-#####
  - YY is the last two digits of the calendar year
  - ##### is the five-digit number assigned consecutively by the LIMS, beginning with the number one (00001) assigned to the first case submitted in the calendar year.

A Laboratory Case Number (LCN) label shall be generated in the LIMS and be applied to the square in the upper left-hand corner the first page of the RLS. This case label will cover text stating:

“Please refer to the crime lab webpage (<https://dps.alaska.gov/comm/crimelab/home>) for guidance, policies, and procedures regarding evidence submission and item selection practices.”

This is an informational statement for submitting agencies and not used for internal laboratory analysis.

A LCN label shall be generated in the LIMS and placed on the first page, at minimum, of all documents submitted to the laboratory with evidence. Subsequent LCN labels should be generated to identify document pages that could not be identified on their own.

An investigating officer may request that evidence from one case be compared to evidence submitted in another case and the request may involve a different jurisdiction. This request shall be documented in the case activities and to establish uniformity, the cases shall be cross-referenced/related in the LIMS.

### Receiving Evidence

Evidence shall be received by evidence section staff except in instances as approved by the Evidence Supervisor or a member of Top Management.

All physical evidence accepted by ASCDL for scientific analysis (technical testing report) shall be accompanied by the current version of the Request for Laboratory Services Form (RLS). When a new RLS is made available, the laboratory will issue to the customer an implementation date that allows customers time to distribute the new document to the necessary users prior to mandatory compliance.

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All evidence item packaging must be properly sealed with initials on the seal(s) at a minimum. Evidence packaging received without a proper seal shall be remedied by placing the evidence in laboratory provided packaging and/or applying new initialed and dated tape to securely seal the packaging to protect the evidence inside.

Laboratory provided packaging is the preferred method for correcting an improper evidence seal and shall be used whenever possible; however, there are exceptions. The first exception is Sexual Assault Kit boxes. Tape may be used to correct an improper seal on a Sexual Assault Kit box. The other two exceptions are 1) a tape seal is needed to protect evidence inside a package or 2) the evidence package is too large to fit inside any laboratory provided packaging.

**Corrected seals will be noted in the notes field of the evidence item in the LIMS.**

At a minimum, the agency case number and agency item number must be present on an evidence item for the laboratory to accept the evidence into the laboratory. In addition, a description of the contents of the evidence packaging is preferred.

From the RLS, the agency city listed on the RLS will be selected from the dropdown in the “city” box of the offense tab for evidence tracking purposes.

### Receiving / Accepting Evidence In Person

The agency representative will present each of the evidence items as the laboratory evidence employee confirms the items are listed on the RLS. Use the agency case number and the agency item number to identify each item of evidence being received. The agency representative will then relinquish the items to the laboratory evidence employee. The laboratory evidence employee shall visually inspect the evidence items to ensure proper seals and evidence markings.

Track each item that is accepted on the RLS to ensure that all evidence is accounted for. When all items on the RLS have been accepted by the laboratory evidence employee, ensure that the agency representative has signed the chain of custody and then the laboratory evidence employee shall sign the chain of custody on the RLS and note the date and time of acceptance into the laboratory. This acceptance is identified as EVIDINTAKE and will be documented in the electronic chain of custody when cases are created in the LIMS.

These steps are repeated until all agency cases presented by the submitting agent have been accepted into the laboratory evidence room. If there is a discrepancy at any time during this process, the submitting agent will correct it at that time or the item will not be accepted by the laboratory evidence employee. Every effort will be made to enter temperature sensitive evidence into the LIMS on the date it is received. If it is not possible, temperature sensitive evidence will be stored in the vault refrigerator overnight and on weekends.

### Receiving / Accepting Evidence via Carrier

When evidence is received via carrier (USPS, FedEx, etc.), create a package label with the date and time the package was received. This acceptance is identified as EVIDINTAKE and will be documented in the electronic chain of custody when the case is created in the LIMS. Items received via carrier will be stored in the evidence vault refrigerator overnight and on weekends if they cannot be processed/accepted into the laboratory on the date received.

When ready to process the package, open the shipping container and find the RLS(s) submitted

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with the evidence item(s). Remove the evidence items one at a time from the shipping container and correlate each evidence item with a specific RLS from the shipping container. The person processing the package shall evaluate item packaging and inventory all evidence items to ensure all evidence is present and properly listed on the RLS(s). Ensure that each item from the box can be matched to an RLS. When all items on an RLS are accounted for and are correct, the person that processed the package shall initial and date in the chain of custody section on the bottom of the RLS for all cases in the package.

If any conditions adverse to evidence quality exist, if there is a discrepancy between an RLS and the evidence received, if the request for services is unclear, or if the suitability of an item of evidence for examination is questionable, the instance shall be reconciled. The reconciliation shall be documented on an Evidence Correction Form (ECF). The ECF should then be sent to the appropriate case agent or noted that no contact was necessary and the correction that was made. The ECF shall be uploaded into the LIMS for the affected case(s). **A case activity will be added to each case in which an ECF is created.** See the JusticeTrax Manual for more information.

### Evidence Received via Electronic Submission

The Laboratory accepts digital images for footwear intelligence and friction ridge via email. The appropriate discipline manual addresses the procedure that is followed and how the evidence receipts are documented.

### Logging evidence into the LIMS

Evidence is logged in to the LIMS system as per the JusticeTrax Manual. Laboratory employees shall maintain the item number designation assigned by the submitting agency. No duplicate item numbers shall exist within a laboratory case. The agency shall be contacted in the event of duplicate numbers and the correction documented. Evidence shall be described in the LIMS utilizing the RLS as a guide. Administrative errors and information deemed more appropriate to the tracking of evidence may be changed in the LIMS by the Forensic Scientist/Technician assigned to the task.

Barcode labels for each item of evidence accepted by the laboratory shall be generated with the LIMS. Each item shall have only one barcode associated with it.

The chain of custody shall start from EVIDINTAKE. The date and time the package was received, noted on the package label or RLS, will be entered into the date and time slot in the evidence transfer window. The laboratory staff member logging the case shall be listed in the To field. This initial transfer can potentially appear that the evidence was in the laboratory staff member's possession for an extended period of time if the evidence was in the intake location for an extended period of time. During the evidence intake portion, the evidence is either under seal when received in person or sealed in a mailing package until processed and accepted into the lab. The process of evidence intake is trying to electronically capture the time the evidence was received at the laboratory rather than document when the evidence technician took it off the intake table to process it. During the evidence intake time, all evidence technicians have equal access to processing the evidence so capturing when the evidence arrived at the lab and who actually processed it addresses more risk than the time the specific technician took possession of the evidence off the intake table as the date and time the evidence item is created in the LIMS is stored in the audit trail.

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The RLS and any supporting documentation, to include an ECF, shall be uploaded into the appropriate case in the LIMS. This documentation will be stored as one PDF per case submission in the imaging module and will have the date in the file title.

### Logging Sexual Assault Kit (kit only) into the LIMS

Sexual Assault Kits received at the laboratory require additional information to be collected to meet state statutes. For kits, the item of evidence should be entered as normal, to include the source, and then the “Evidence Type” is selected. When Pediatric SA Kit, Suspect SA Kit, or Victim SA Kit is selected, the data extension field (three dots to the right of the evidence type field) becomes active. Open the data extension field:

- Enter the Exam Start Date as written on the RLS or the kit itself
- Enter Exam (Date) comments should be filled in when the exam is listed as spanning multiple days
- Enter Disposition Reason as per agency service request per RLS (analysis, storage reason, etc.)
- Disposition Notes will be filled out by the Biology Section, if needed, to identify the reason a kit is not viable for analysis
- Disposition Status will be filled out by the Biology Section, if needed, to identify if a disposition reason in the Disposition Notes field has been verified

### **Documentation of Case Transactions**

All evidence transfers shall be documented in the chain of custody in the LIMS each time an evidence transaction takes place.

### **Protection of Evidence from Loss, Cross-contamination, and Deleterious Changes**

It is the responsibility of all laboratory staff to ensure, insofar as possible and reasonable, that evidence does not experience loss, cross-contamination, or deleterious change while in the possession of ASCDL.

All seals applied to evidence by laboratory personnel shall be marked with the initials of the person sealing the evidence and the date sealed. Whenever possible these markings should cross the barrier between the seal and the container.

All sealed evidence containers opened by laboratory personnel will be identifiably marked by the person that opened the item. The item(s) tested will be identifiable for association to observations and results in the report. All outer evidence containers sealed by laboratory personnel must have the laboratory case number and item number visible, and the agency identifiers/barcode should be visible through any laboratory provided packaging that is used.

Evidence items received in paper bags will be repackaged by the Forensic Scientist into laboratory provided packaging prior to being returned to the evidence vault after analysis. If laboratory personnel must vary from this practice, it must be documented in the LIMS.

If an item of evidence is located in a location different from that listed in the chain of custody, the Evidence Supervisor shall be notified.

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Evidence which may experience deleterious change without refrigeration shall be placed in an evidence refrigerator as quickly as possible and remain refrigerated until examined or transferred. Evidence which may experience deleterious change due to breathability of the packaging in which it was submitted should be addressed and repackaged into laboratory provided breathable packaging. **This action should be documented in the notes field of the item in the LIMS.**

Any questions regarding the proper storage and/or packaging of evidence shall be directed to the discipline to which the evidence is being assigned.

When an employee recognizes that evidence has been contaminated so as to alter or affect the results, the employee shall notify their supervisor and initiate the appropriate corrective action.

If seals are not intact on evidence packages containing controlled substances or currency, the Forensic Scientist or Technician will **document the condition of the package using the notes field for the item** in the LIMS. A witness shall attest to the condition of the package **in the case activities** of the LIMS.

If tampering is suspected, the discipline supervisor shall be immediately notified. The discipline supervisor shall notify top management and they shall determine the appropriate course of action.

### Convenience Packages

Clear plastic folders are available to consolidate and organize cases with small items. The folders should be used whenever practical for smaller items in a case. The case number should be visible through the convenience package for easy case reference. The folders should be easy to file, not bulging or rounded. More than one folder may be used for a case. If a case has one large item and numerous small items in a folder, the large item should be stored as near as possible to the clear plastic folder storage area.

### Evidence Storage

Access to the laboratory evidence vault is limited to evidence staff members and key management. Access to discipline evidence rooms/areas is limited to designated personnel. Each discipline evidence room has incoming and outgoing evidence storage locations that accommodate evidence transfers from the evidence vault to the analysts at the time the discipline has designated prior to analysis and at the conclusion of analyst's need for access to the evidence. A work instruction is available for more information on this process. In the event that the Forensic Chief or designee enters a Forensic Scientist's/Technician's personal evidence storage area, the transaction shall be documented in the case activity of the LIMS for all cases that were subject to the access.

Evidence items in the custody of Forensic Scientists/Technicians shall be sealed properly and stored in evidence storage rooms or personal evidence storage areas when not actively being examined. Evidence in the process of being examined shall be maintained in a manner to avoid loss, contamination and/or deleterious change but still allow easy access by the examiner during the examination process. Containers/items shall be re-sealed upon completion of analysis and retained securely until transferred.



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Evidence should be replaced in the original container whenever possible after analysis unless a discipline manual specifies an alternate method. Evidence shall be returned with the original container in a laboratory provided package in the event that the evidence is not replaced in the original container.

The agency identifiers/barcode should be visible through any laboratory provided packaging that is used. If it is impractical to seal an evidence item in a package, the item shall be tagged securely, and the tag shall contain all required identifying information.

### Returning Evidence

#### Staging Evidence for Return

Evidence can be returned to the submitting agency when case analysis has been completed, when notification is given that evidence is ready to be returned, or when a communication is received from the submitting agency that testing of case evidence is no longer required. Evidence personnel can search and review cases in the LIMS to find ready to return evidence and make a note of these cases by running the Ready to Return Evidence Report. Run the Ready to Return Evidence Report from JusticeTrax (or use a document provided by the Chief and/or Evidence Supervisor) find the agency of interest and identify all the items that are designated to be transferred back to the representative.

Collect all items listed on the report for the specific agency from the evidence vault. Perform a self-check of all the items pulled for return to ensure that the correct items have been selected for return.

If these items are for an agency who is receiving these items in person, follow the procedure below under the heading “In Person Return”. If these items are to be mailed to the submitting agency, follow the procedure under the heading “Via Traceable Delivery Return”.

#### In Person Return

To return items in person, to an agency representative at the window, in the LIMS, the evidence items selected for return are electronically transferred to the agency representative by the laboratory evidence employee. To do this, the evidence is scanned from the evidence vault location to the laboratory evidence employee. In the “Via” dropdown box, “In Person” is selected. The “Then To” field is then selected “Manually Select” is selected. The laboratory evidence employee selects “Agency Representative” from the drop down list. A small “Select Agency - Rep” window will appear and from the “Agency” drop down choose “\*Evid Return”. This will automatically populate the “Rep” as “Rep, AGC” in the drop down field below. Click on “Rep, AGC” and click “Select”.

Once the Chain of Custody information is entered and correct, highlight the “Evidence to Transfer” field and scan each of the evidence items that are to be returned. Once all items are scanned, press the “OK” button which will clear all the items that were scanned. Go back to the “Transfer” option at the top of the LIMS window and select “Print Outbound Receipts”. Select the box net to “Show Mine Only” and verify that only the items just transferred are showing. Click “Print Selected” at the bottom of the screen. This will download a PDF version of the receipt onto the computer. Print the evidence receipt and then use it when handing the evidence over to the agent to ensure that all items transferred appropriately.

If all items transferred and are accounted for on the evidence receipt, give the printed receipt to the

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agency representative and the transfer is complete. If an item did not get transferred, go back through the above steps until all items from the “Return Report” for the agency have been transferred out of the laboratory’s possession.

### Via Traceable Delivery Return

The Laboratory shall return evidence via traceable delivery (Note: Certified USPS is the preferred method for returning evidence, but other traceable delivery types like GoldStreak or FedEx are acceptable). The Forensic Scientist/Technician packaging the evidence is responsible for determining the most appropriate, cost effective, and lawful method of return.

Evidence to be mailed shall be placed in a container of sufficient size and strength to contain the evidence. Select an appropriately sized box to fit all items selected for return. Add bubble wrap/paper to stabilize and protect the item during shipment. Once everything is packed in the box, take it over the postage meter area and place it on the scale. Log in to the Pitney Bowes SendPro Web Application and follow the prompts to print a shipping label. Choose the shipping service Priority Mail® and check the boxes for Certified Mail® and Return Receipt Electronic. Print the shipping label.

In the LIMS, the evidence items selected for return are electronically transferred to the agency by the laboratory evidence employee. To do this, open the transfer window. The evidence is scanned from the evidence vault location to the laboratory evidence employee. In the “Via” dropdown box, USPS is selected and then the barcode on the shipping label is scanned into the “Note” field. The “Then To” field is then selected and then “Manually Select” is selected. The laboratory evidence employee selects “Agency Representative” from the drop down list. A small “Select - Agency Rep” window will appear and from the “Agency” drop down choose “\*Evid Return”. This will automatically populate the “Rep” as “Rep, AGC” in the drop down field below. Click on “Rep, AGC” and then click select. Once the Chain of Custody information is entered and correct, click in the “Evidence to Transfer” field and scan each of the evidence items that are to be returned. Once all items are scanned, press the “OK” button which will clear all the items that were scanned. Go back to the “Transfer” option at the top of the LIMS window and select “Print Outbound Receipts”, select the box next to “Show Mine Only” and verify that only the items you just transferred are showing. Then click “Print Selected” at the bottom of the screen. This will download a PDF version of the receipt onto your computer. Open the PDF and then print a copy.

Use the evidence receipt when placing the evidence items into the shipping container to ensure that they are all accounted for and transferred appropriately.

If all items transferred and are accounted for on the evidence receipt, place the receipt into the shipping box and package for shipment. If an item did not get transferred, go back through the above steps until all items from the “Return Report” for the agency have been transferred out of the laboratory’s possession.

Tape the shipping container closed. Wrap the shipping container in postal paper and apply postal tape to cover all seams. Openings shall be sealed properly with tape to prevent evidence loss, cross transfer,



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and/or contamination. Affix the shipping label to the package. Place the package in the designated location for postal pick up.

Upon receiving delivery confirmation from Pitney Bowes via e-mail, go to USPS.com and enter the tracking number. Click the drop-down for Return Receipt Electronic and enter your contact information, use [DPS.Evidence.SCDL@alaska.gov](mailto:DPS.Evidence.SCDL@alaska.gov) for the e-mail address. An electronic return receipt will be e-mailed within a few minutes. Attach the PDF Return Receipt in the LIMS to each case that was contained in the package. Name the file as: YYYY/MM/DD – RETURN RECEIPT with the date being when the shipping label was printed (the same date that the items show returned in the LIMS). Note: If a Laboratory employee becomes aware of evidence which has been lost in transit to or from the Laboratory, the employee shall immediately notify the Evidence Supervisor.

### Evidence Inventory

A full inventory of the Evidence Vault and Bio Evidence 2 should be performed annually at a minimum. An inventory of open locations in Bio Evidence 1 should be performed annually.

#### Preparation

In the evidence vault, open the computer Notepad program and save the document as the Shelf Row/Location to be inventoried name and year (Ex: Shelf A 2016) in a data location that is easily accessible by the Evidence Supervisor. Evidence inventory is preferred to have a minimum two people to perform, a scanner and a recorder.

#### Scanning

Scan the employee bar code in the notepad system and then the location barcode. From there, the scanner will scan each item in that location. The recorder will ensure that each scan is captured in the Notepad program. The recorder will save the record periodically throughout the scanning process. For locations that do not have items of evidence on them, a “TEST” barcode is used to ensure that the location is scanned and accounted for. When one row of shelves is done being scanned, the recorder will save the document and open a new notepad.

#### Reconciliation

Open the evidence reconciliation software and enter JusticeTrax username and password. Click “New”, Un-check the box “Pull File From Pocket PC” and click “Browse”. Find the document that was saved during the scanning procedure. Open the document and click “OK”. The reconciliation software will prepare four reports:

- Evidence in Correct Location
- Incorrectly Stored Evidence
- Evidence Missing from Scanned Location
- Scanned Barcodes of Incorrect Type

Once the reports are saved for that shelf row/location, the next shelf row/location can be scanned using the preparation and scanning protocols above.

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The reports titled Incorrectly Stored Evidence and Evidence Missing from Scanned Location for each evidence Shelf/Location will be printed, assessed, and the items appearing on the reports corrected or accounted for before the inventory is considered complete. If an item of evidence cannot be accounted for a Corrective Action Report will be performed.

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### Revision History

2021 R1	2021 R0	Section	Changes
-	-	Throughout	Updated spelling, spacing, grammar, and punctuation. Used ASCDL in place of "the laboratory".
3	-	Receiving Evidence	Added "Corrected seals will be noted in the notes field of the evidence item in the LIMS." and "From the RLS, the agency city listed on the RLS will be selected from the dropdown in the "city" box of the offense tab for evidence tracking purposes."
3	-	Receiving/Accepting Evidence in Person	Added "Every effort will be made to enter temperature sensitive evidence into the LIMS on the date it is received. If it is not possible, temperature sensitive evidence will be stored in the vault refrigerator overnight and on weekends."
3	-	Receiving/Accepting Evidence via Carrier	Added "Items received via carrier will be stored in the evidence vault refrigerator overnight and on weekends if they cannot be processed/accepted by the laboratory on the date received."
4	-	Receiving/Accepting Evidence via Carrier	Added "A case activity will be added to each case in which an ECF is created."
5	5	Protection of Evidence From Loss...	Changed "all evidence items sealed" to "All seals applied to evidence by laboratory personnel"
6	-	Protection of Evidence From Loss...	Added information regarding where information of evidence items should be documented in the LIMS.

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6	-	Evidence Storage	Access to the laboratory evidence vault is limited to evidence staff members and key management. And "Each discipline evidence room has incoming and outgoing evidence storage locations that accommodate evidence transfers from the evidence vault to the analysts at the time the discipline has designated prior to analysis and at the conclusion of analyst's need for access to the evidence" and updated " In the event that the Forensic Chief or designee enters a Forensic Scientist's/Technician's personal evidence storage area, the transaction shall be documented in the case activity of the LIMS for all cases that were subject to the access."
7	7	In Person Return	Updated entire section to match LIMS commands
8	7	Via Traceable Delivery Return	Updated entire section to account for new electronic program and to match LIMS commands