NIST Special Publication 1500

NIST SP 1500-33A

Evidence Management Steering Committee Report: Opportunities to Strengthen Evidence Management Processes

NIST/NIJ Evidence Management Steering Committee

This publication is available free of charge from:
https://doi.org/10.6028/NIST.SP.1500-33A

NIST NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF STANDARDS AND TECHNOLOGY
U.S. DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE

NIJ NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF JUSTICE
ADVANCING JUSTICE THROUGH SCIENCE

NIST Special Publication 1500
NIST SP 1500-33A

Evidence Management Steering Committee Report: Opportunities to Strengthen Evidence Management Processes

NIST/NIJ Evidence Management Steering Committee

This publication is available free of charge from:
https://doi.org/10.6028/NIST.SP.1500-33A

September 2025

U.S. Department of Commerce
Howard Lutnick, Secretary

National Institute of Standards and Technology
Craig Burkhardt, Acting Under Secretary of Commerce for Standards and Technology and Acting NIST Director

Certain equipment, instruments, software, or materials, commercial or non-commercial, are identified in this paper in order to specify the experimental procedure adequately. Such identification does not imply recommendation or endorsement of any product or service by NIST, nor does it imply that the materials or equipment identified are necessarily the best available for the purpose.

Publications in the SP1500 subseries are intended to capture external perspectives related to NIST standards, measurement, and testing-related efforts. These external perspectives can come from industry, academia, government, and others. These reports are intended to document external perspectives and do not represent official NIST positions. The opinions, recommendations, findings, and conclusions in this publication do not necessarily reflect the views or policies of NIST or the United States Government, nor do they necessarily reflect those of the committee members' organizations.

NIST Technical Series Policies

Copyright, Use, and Licensing Statements

NIST Technical Series Publication Identifier Syntax

Publication History

Approved by the NIST Editorial Review Board on 2025-09-18

How to Cite this NIST Technical Series Publication

NIST/NIJ Evidence Management Steering Committee (2025) Evidence Management Steering Committee Report: Opportunities to Strengthen Evidence Management Processes. (National Institute of Standards and Technology, Gaithersburg, MD), NIST Special Publication (SP) 1500-33A. https://doi.org/10.6028/NIST.SP.1500-33A.

Abstract

In 2018 in conjunction with the National Institute of Justice (NIJ), the National Institute of Standards and Technology (NIST) assembled a group of multidisciplinary experts, the Evidence Management Steering Committee, to develop a plan to (1) provide recommendations for the retention, preservation, integrity, and disposition of evidence and property and (2) encourage the adoption of practice improvements, through education and engagement, by the broad community of U.S. justice system stakeholders involved in evidence management. The committee oversaw four major activities: an evidence management survey (NIST SP 1500-33B); a review of existing research on evidence management (NIST SP 1500-33C); a stakeholder workshop; and preparation of this document. Additionally, the dataset that serves as the basis of the committee's findings in the aforementioned reports has been published at https://doi.org/10.18434/mds2-3834.

Keywords

Evidence; evidence management; forensic; forensic evidence; forensic science.

Table of Contents

List of Figures

Acknowledgments

We thank the NIST/NIJ Evidence Management Steering Committee for preparing this report. The committee is responsible for its content. Committee members' names and their affiliations during the time in which the committee was active (2018 – 2022) are provided below.

Due to NIST staff departures, this report and the two that accompany it were prepared but not published during the tenure of the committee. Vincent Desiderio and Katherine Sharpless, both in NIST's Special Programs Office, updated information where appropriate and finalized the publications.

NIST/NIJ Evidence Management Steering Committee Members

Suzi Doerff, CEO, Police Evidence Audits, LLC

Rachell Ekroos, Assistant Professor, University of Nevada, Las Vegas (UNLV), School of Nursing

Sarah Hawkins, Chief Deputy Public Defender, Clark County, Nevada Public Defender's Office

Melisse Huffmaster, Evidence Vault Director, Las Vegas Metropolitan Police Department

Jennifer Johnson, Program Coordinator, Forensic Assessment Consultation and Treatment Program, Shawnee Mission Health

Joseph Latta, Executive Director, International Association for Property and Evidence, Inc.

Robert Martin, Evidence Manager, Volusia County Sheriff's Office

Nancy McKay-Hills, Evidence Superintendent, Tucson Police Department, Property and Evidence Section

Stacey Mitchell, Clinical Associate Professor, Texas A&M University

Marcela Najarro, Research Chemist, National Institute of Standards and Technology (NIST)

Phil Pulaski, Retired Former Chief of Detectives, New York City Police Department

Brian Russell, Lieutenant/Manager, Charlotte Mecklenberg Police Department, Property and Evidence Division

Elizabeth Small, Supervisory Physical Scientist, Evidence Management Unit, FBI Laboratory

Lindsey Smith, Executive Director, North Carolina Innocence Inquiry Commission

Ellen Spain, Forensic Evidence Manager, Virginia Department of Forensic Science

Patricia Speck, Professor/Coordinator, University of Alabama at Birmingham, MSN Advanced Nursing Program

Robert Thompson, Senior Research Manager, NIST Special Programs Office

Erin Trujillo, Assistant Director, Los Angeles Sheriff's Department, Scientific Services Bureau

Raymond Valerio, Director, Forensic Sciences, Office of the Queens County District Attorney

Staff

Shannan Williams-Mitchem, Project Manager, NIST Special Programs Office

Corrine Lloyd, Management Analyst, NIST Special Programs Office

Donia Slack, Forensic Technology Center of Excellence (FTCOE), Research Triangle Institute

Sarah Norsworthy, FTCOE, Research Triangle Institute

1. Introduction

In 2016, the U.S. Congress passed the *Justice for All Reauthorization Act,* which called upon the Director of the National Institute of Justice (NIJ) to establish "best practices for evidence retention" in "consultation with federal, state, and local law enforcement agencies and federal laboratories."[1] The NIJ commissioned the National Institute of Standards and Technology (NIST) to develop best practices for evidence management, and in 2018, NIST assembled a group of multidisciplinary experts, the Evidence Management Executive Steering Committee, to create a plan to (1) develop recommendations for the retention, preservation, integrity, and disposition of evidence and property and (2) encourage the adoption of practice improvements, through education and engagement, by the broad community of U.S. justice system stakeholders involved in evidence management.

The NIST/NIJ Evidence Management Steering Committee comprised 22 practitioners, executive management personnel, legal professionals, researchers, and educators associated with physical evidence management (page vi). NIST and the NIJ selected these individuals from local, state, and federal agencies and private organizations responsible for managing physical evidence. The committee oversaw four activities:

The 2021 Evidence Handlers Survey

A national survey of evidence handlers and their organizational leadership was conducted to obtain information regarding their training, practices, processes, and work environments. The survey included 86 questions in multiple-choice and free-text formats. Responses were received from 1443 individuals, 94% of whom indicated that they directly interact with evidence and property. Their most common duties included storing (96%), receiving (95%), securing (92%), and marking/tagging (91%) evidence and property. The distribution of respondents' primary organizations is shown in Figure 1. For more information regarding survey development, dissemination, results, and findings, see NIST SP 1500-33B. The data collected in the survey is available through NIST's data portal at https://doi.org/10.18434/mds2-3834.

A Literature Review

A review of the literature on evidence preservation, storage, and disposition practices was conducted to identify gaps in the scientific basis for evidence handling and storage. Standards and guidelines for collecting and preserving evidence were also identified (Appendix A).[2] However, these resources do not address the management of a given item through all phases of the process, from intake through disposition. See NIST SP 1500-33C for an expanded bibliography of the scientific literature that informed this report.

[1] Justice for All Reauthorization Act, Public Law 114-325, December 16, 2016. https://congress.gov/114/plaws/publ324/PLAW-114publ324.pdf (Accessed August 8, 2025)

[2] In preparation of this report for publication, we have reviewed the standards and guides assembled by the committee while they were active and have updated the list as needed to reflect documents available in 2025.

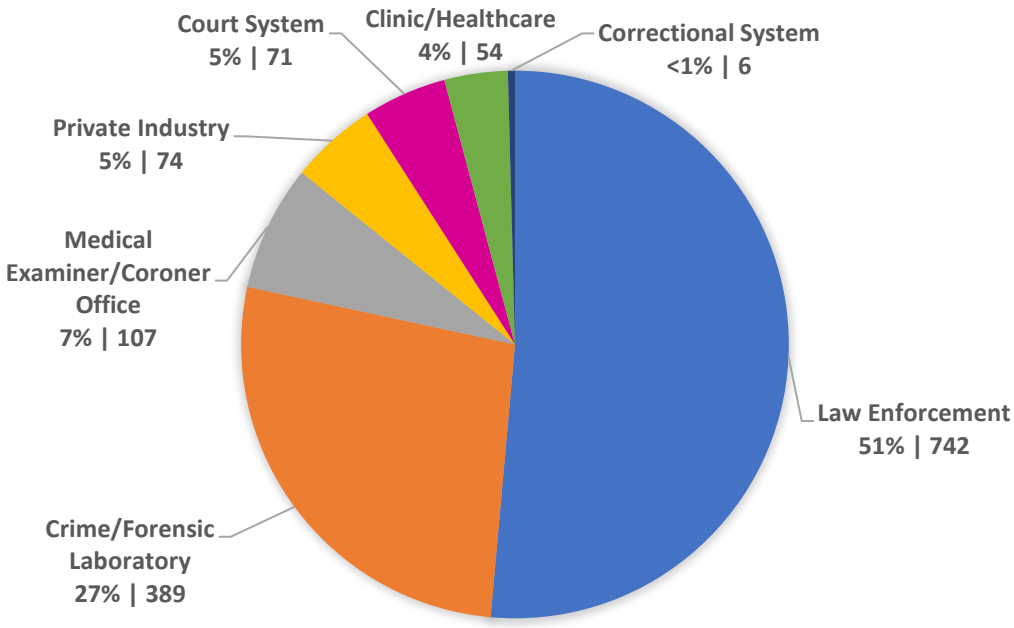

Figure 1. Primary organization type of respondents to the 2021 Evidence Handlers Survey, shown as a percentage and number of responses. There were 1443 respondents in total.

A Stakeholder Workshop

The Evidence Management Conference was held from October 2 to 4, 2019, in Gaithersburg, MD. This was a public conference for federal, state, and local organizations, the evidence management community of practice, and public stakeholders to discuss, prioritize, and publicize evidence management issues and solutions. The agenda and recorded presentations are available on the NIST website.[3]

Dissemination of Findings

This report offers guidance to organizations, evidence custodians, and evidence handlers by providing a high-level summary of considerations and best practices in the evidence management process. The report incorporates information from the survey, review, and workshop described above to identify areas requiring additional research and areas in which transfer of existing knowledge to evidence-handling organizations could be beneficial.

[3] National Institute of Standards and Technology, "Evidence Management Conference" website, https://www.nist.gov/news-events/events/2019/10/evidence-management-conference (Accessed August 8, 2025)

1.1. How to Use This Document

Properly trained personnel, documented processes, and appropriate facilities are integral to a solid evidence management program. Following a description of these components, the report is divided into sections that align with the five "phases" of the evidence management lifecycle once a potential item of evidence is recognized: A) collect, package, and document; B) intake; C) store and preserve; D) transfer and release; and E) disposition. These sections highlight variability in current practices and identify key takeaways to improve evidence management within each phase. The steps in each phase are numbered:

> For example, step 3 in Phase A is "Package." The reader is presented with considerations related to packaging evidence (e.g., evidence type, available and appropriate packaging materials) and key takeaways. A text separator icon, , and blue font highlight survey findings and committee recommendations that augment or reinforce the takeaways in this report; these are followed by [SR 2.x.1] to indicate the section of the survey report on which they are based.

A glossary (Appendix B) provides definitions of technical terms that appear in this report.

2. Defining the Physical Evidence Management Landscape

Evidence is "a body of facts, information, or material objects indicating whether a belief or proposition is true or valid."[4] In the context of the U.S. justice system, evidence is an item or information proffered to argue that the existence of a fact is more or less probable.[5] Various types of evidence exist (e.g., physical/real, testimonial) with various definitions for each in the legal vernacular. Forensic science, for the most part, is concerned with physical evidence, which is defined as the material objects potentially related to the commission of a crime under investigation or adjudication. This encompasses tangible items (e.g., blood, narcotics, fingerprints) that can be directly examined to obtain information to help derive facts during an investigation.

Maintaining the integrity of physical evidence is fundamental to the administration of justice. Every day, critical decisions are made that determine the outcomes of legal proceedings. These decisions frequently rely on information associated with an item of evidence. Once identified as possible physical evidence, an item begins a journey from collection through final disposition (e.g., destruction, return to owner). This journey, and the documentation required to track the location and storage conditions of each item as well as every person who handled it, is known as the chain of custody. The chain of custody is a chronological record of the transfer, handling, and storage of an item from its point of collection to its final return or disposal. If at any point this chain is broken, be it through mishandling or lapses in accountability or documentation, the evidentiary value of the item could be compromised to the point that it can no longer be relied upon in court.

Depending on the case type, the form of evidence, the size of the item, and numerous other factors, the journey of a single item of evidence can extend for decades. Maintaining an unbroken chain of custody throughout an item's lifetime is integral to the criminal investigation process. The field dedicated to organizing and maintaining evidence, thus ensuring the integrity of the chain of custody and the evidentiary items involved, is known as evidence management.

A technically sound evidence management system is reliant on appropriately trained personnel, carefully crafted and well-documented processes and standard operating procedures (SOPs), the use of appropriate equipment, and the availability of suitable facilities to process and store items. In an ideal world, all agencies that handle and process evidence would have a robust, well-staffed evidence management system with processes and procedures standardized across organization types and jurisdictions. Such a scenario would ensure that evidentiary samples collected by law enforcement in one jurisdiction could seamlessly be preserved and handled in another without any concerns that the chain of custody might be jeopardized.

---

[4] National Institute of Standards and Technology, The Organization of Scientific Area Committees for Forensic Science, "OSAC Lexicon" website, https://www.nist.gov/glossary/osac-lexicon?k=&name=evidence&committee=All&standard=&items_per_page=50&f%5B0%5D=group%3AE (Accessed August 8, 2025)

[5] Cornell Law School, Legal Information Institute, Wex website, https://www.law.cornell.edu/wex/evidence (Accessed August 8, 2025)

In addition to physical evidence, organizations may also acquire and store various forms of non-evidentiary property, such as items lost, abandoned or held for safekeeping. In addition, seized or forfeited property in connection with criminal investigations may also be held by law enforcement agencies under statute. Typically, law enforcement agencies assign responsibility for managing both evidentiary and non-evidentiary property to singular property and evidence units.

Quality Management

As alluded to above, an evidence management system should rely on sound processes and procedures that are based on standards and are well documented. To ensure the consistent function of an evidence management system, a quality management system (QMS) should be employed.

A QMS is a set of documented processes and procedures that allows an organization to maintain a consistent level of quality in their work. Staff are assigned specific roles and responsibilities within the QMS. In their quality manual, an organization documents how tasks must be accomplished, and staff perform their assigned tasks by following those documented processes. Quality assurance (QA) occurs when documented processes and standard operating procedures (SOPs) are followed by everyone in the organization. Quality control (QC) occurs when someone conducts a check, audit, or assessment to determine whether or not a component, service, or completed work meets the organization's quality management objectives. If a problem is identified through a check, audit, assessment, or through a customer complaint, the cause is determined, and documents describing processes and procedures are updated if necessary. As a result, a QMS can result in continuous process improvement.

Law enforcement executives (e.g., Chiefs of Police, Sheriffs) and other managers in organizations (e.g., Laboratory Directors, Quality Assurance Managers) who handle evidence are responsible for establishing the policies, processes, and SOPs followed[6] and for ensuring that their QMS is assessed through regularly scheduled, comprehensive, documented reviews and audits. They may also choose or be required to have their organization accredited, which means an accrediting body evaluates their QMS, including the records they keep, against existing criteria and determines whether the organization is qualified and able to consistently perform their work.

Everyone involved in the evidence management process must be aware of and follow written agency procedures. Individuals handling evidence must clearly understand their specific roles and functions within the evidence management process. In combination with other considerations identified throughout this report, a lack of clarity may result in items being damaged, contaminated, lost, or stored improperly for maintaining the item's integrity, or for periods longer or shorter than appropriate.

[6] Some organizations make their quality management documentation publicly available; see, for example, manuals available online from the Crime Scene Investigator Network.

Formal documentation of training is an essential part of a QMS, and respondents were asked to provide reasons for documenting training. Respondents most commonly answered that training is documented for employment requirements (54%), certification, licensure, or related professional requirement (45%), and accreditation requirements (37%). As part of a QMS, it is necessary for staff to be authorized, with documentation, to perform a particular activity; evidence of training is part of the authorization process [SR 2.4.1]

If the educational requirements for a job are less than those necessary to perform the work required, additional education should be provided so employees have the proper skills for the job. A basic understanding of the importance of evidence preservation and knowledge of clerical/administrative principles, inventory management, and database management technologies is helpful when handling evidence. About half of the survey respondents indicated that their organization does not require formal, specialized evidence management training or certifications for the job they hold. [SR 2.4.1]

While the majority (83%) of the respondents indicated that their organization has QA/QC policies, 17% of the respondents indicated that there are no developed QA/QC policies within their organization. (In the survey, quality assurance was defined as *standardized procedures, methods, or philosophy for collecting, processing, or analyzing data, that is performed on an ongoing basis and aimed at maintaining or improving the appropriateness and reliability of services.* Quality control was defined as *the sum of all the activities that prevent unwanted (e.g., negative) change in quality of services.)* [SR 2.5.1]

Most respondents were aware of the existence of written policies, procedures, and protocols related to evidence management within their organization. Still, a small portion (5%) of the respondents disclosed that their organization does not have written documents describing essential evidence management functions. Another small group (4%) revealed that they did not know whether their organization had these documents. [SR 2.5.1]

Fewer than half of the respondents (43%) indicated that reviews of their organizations' SOPs related to evidence management occur on a predetermined schedule. Creating a review schedule of existing protocols is necessary to ensure that policies reflect changes in applicable legislation and high-level organizational requirements, functions, inventory levels, and updated scientific and technical information or tools. In addition, periodic reviews are a common requirement for accreditation. [SR 2.5.1]

Thirty-seven percent of the respondents reported that they review or revise SOPs on an as-needed basis; committee members cautioned that such "as-needed" reviews often occur when an evidence handler has made a mistake. A small fraction (2%) of the respondents indicated that their organization never reviews their SOPs once they are established. [SR 2.5.1]

A lack of SOPs can be harmful to the organization's effectiveness, health, and reputation. It can be problematic when evidence handled by these organizations is necessary for a criminal

investigation and is admitted into court as evidence. Without written SOPs, an organization cannot ensure that all evidence handlers perform and function in a systematic way when handling evidence/property. [SR 2.5.1]

Of respondents who indicated that their organization's evidence/property room is audited (73%), the most commonly selected elements evaluated during an audit included compliance with established policies and procedures (83%), security controls (80%), and quality of data entry (71%). The majority of respondents (81%) indicated that corrective actions are required based on audit findings. While corrective actions are essential for addressing practices inconsistent with policies and procedures and preventing them from recurring in the future, corrective actions must be non-punitive to promote a healthy work environment, which should also be an element evaluated during audits. [SR 2.8.1]

Evidence Management Stakeholders

Evidence management stakeholders include people or organizations that receive, preserve, store, use, and dispose of evidence. They include members of the law enforcement and healthcare communities, medicolegal death investigators, public and private forensic laboratories, and courts, as well as policymakers who promulgate recommendations for statutes, rules, regulations, and policies regarding evidence management.

Evidence Management Roles and Responsibilities

The delineation of roles here is not intended to limit the activities of employees working in those roles but rather to provide language around administrative decisions, policies, and procedures. Individuals may play one or more roles depending on agency size. For example, one person may have several responsibilities beyond evidence management within a small organization. A large organization may divide one function into multiple levels of responsibility or assign a role to multiple people. Volume typically dictates the number of people assigned to evidence management processes. Regardless of agency size and the number of evidentiary items managed, all agencies need clear role descriptions for positions involving evidence management responsibilities. Staff in all four roles described below must be appropriately trained and follow established guidelines for the handling and preservation of evidence.

Collectors: Collectors recognize, gather, preserve, and document items as evidence according to evidence management guidelines. The collector's role follows professional and federal safety guidelines in handling evidentiary items, including but not limited to:

- Using appropriate personal protective equipment (PPE)
- Following professional and federal safety guidelines in handling evidence
- Determining which field tests are appropriate for an item while at a crime scene and executing the field tests in accordance with established policies and procedures

- Following guidelines for documentation (e.g., production of detailed notes, sketches, and photographs), collection, and packaging of evidence (e.g., appropriate packaging, marking, and sealing)
- Documenting/recording information in summary documents (e.g., scene reports, medical records)
- Securely storing collected items
- Transporting and transferring collected items for storage in an evidence room or crime laboratory
- Maintaining chain of custody from collection through transfer and storage of the item.

Technicians: Technicians follow agency policy and procedures for storing evidence items and maintaining a chain of custody. They may be responsible for transporting items from location to location (e.g., from a healthcare facility to a forensic laboratory), evaluating and accepting items at intake, or identifying items for testing. They use tracking systems to collect and store pertinent information for assuring the location of each item, monitor environmental conditions for specific types of evidence, and follow established procedures for rejecting incorrectly packaged evidence items.

Managers: Managers are responsible for maintaining and developing job descriptions reflecting the organization's needs, and monitoring employee fidelity to job performance requirements. They are responsible for organizational policies, procedures, processes; inventories; quality assurance, quality control, and quality improvement; and audits for compliance with quality management systems. Additionally, managers purchase, maintain, and manage evidence- and information-tracking systems, and coordinate communication between organizations that handle evidence. They have ultimate responsibility for managing and disposing of items in their agency's possession.

Decision-Makers for Evidence Handling and Use: Managers are typically responsible for making decisions related to policy. Decisions about evidence storage and disposal are made by a designated individual. Agency policy identifies the decision maker's responsibility, abiding by appropriate governing statutes. Decision-makers address processes such as testing evidence in the laboratory or use of evidence in the courts. Based on federal, state, and local statutes, these decision-makers may determine whether an item requires analysis, and they provide the sign-off approval for a final disposition.

The Evidence Management Process

By combining all of the elements above under the framework of the chain of custody, the Evidence Management Steering Committee was able to produce a flowchart depicting the evidence management process. This process follows an item of evidence from the collection phase all the way through its final disposition. The process is presented in Figure 2 and serves as the organizing foundation for each of the following sections. It includes five distinct phases,

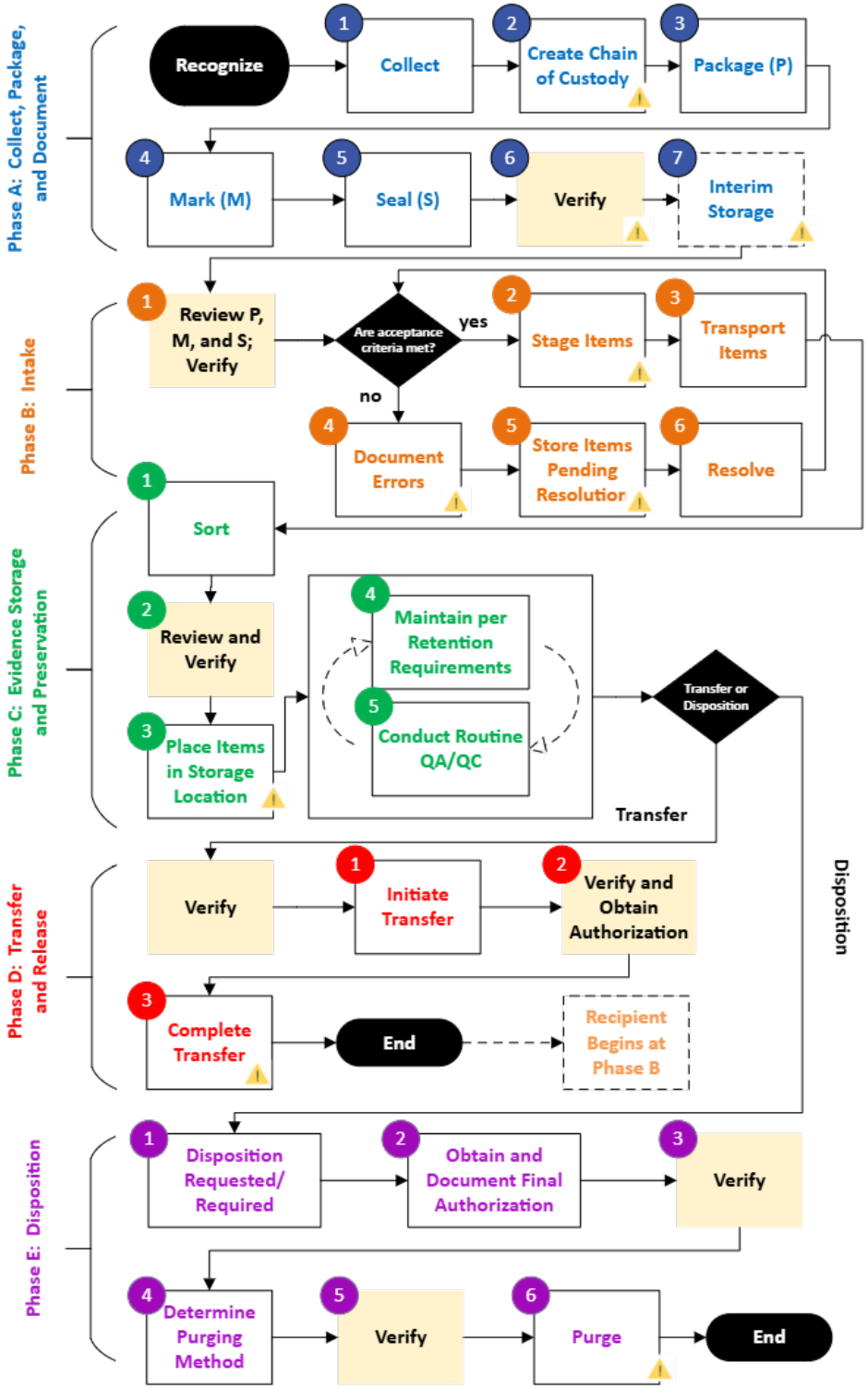

Figure 2. The Evidence Management Process. The major components within each phase of the evidence management process are shown; relevant portions of the flowchart are reproduced in each section that follows. Step numbers are shown in circles; a triangle with an exclamation mark indicates a step in which a record is created.

each with their own critical steps that outline the evidentiary flow through the chain of custody, all of which will be discussed in greater detail.[7]

2.1 Key Takeaways

1. The process for managing evidence – from its recognition and collection to intake and final disposition – can be complex. The process is critical for maintaining the chain of custody, which in turn ensures the integrity of items that are collected, analyzed, and potentially introduced into legal proceedings. Depending on the case type, the form of evidence, the size of the item, and many other factors, the lifetime of an individual item of evidence can extend for many years.

2. Property and evidence rooms in law enforcement agencies are the primary locus of control in the evidence management system, but our survey showed that within law enforcement evidence rooms, the person responsible for managing evidence may have minimal specialized training, formal education, or policy guidance to protect and manage evidence. Similarly, others who handle physical evidence, such as healthcare providers or court personnel, often lack guidance on the best practices or procedures necessary to preserve the integrity of physical evidence.

3. Law enforcement executives (e.g., Chiefs of Police, Sheriffs) and other managers should tailor improvements to their evidence management processes to the specific needs of their jurisdiction (or organization, if they are not from a law enforcement entity), considering applicable federal, state, and local statutes, regulations, and policies.

4. Standards are critical for ensuring consistent practice across jurisdictions. Where standards for evidence management exist, managers should work to implement these standards and harmonize their application to provide clear and consistent guidance to evidence handlers and other stakeholders. In the absence of standards, the evidence management community should work to identify gaps and develop consensus-based standards that address these areas of need.

5. Managers in organizations that handle evidence should consider technological tools to identify, develop, and track key performance indicators (KPIs) related to the organization's evidence management processes. KPIs could include, for example, the percentage of external evidential submissions rejected due to absent or inaccurate chain of custody documentation; the percentage of suspected drug evidence analyzed within a certain number of days after intake; and the average length of time from intake to disposition for specific categories of evidence.

[7] A Crime Scene Investigation Process Map is being prepared by the Organization of Scientific Area Committees for Forensic Science (OSAC) Crime Scene Investigation and Reconstruction Subcommittee and will be available through NIST's data portal, https://data.nist.gov, when it is published.

6. Managers in organizations that hold evidence should implement a QMS that requires routine audits to evaluate evidence management practices and procedures.

7. Managers in organizations handling evidence should develop a comprehensive contact list of all jurisdictional organizations/entities under their purview that handle and submit evidence, to include identifying the individuals responsible for evidence management. The managers should clearly communicate policies or procedures, including changes, to the contact list and collaborate to solve common problems related to evidence management. Managers should also provide training to help ensure consistent practice at levels that exceed those that would be considered minimally acceptable.

8. The evidence-handling community should establish standardized classification systems to guide packaging, storage, and management of common evidentiary items and specimens collected, with the goal of promoting appropriate and consistent preservation throughout the item's lifecycle.

9. When considering evidence management improvements, managers and decision makers should consider the impact on all the functions within the agency, including non-evidentiary property management functions.

3. Collect, Package, and Document

This section of the report addresses the initiation of the evidence management lifecycle after an item is recognized as evidence. (A.)

Evidence collectors should consult guidance on how to collect and package specific types of evidence. The FBI provides guidance in their Handbook of Forensic Science;[8] NIJ offers on-line information and training on evidence collection and packaging; [9,10] and additional resources are provided in Appendix A.

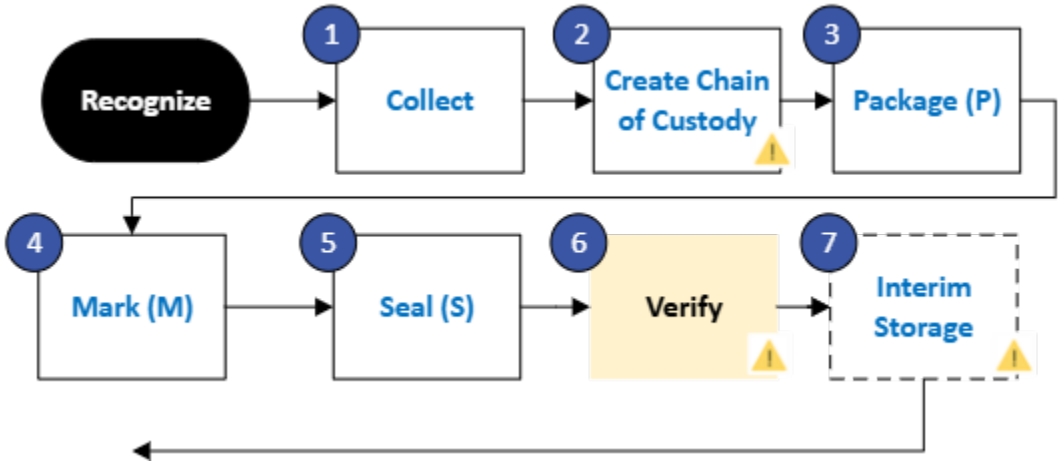

Figure 3. Phase A – Collect, Package, and Document

3.1 Phase A Fundamentals

Recognizing Evidence

Investigating agencies are often responsible for managing items that may or may not hold probative value, and organizational units responsible for handling and storing evidence are typically called "property and evidence units." All evidence is property, but property is not always evidence. Agencies and staff must recognize that property could become evidence at some future stage of the criminal justice process and handle it appropriately from the point of collection.

When an item is collected, whether or not it is evidence depends on the crime under investigation and other factors, including the item itself, its probative value, and its context

[8] Federal Bureau of Investigation, Handbook of Forensic Services, 2019, https://www.fbi.gov/file-repository/laboratory/handbook-of-forensic-services-pdf.pdf/view. (Accessed August 8, 2025)
[9] Technical Working Group on Crime Scene Investigation, Crime Scene Investigation: A Guide for Law Enforcement, NCJ 178280, U.S. Department of Justice, January 2000, https://www.ojp.gov/pdffiles1/nij/178280.pdf. (Accessed September 16, 2025)
[10] National Institute of Justice, "Education for First Responders and Crime Scene Technicians" under "Leveraging Limited Resources" website, https://nij.ojp.gov/nij-hosted-online-training-courses/forensic-dna-education-law-enforcement-decisionmakers/leveraging-limited-resources. (Accessed September 16, 2025)

with respect to a specific case. Organizations should provide written guidance such as that described by the NIJ in their Death Scene Investigation Guide[11] and Forensic DNA Education for Law Enforcement Decisionmakers[12] as well as the International Association of Chiefs of Police for Property and Evidence Control.[13]

Non-evidentiary items stored for safekeeping are labeled as property. Although the probative value of property items is not decided by those storing it, investigations may lead back to the property, which then would become evidence. To this end, the entities responsible for storing property should ensure that items are tracked and their integrity preserved in the same way as evidence.

Property and Evidence Classification

Classification schemes assist in determining the appropriate handling of items, who is qualified to handle them, where they are stored or transferred, and when and how each item is released or purged from inventory. The classification of collected items is based on two primary considerations:

- its evidentiary value (or lack thereof)
- whether it falls into a high-liability (sometimes known as high-value) or general-liability classification

Organizations responsible for handling evidence need written guidelines that describe how they classify evidence. Staff responsible for recognizing and collecting evidence and/or property typically determine how specific items should be classified within those guidelines because they have firsthand knowledge of the items in question and are responsible for packaging them.[14] During classification, the collector will determine whether items in question are evidence, property, or extraneous materials. In the case of both evidence and property, the collector will initiate the formal chain-of-custody process; however, the level of scrutiny and the paths taken through the evidence management process will differ for each. In the case of extraneous materials, the journey ends at this stage as there is no need to collect these items.

---

[11] National Institute of Justice, Death Investigation: A Guide for the Scene Investigator, NCJ 308955, 2024. https://nij.ojp.gov/library/publications/death-investigation-guide-scene-investigator-2024. (Accessed September 12, 2025)

[12] National Institute of Justice, "Proper Evidence Collection and Packaging" website, https://nij.ojp.gov/nij-hosted-online-training-courses/forensic-dna-education-law-enforcement-decisionmakers/leveraging-limited-resources/proper-evidence-collection-and-packaging. (Accessed September 12, 2025)

[13] International Association of Chiefs of Police, Law Enforcement Policy Center, Property and Evidence Control, IACP Law Enforcement Policy Center, Alexandria, VA, February 2021, https://www.theiacp.org/sites/default/files/2021-03/Evidence%20Control%20Formatted%2003.03.2021.pdf (Accessed August 8, 2025)

[14] Note that classification and categorization at the scene can be difficult because information may be scarce, and it can be difficult to determine which items may be relevant. Therefore, extraneous materials are often collected. The classification process can be refined during examination of the evidence in a laboratory setting. It is better to collect too much at a crime scene than not enough, but within limits.

Items that are collected for investigative purposes are classified as evidence. Although it may be difficult to know the exact evidentiary value of an item at the outset, there are often signs that items are relevant to an event that is being investigated. These might include bloody fingerprints found at a homicide scene, glass particles found on the clothing of a person suspected of breaking into a car, baggies of unknown white powder purchased as part of a drug deal, or remnants of electronic components found at the scene of an explosion. Such items would be collected and handled from the outset with the expectation that they will eventually be presented in court. Because of their organization's written guidelines for evidence collection and classification, the collector understands that the items need to be meticulously documented, carefully collected, packaged and sealed for preservation, and marked so that they can be individually recognized at every step.

Items not associated with investigative activities that must be saved for their rightful owners are considered non-evidentiary property and are held for safekeeping. Additional non-evidentiary items such as items that are illegal to possess or items that represent a public safety concern also fall under the safekeeping category.

After the collector determines whether something is evidence or property, they determine whether the items fall into a high-liability or general-liability classification. High-liability items such as firearms, drugs, money, and jewelry require greater levels of caretaking primarily due to the risk of theft.

While most respondents (84% and 87% in two separate questions) indicated that their organization requires background checks before hire for their current position, background checks are not required for positions held by 16% of the respondents and 5% of respondents' organizations. Sixty-eight percent of organizations perform drug testing upon hire, and 40% do random drug testing. Individuals who handle or interact with property/evidence have access to high-liability, high-value items. The International Association for Property and Evidence (IAPE) has noted that drug theft is not uncommon in property/evidence rooms.[15] Thus, a background check to ensure agencies do not hire employees with a criminal history is important to minimize the likelihood of theft occurring. [SR 2.1.1, SR 2.3.1]

The general-liability classification consists of all items that do not fall into the high-liability type. General-liability items can be subsequently categorized in several ways, influenced by storage methodologies and the item's size. Biological, cold storage, and bulk items are often subcategories of general-liability evidence.

[15] See, for example, International Association for Property and Evidence website, https://welcome.iape.org/tag/drug-theft/, https://welcome.iape.org/tag/stolen-pills/, and https://welcome.iape.org/tag/stealing-drugs/ (Accessed August 8, 2025)

Items from different liability categories should not be commingled, even if the items are from the same case. For instance, a firearm found at a crime scene should not be packaged with an article of clothing with suspected blood stains that was collected from the same scene. In addition to the greater risk of theft for the firearm, which necessitates greater accountability and storage in a more secure area with a higher level of limited access, there are safety concerns as well. Firearms should be stored in secure locations such as gun lockers or reinforced vaults. Biological materials such as suspected blood stains have different safety and preservation concerns. As they would not pose a significant risk with respect to theft, biological materials do not need to be stored under higher levels of security; however, they may need to be stored in refrigerators or freezers for preservation purposes. They would need to be properly and securely packaged to prevent contamination and to ensure staff safety from exposure to bloodborne pathogens.

Questions that guide a physical evidence classification scheme should consider safety, type of evidence, classification assignment, and transfer. For example:

- In what crime category is the investigation?
- Can conclusive evidence of a crime be extracted from the item?
- Is forensic examination or testing of the item possible or required?
- Does the item require specialized handling or storage (e.g., cold storage, drying, or other action) to maintain its integrity for forensic analysis?
- Is the item safe to handle?
- Is the item of high liability/high value?
- What is the item's size or weight, and where are such items typically stored in the facility?
- Does the agency have the necessary resources to store the item?

Personnel handling evidence are responsible for the appropriate preservation and management of evidence and property regardless of the reason for it being impounded, the severity of the crime, and the likelihood of prosecution.

Management of evidence can be complicated by unpredictable scenarios. An item may appear to have no evidentiary value in one crime; however, it may be of probative value if it is linked to another investigation later. The ability to quickly reclassify items in such circumstances is imperative to ensure integrity and preservation for successful investigation and prosecution of a case, and it is critical that property be handled as carefully as known evidence is.

Key Takeaways for Phase A, Collect, Package, and Document

1. Any organization responsible for handling evidence should have written guidelines to describe and implement their classification scheme.

2. Items should be stored in accordance with their classification as evidence or property

3. Items may require reclassification as an investigation evolves, such as when an item that begins as property becomes probative evidence in a case.

4. Items should be initially sorted based on high-liability and general-liability classifications, with high-liability items (firearms, drugs, money, and jewelry) properly secured and not visible.

3.2 Phase A Step 1: Collecting Evidence

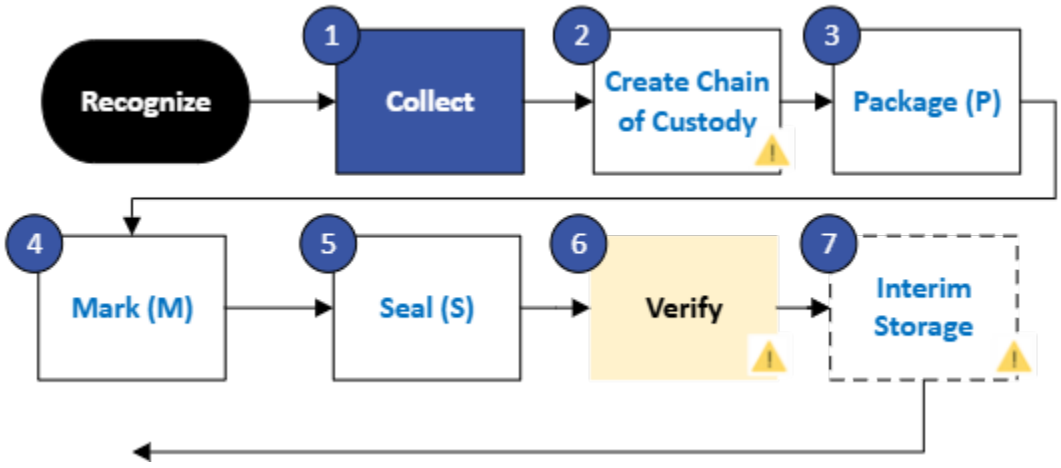

Figure 3-1. Phase A Step 1 Collecting Evidence

The evidence management lifecycle begins with the recognition, collection, seizure, or submission of an item that has the potential to become evidence in a criminal proceeding. In general, physical evidence or property may be collected from:

1. crime or event scenes, such as:
    a. suspected homicides
    b. robberies/burglaries
    c. traffic stops
    d. automobile collisions/hit-and-run scenes
    e. domestic violence incidents
2. lost or abandoned items found in public[16]
3. items handed over for safekeeping[17]
4. victims, witnesses to a crime, suspects, the accused, or other individuals who may have interacted with a scene or activity (e.g., someone who may have unwittingly passed through a crime scene or purchased or otherwise acquired stolen property)
5. locations separate from the primary crime scene (e.g., suspect's residence or vehicle)

[16] Such items are referred to as found property. In rare instances, individuals may try to claim illicit materials (e.g., drugs of abuse or large sums of cash generated from illicit activities). In such cases, the property may then become evidence.

[17] For example, legally owned firearms may be handed to law enforcement for safekeeping when individuals become concerned about the mental well-being of a family member.

6. community-sponsored events where items are handed over (e.g., firearms or drugs)[18]
7. the forensic laboratory.

Note that it is common for forensic analysts to produce what are known as subsamples. These are typically items of evidence that are created from a parent item of evidence. Examples include latent fingerprint lifts developed from items, examination-grade photographs of evidence that are used for comparison, cuttings or swabs of stains for biological analysis, microscope slides containing trace evidence isolated from items, and test fires from firearms suspected of use during the commission of a crime. Any subsamples generated during these analyses require their own packaging, marking, and chain of custody and would themselves have a lifecycle as depicted in Figure 1.

Depending on the situation or a jurisdiction's policy, the individuals responsible for evidence collection may be first responders (e.g., police officers, firefighters, paramedics), investigators, forensic examiners, dedicated crime scene personnel, or health and medical forensic professionals. These individuals may be subject to different agencies' policies and procedures and have differing levels of training, expertise, and experience in handling evidence. It is essential that any item that could be evidence in a criminal proceeding is handled by personnel who are trained and authorized to collect, package, and store the item. Training and subsequent authorization should be documented, as should the procedures used.

When asked about the various types of training received for their current position, most respondents (92%) indicated that they received on-the-job training, with other most common forms of training being conferences (46%), lectures or presentations without continuing education credits (36%), or self-education (34%). Some training occurs nearly universally, as only 1% of respondents indicated that they do not receive any training, but some respondents indicated that training is not documented (16%). [SR 2.4.1]

Although a high percentage of respondents indicated that they received training, it was unclear what elements of evidence management were included. Based on the cross jurisdictional nature of criminal activities, standardization of practice is important. It is recommended that various forms of training, be it on the job or formal internal or external programs, include awareness of the various standards, best practices, and resources that exist to help guide proper procedures. (See, for example, Appendix A.) This would help to ensure harmonization of practice across the evidence management community. [SR 2.4.1]

[18] These events often have a "no strings attached" policy with the goal of removing as many of these items from the public as possible in a safe manner. These items may go immediately to the disposition phase for the purpose of destruction and have little chance of becoming evidence.

Evidence Handling and Safety

Prevention of Contamination, Damage, and Degradation

Contamination, damage, and degradation of evidence is a significant concern. As previously discussed, evidence may be presented during legal proceedings. If at any point evidence is found to have been contaminated, damaged, or degraded, the items in question may be excluded from legal deliberations with the potential for loss of significant probative information that may affect the outcome of criminal investigations. Additionally, contamination, damage, and degradation of evidence, if not recognized prior to laboratory analysis, could lead to misleading results or the inability to obtain information that was once present.

Measures to prevent contamination, damage, and degradation include the use of proper packaging, ensuring packaging is properly sealed, securing materials during transport and handling, using clean tools during evidence collection, and using appropriate PPE during collection and handling.

Improper collection and packaging of evidence could compromise its integrity and value in an investigation. Consider the consequences of these potential scenarios:

- automotive paint flakes collected from a hit-and-run incident fall out of a partially sealed envelope
- a glass bottle shatters during transport, making fingerprint analysis impossible and causing liquid inside to leak onto other items
- debris from a fire scene is placed in a cardboard box prior to testing for ignitable liquids, and it is transported to the lab along with gasoline-powered equipment
- specks of dried blood from a victim's underwear are transferred to their jeans when they are packaged together
- gunshot residue collection stubs are contaminated during storage in a laboratory where firearms testing is performed, and those contaminated stubs are subsequently used to collect gunshot residue at a crime scene
- fingerprints from an investigator who was not wearing gloves are transferred to a knife found at a stabbing scene
- an improperly immobilized knife cuts through its packaging, and trace evidence is lost
- a suspect's wet bloody clothing is placed in a plastic bag, and mold begins to grow.

It is important to note that measures to prevent contamination, damage, and degradation span the entire lifecycle of an evidence item, from its collection, packaging, transport, and intake through disposition. Degradation of evidence may also be natural, even when preventative steps and countermeasures are taken; a laboratory may need to educate a court about natural degradation.

Most respondents indicated that written policies, procedures, and protocols related to evidence management exist within their organization. When asked whether documentation existed for specific topics in evidence management, documents related to packaging, storage, disposition, security, and tracking were most prevalent, with 79% to 86% of respondents reporting their existence. Documents related to storage to minimize cross-contamination were least prevalent (63%). Preventing cross-contamination is crucial in ensuring evidence is kept in as pristine condition as possible to avoid possible misinterpretation. To this end, agencies that handle evidence should ensure that policies and procedures are in place for this purpose and personnel are trained accordingly. [SR 2.5.1]

Wet Evidence Items

Whether saturated or damp, wet items require different handling than dry items. Examples of wet evidence items include blood- or urine-soaked clothing, moistened DNA collection swabs, items left out in wet weather conditions, and fresh plant material such as marijuana. Wet evidence, particularly when the item may contain biological material, should be immediately dried whenever feasible. *The Biological Evidence Preservation Handbook: Best Practices for Evidence Handlers*[19] offers guidance on high-tech and low-tech ways to dry evidence. Organizations responsible for drying evidence should have and follow appropriate policies and procedures for drying evidence on site and at a facility, collecting and packaging wet evidence, transferring wet evidence to a location at which it can be dried, recordkeeping of previous usage and decontamination of the drying site, and maintenance of chain of custody at all times.

Biological and Toxicological Evidence

The Biological Evidence Preservation Handbook: Best Practices for Evidence Handlers[20] offers recommendations related to the physical storage, preservation, and tracking of biological evidence at storage facilities, and also covers transfer of materials between the storage facility and other locations. The American Academy of Forensic Sciences provides guidance on storage and preservation of specimens for forensic toxicological analyses in ANSI/ASB Best Practice Recommendation 156, "Best Practices for Specimen Collection and Preservation for Forensic Toxicology."[21]

[19] Ballou, S., Kline, M., Stolorow, M., Taylor, M., Williams, S., Bamberger, P., Yvette, B., Brown, L., Jones, C., Keaton, R., Kiley, W., Thiessen, K., LaPorte, G., Latta, J., Ledray, L., Nagy, R., Schwind, L., Stoiloff, S., and Ostrom, B. The Biological Evidence Preservation Handbook: Best Practices for Evidence Handlers, NIST Interagency/Internal Report (NISTIR) 7928, National Institute of Standards and Technology, Gaithersburg, MD (2013) https://doi.org/10.6028/NIST.IR.7928 (Accessed August 8, 2025)

[20] Ibid.

[21] American Academy for Forensic Science, ANSI/ASB Best Practice Recommendation 156, Best Practices for Specimen Collection and Preservation for Forensic Toxicology, 2023. https://www.aafs.org/asb-standard/best-practices-specimen-collection-and-preservation-forensic-toxicology. (Accessed September 12, 2025)

Digital Evidence

Digital evidence may reside on physical storage media handled as physical evidence. *Digital Evidence Preservation: Considerations for Evidence Handlers*[22] addresses the preservation of digital evidence and describes factors related to digital evidence preservation and how it differs from preservation of other evidence types.

Safety

Staff having evidence management and storage responsibilities encounter a range of items, from the benign to the hazardous. Administrators of evidence/property facilities should address worker safety through education and infrastructure. Critical safety elements that must be considered include the availability of safety equipment covering the range of responses that may be required, availability of PPE for the types of materials being handled (e.g., sharp items, biological evidence), engineering controls to mitigate hazards (e.g., proper ventilation in areas that contain volatile chemicals), clear labeling of items being handled, and proper segregation of items in storage. The Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) offers hazard classification guidance[23] for health and physical hazards as well as guidance on bloodborne pathogens and needlestick prevention.[24]

An essential step in creating a safe environment includes an inventory process that identifies the specific hazards associated with items requiring storage. This facilitates the selection and assignment of proper storage areas to ensure safety and allow for better preservation of the evidence.

Safety training is necessary for any individual who will be handling items of evidence and property to ensure the safety of the handler and their coworkers and the integrity of the items they handle. Of the respondents who indicated that their organization does not require safety training (21%), more than half (66%) were from law enforcement agencies. The survey data demonstrates the need to improve training practices throughout all organization types that manage evidence. Developing a basic training program or a standard requirement for ongoing and routine safety training would help prevent injury and health concerns as well as eliminate the potential for mishandling evidence and property. [SR 2.10.1]

[22] Guttman, B., White, D.R., and Walraven, T. Digital Evidence Preservation: Considerations for Evidence Handlers, NIST Interagency/Internal Report (NISTIR) 8387, National Institute of Standards and Technology, Gaithersburg, MD (2022). https://doi.org/10.6028/NIST.IR.8387 (Accessed August 8, 2025)
[23] Occupational Safety and Health Administration, Hazard Communication: Hazard Classification Guidance for Manufacturers, Importers, and Employers, OSHA 3844-02, Occupational Safety and Health Administration, Washington, DC, 2016. https://www.osha.gov/sites/default/files/publications/OSHA3844.pdf (Accessed August 8, 2025)
[24] Occupational Safety and Health Administration, "Bloodborne Pathogens and Needlestick Prevention" website, https://www.osha.gov/bloodborne-pathogens (Accessed August 8, 2025)

PPE should be available to all evidence handlers, no matter the position they hold or their organization type. The correct use of PPE protects the evidence handler from coming into contact with potentially harmful items (e.g., biological fluids, narcotics, solvents) and prevents possible cross-contamination events between the handler and the item being handled, including incidental transfer of evidence. While the majority (90%) of the respondents indicated their organization supplies the proper PPE for evidence handlers, 7% of the respondents indicated that PPE is not provided; over half of those were from law enforcement agencies. Twenty-five percent of survey respondents indicated that their organization does not supply naloxone products in evidence/property areas storing narcotics; all of these were from law enforcement or local (as opposed to state and federal) organizations. [SR 2.10.1]

A third of survey respondents indicated that their evidence/property area does not have fire-suppression features such as sprinklers. **The absence of fire-suppression systems is a concern for workplace safety in general.** This situation goes beyond the management of evidence and property and could be life-threatening to personnel if a fire occurs. In addition, certain types of evidence could be a source of ignition (e.g., lithium batteries accompanying digital evidence) while others could significantly enhance or propagate a fire (e.g., flammable, combustible, and explosive materials), all of which may be stored as evidence. The survey presented a number of property room features for respondents to choose from, and the absence of basic security and safety features was not specific to any organization type. [SR 2.9.1]

Role Considerations

Generally, an official with experience, training, and insight into the context of an individual case should be assigned the responsibility of determining whether an item should be considered evidence in the initial stages of the evidence management process. As described earlier in the report, this individual would fill the role of a decision-maker for evidence processing and use.

Identifying decision-makers depends on location and jurisdiction. Decision-makers may be managers, prosecutors, investigators, evidence/property room staff, laboratory personnel, or forensic medical staff. These decision-makers often:

- decide whether something will be sent to the laboratory for analysis
- decide the sequence in which analyses will occur if multiple analyses are required
- transfer the decision-maker role to another decision-maker[25]
- provide sign-off approval for final disposition

[25] Investigators may defer decision making to forensic laboratory staff when determining what evidence is most probative, how the items will be analyzed, and the sequence of analyses when multiple disciplines within a laboratory will be tasked with working on specific items (e.g., a bloody fingerprint on a firearm that would require independent examination by members of the firearms, latent prints, and DNA sections of a laboratory). In some instances, dynamic decision making is required (i.e., the laboratory may not have explicit decision-making ability, but they must choose a course of action in an expedient manner). In such instances, any changes to requests from investigators or other decision-makers are typically communicated before the examinations proceed.

- make decisions based on federal, state, and local statutes, regulations, and policies.

After a decision-maker determines what items to collect as evidence, the individuals who conduct the sampling and collection operate under the *collector* role. Collectors such as crime scene technicians, first responders, and medical personnel:

- follow their organization's policies and procedures as well as professional and federal safety guidelines in handling evidence
- use appropriate PPE
- complete field tests as appropriate for an item while at the crime scene
- follow guidelines for collection and appropriate packaging of evidence (marking, packaging, and sealing)
- document information in field notes and summary documents (e.g., scene reports, medical records)
- submit evidence for storage at an evidence room or crime laboratory for transfer or analysis
- initiate and maintain the chain of custody from collection through the transfer of the item.

Key Takeaways for Phase A Step 1, Collecting Evidence

1. Regardless of agency or job title, any individual responsible for collecting physical evidence must be authorized and trained to recognize and handle items that may become evidence in a criminal proceeding.

2. Regardless of agency or job title, any individual responsible for collecting physical evidence must follow appropriate health and safety guidelines, including wearing appropriate PPE to protect themselves and to prevent cross-contamination between items being handled.

3. Any hazardous or biological material evidence must be immediately marked and handled according to health and safety guidelines.

4. Whenever possible, wet items must be dried before packaging. If immediate drying at a collection site is not feasible, the items can be temporarily stored in nonporous, impermeable containers for transportation purposes. Upon repackaging of the evidence item, the original packaging should be packaged separately before placing both in long-term storage.

5. Engagement across roles is necessary to ensure that storage and management to prevent contamination or degradation of environmentally sensitive evidence does not hinder forensic analysis processes.

6. Engagement across roles is necessary to ensure that storage and management of high-liability items does not hinder forensic analysis processes.

3.3 Phase A Step 2: Creating a Chain of Custody

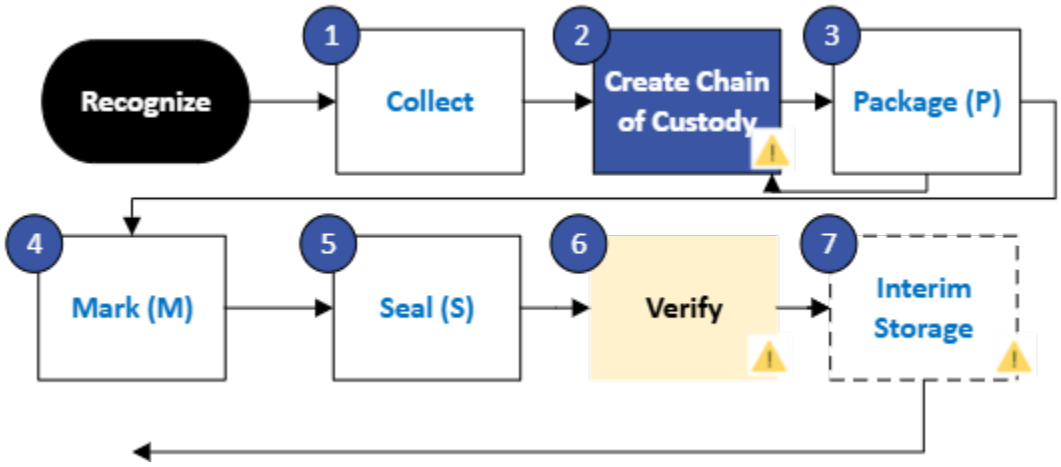

Figure 3-2. Phase A Step 2 Creating a Chain of Custody

Tracking evidence movement is an essential aspect of the evidence management lifecycle.

The chain of custody begins the moment an item of evidence is recognized and collected. This chain must remain unbroken from the time an item is collected through to its final disposition. A chain-of-custody report identifies all people and places that have held an item, in chronological order, from collection to disposition. Additionally, the chain-of-custody report may include corrections or modifications to the item record (e.g., edits to dollar amount, drug weights, or item counts, and notations regarding other potential discrepancies). The chain of custody chronicles any activity associated with the evidence item, including isolation of subsamples from the original (parent) item. If an item's chain of custody is compromised, the integrity of the item itself is compromised, thus potentially rendering the item and any subsamples inadmissible in court proceedings.

Information management systems

Chains of custody are recorded using a variety of information management systems. Some agencies use manual or paper-based systems, and others use electronic or automated systems, including electronic evidence tracking systems. Evidence tracking is distinct from the chain of custody. A chain of custody identifies each individual who had possession of the evidence item in chronological order of interaction (i.e., date, time, individual's name, location) when transferred from one individual or location to another). An evidence tracking system maintains the chain-of-custody information to track evidence but may also store related case records and documentation as well as specific details on the physical location of an evidence item to enable efficient retrieval. Through it, managers can easily determine the status and history of an item's

storage, testing, security, and transportation. Laboratory information management systems (LIMS) may be used by forensic laboratories.[26,27]

Although manual systems can be effectively used, electronic evidence tracking systems are recommended because these systems enhance chain-of-custody recordkeeping and tracking, assist inventory management, allow efficient evidence retrieval, and are less subject to loss during transport or as a result of physical damage or misfiling.[28] A list of considerations in the acquisition of an electronic system is provided in *The Biological Evidence Preservation Handbook*.[29]

An electronic spreadsheet is preferred to a paper log as it allows for searchability, sorting, and some automation of functions. Funding is a known barrier to implementing electronic evidence tracking systems, so many agencies still rely on paper records or computerized spreadsheets. Be aware that any spreadsheet used must be able to track all changes so that the original record cannot be modified. For security reasons, processes should ensure that information cannot be easily deleted, and deletion processes must be tracked and linked to the original file.

The chain of custody is critical in evidence management, and evidence should be tracked by all agencies handling it. The majority of the respondents (96%) indicated that their organization does so. Respondents who work in court agencies constituted 54% of the respondents who indicated that their organization does not track chain of custody, with private industry (20%) and clinic/healthcare (9%) being second and third most represented, respectively. This data aligns with discussions within the evidence management community and among committee members who have expressed concern about evidence handling within some court systems that lack staff with experience in handling evidence and relevant policies and protocols. The number of respondents representing court systems in this data cannot be ignored and points to a significant issue in some jurisdictions. [SR 2.6.1]

When asked about the type of information documented for an item's chain of custody, movement/transfer (96%) was the most common selection. The least commonly selected was

[23] Hendrickson, A., Mennecke, B., Scheibe, K., and Townsend, A. Laboratory Information Management Systems for Forensic Laboratories: A White Paper for Directors and Decision Makers. IS-5175, Prepared for the U.S. Department of Energy Under Contract W-7405-Eng-82, December 14, 2005. https://www.osti.gov/servlets/purl/892806 (Accessed September 15, 2025)

[27] Shute, R. and Ropero-Miller, J. A Landscape Study of Laboratory Information Management System for Forensic Crime Laboratories, *Forensic Science Review*, *33*(1), 14-17. http://forensicsciencereview.com/Abstract/33(1)-0-C%20(R&C)%20Full%20Text.pdf (Accessed September 15, 2025)

[28] Electronic evidence management systems are also subject to loss (e.g., deletion of data due to human error or power failures); however, well-designed systems are typically backed up so that any lost information can be readily retrieved.

[29] Ballou, S. et al. The Biological Evidence Preservation Handbook: Best Practices for Evidence Handlers, NISTIR 7928, National Institute of Standards and Technology, Gaithersburg, MD (2013) https://doi.org/10.6028/NIST.IR.7928 (Accessed August 8, 2025)

the reason for movement (66%). Arguably, item movement/transfer, reason for movement, item custody/possession, authorizing person, disposition status, and date and time stamps should be tracked for transparency in how an item is handled and managed. This information is critical when evidence will be admitted in court. [SR 2.6.1]

Most respondents indicated that their organization uses either an electronic (61%) or a hybrid evidence tracking system (29%) to manage evidence/property inventories. The capabilities of electronic systems can significantly reduce administrative errors and labor demands and enhance security if deployed and maintained appropriately. Smaller organizations may have smaller inventories and thus less perceived need for an electronic or hybrid tracking system. However, all organizations can arguably benefit from a technological resource assisting with evidence tracking and management to prevent loss of information and human error. [SR 2.6.1]

Key Takeaways for Phase A Step 2, Creating a Chain of Custody

Upon collecting an item of evidence, a chain of custody record should be initiated immediately or as soon as possible if conditions preclude immediate action (e.g., weather or safety-related circumstances).

A chain-of-custody record should, at a minimum, contain the following information about an item. An example report form is provided in Appendix C.

- What
  - Unique identifier
  - Number of items
  - Case number
  - Item type
  - Short description of the item
- Who
  - Initially collected the item (name and employee designator)
  - Received the item
  - Completed any transfers involving the item
- When
  - Date and time collected
  - Date and time of each subsequent movement
  - Date and time item/packaging was opened and closed
- Where
  - Location of collection
  - Location of storage (temporary and permanent)
  - Detailed information about storage within a facility (e.g., shelf and container-specific location of item)
- Why
  - Reason for custody and storage of item

Implementing an evidence tracking system allows rapid access to the following information:

- Evidence item chain of custody
- Unique case identifier
- Location where item was collected
- Case category and status
- Evidence storage location
- Evidence status (e.g., pending release, disposal of, auction, diversion)
- Investigative examinations conducted
- List and location of subsampled evidence items that have been isolated from primary evidence item (e.g., fabric cutting for DNA extraction from a blood-soaked object, microscope slides containing trace evidence)
- Reports

3.4 Phase A Step 3: Evidence Packaging

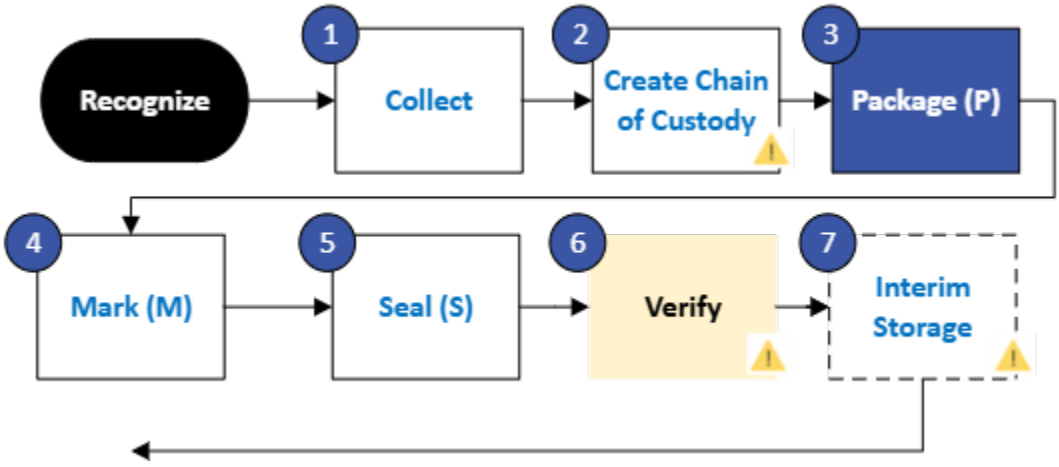

Figure 3-3. Phase A Step 3 Evidence Packaging

Evidence Packaging Materials

Proper packaging is critical for the protection of evidence and must take into consideration the fact that anything in the physical environment could become a relevant item of evidence (solid, liquid, or even gas); therefore, the selection of suitable packaging materials and evidence containers is not trivial. Generally, when considering what types of packaging to use for individual items of evidence, two questions are asked:

1. Is the packaging approved?
2. Is the packaging appropriate?

Packaging Approval

Stakeholders involved in collecting, storing, and packaging evidence items must collaborate and agree on the types of packaging and containers used to store evidence items and ensure the types of packaging meet the needs of the evidence storage facility. Considerations for material selection include:

- Effectiveness of the materials in preventing loss, degradation, and contamination
- Effectiveness of the materials in mitigating hazards
- Appropriateness of material for environmental factors in the geographic region of the storage facility
- Suitability for size and weight of physical evidence
- Ability to label packaging materials
- Accessibility of materials by authorized personnel
- Material costs
- Labor involved in using the materials
- Storage efficiency
- Uniformity
- Storage capabilities of facilities (e.g., temperature control)
- Personnel constraints.

Ideally, an agency provides detailed instructions on what materials to use for packaging various types of evidence, and evidence collectors follow those instructions and understand how to use the packaging materials properly. In the absence of agency guidance, if an evidence collector must choose the type of packaging material themselves, they should be knowledgeable about loss, degradation, and contamination factors. In the event they are unaware of best practices, they should consult a knowledgeable resource for guidance.

Packaging Appropriateness

Evidence packaging and containers are meant to maintain the item's integrity by preventing loss, degradation, and cross-contamination. Packaging evidence can be challenging since an item of evidence can be almost anything imaginable in any given circumstance. While agency policies can provide general guidance on the most common types of evidence, trained evidence collectors and handlers must use their best judgment to decide on the most appropriate packaging material for specific items. Although evidence collectors and handlers often have a selection of approved packaging options, they ultimately select the material used for each item collected. The following are examples of commonly used evidence packaging materials:

- Bags (paper, mesh, padded, plastic, or a combination thereof; body bags)
- Cardboard boxes
- Envelopes
- Paper (for bindle/druggist fold)
- Paint cans

- Tubes (glass or plastic)
- Jars (glass or plastic)
- Wire tags
- Butcher paper
- Plastic wrap
- Faraday bags or electromagnetic field-blocking containers
- Packing paper to keep items inside the package securely in place
- Evidence sealing tape – frangible tape that tears easily to indicate tampering
- Packing tape to close an item – different purpose and placement than frangible tape
- Self-sealing bags, boxes, envelopes.

Packaging Evidence Items

After determining the type of packaging or container to use, each item should be placed in an individual, unused container to prevent contamination or commingling of items containing trace or biological evidence. Each agency may have exceptions to placing items in a single container, for instance, packaging a purse and its contents in a single container or packaging a toolbox and the tools it contains in a single container. Additional packaging considerations include selecting containers to facilitate evidence storage and sorting. Addressing the how-to for packaging all items is beyond the scope of this report (e.g., items with doors, drawers, or pockets; flammable items; vehicles). NIJ offers on-line information and training on evidence collection and packaging; additional resources are provided in Appendix A.[30,31]

Key Takeaways for Phase A Step 3, Evidence Packaging

1. Any law enforcement agency or organization that handles evidence should have written policies and procedures for evidence packaging. These policies and procedures should be reviewed by and incorporate input from the evidence handling community within their jurisdiction, including but not limited to crime scene technicians, evidence/property custodians, hospital personnel, first responders, forensic scientists, and others directly responsible for handling evidence.

2. Written guidelines should provide detailed packaging scenarios specifying the packaging requirements of commonly encountered evidence types and consider jurisdictional requirements, such as acceptance criteria for local laboratories or agencies responsible for analysis.

[30] Technical Working Group on Crime Scene Investigation, Crime Scene Investigation: A Guide for Law Enforcement, NCJ 178280, U.S. Department of Justice, January 2000, https://www.ojp.gov/pdffiles1/nij/178280.pdf. (Accessed September 16, 2025)
[31] National Institute of Justice, "Education for First Responders and Crime Scene Technicians" under "Leveraging Limited Resources" website, https://nij.ojp.gov/nij-hosted-online-training-courses/forensic-dna-education-law-enforcement-decisionmakers/leveraging-limited-resources. (Accessed September 16, 2025)

3. Evidence items should be packaged based on evidence categories/types and consider storage and laboratory requirements.

4. Each agency should use packaging materials and containers that are aligned with their policies and procedures.

5. Forensic laboratories, law enforcement agencies, and other organizations involved in the recognition, collection, and packaging of evidence should coordinate training so that all individuals who handle evidence receive consistent information on the proper collection and packaging of evidence.

6. If forensic laboratories have specific evidence packaging requirements and storage recommendations for commonly tested evidence items, they should ensure that they are available in an easily accessible format for evidence handlers across law enforcement agencies and other organizations (e.g., healthcare facilities).

7. Labs often design kits for evidence handlers to maintain the integrity of the evidence during and after collection. When designing these kits, collaboration with relevant stakeholders is encouraged to ensure that they are designed to meet the needs of the field and function in an efficient manner.

8. Care should be exercised with any items that contain easily lost or apparent pattern evidence that may be altered during transport. Any observed patterns must be documented (e.g., photographed) prior to collecting the evidence.

3.5 Phase A Step 4: Evidence Marking

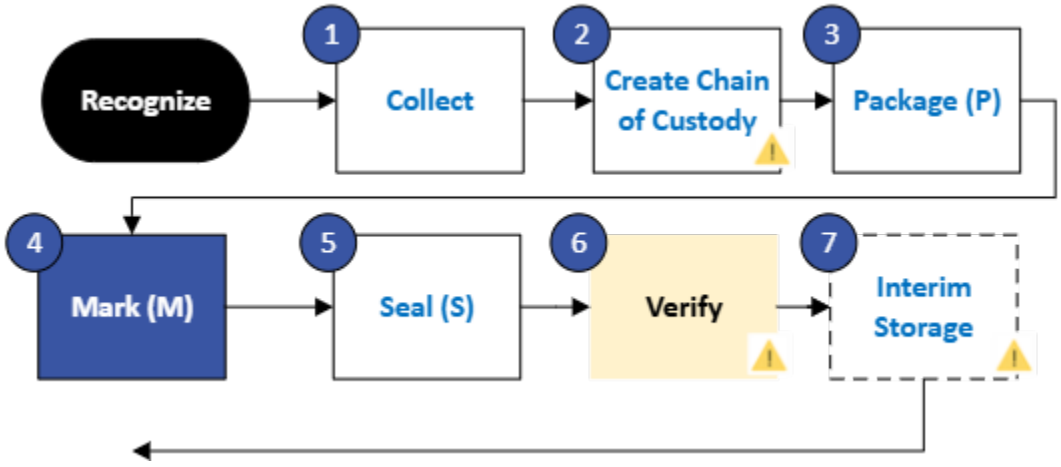

Figure 3-4. Phase A Step 4 Evidence Marking

Whenever feasible, containers for evidence should be individually and uniquely marked as the items are collected. This helps to establish the chain of custody and serves as a measure to prevent mix-ups during packaging as the items can be cross-correlated with other forms of

documentation from the scene of collection (e.g., notes, sketches, and photographs). In some situations, it may be helpful to mark the collected item itself; however, care and common sense must be exercised as some items are too small to be marked, and the act of marking an item may compromise the evidentiary value (e.g., writing over a latent fingerprint).

At a minimum, markings for each item that is collected must include:

- The initials of the individual collecting the item
- The date and time the item was collected
- The identity of the item and a brief description (e.g., Item 1a-fired projectile recovered from left front tire of victim's vehicle)
- Agency and investigative case information
- Markings to indicate any hazards (e.g., biohazard stickers).

Typical materials used to identify the package or item are preprinted packages, preprinted labels, wire tags, and barcoded labels generated by evidence tracking systems as information is entered into the system. Some agencies may write directly on the packaging container using a permanent marker to designate an item of evidence. Often, a handwritten or electronic report will be attached to the items for long-term recordkeeping and dissemination of information during discovery procedures.

Markings should also include information necessary to protect the item's integrity and the safety of personnel handling it. Bright-colored stickers may call out special storage instructions, such as refrigeration or freezing, and warn of any hazards requiring caution during handling, such as sharps and biohazards. Color-coded labels can also designate specific types of evidence, such as homicide-related, officer-involved shooting, and found property, or specify the year of impound. Such designators serve as a quality control mechanism, aiding the proper use of storage facilities and preventing erroneous destruction. However, people who are colorblind may be unable to associate a colored label with its intended meaning, so text or symbols must also be provided on labels.

Most organizations label evidence/property items individually (97%) and use unique identifiers (92%) representing two well-known best practices in evidence management. Both practices should be used universally. Respondents were asked to expand on how individual evidence/property items are identified and referenced. Commonly mentioned identification and reference conventions included "case number," "labels," and "report number." [SR 2.6.1]

Key Takeaways for Phase A Step 4, Evidence Marking

1. Any law enforcement agency or organization handling evidence should have documented evidence marking procedures to ensure consistent and appropriate marking practices.

2. Procedures should require a unique identifier for each item, including numerous like-items for a case. For example, each cartridge case collected at a scene should be uniquely identified so that they can all be correlated to its original location through scene documentation such as sketches and photographs.

3. The package should be marked with an identifier (e.g., case number, control number, item number) corresponding to the item description noted on all chain-of-custody logs including any generated property and evidence reports (e.g., evidence tag, property sheet, property receipt, property invoice).

4. All identifying characteristics and information should be recorded, including serial and model numbers, identification names or numbers, and other descriptors as appropriate for the specific item type.

5. A description of the container and a description of the property packaged within the container (e.g., tape-sealed brown paper bag containing suspect's clothing, heat-sealed plastic bag containing compressed white powder, tape-sealed metal can containing charred debris, etc.) should be included with chain-of-custody documentation.

6. When storing items for safekeeping, markings should identify the owner of the property.

7. Brightly colored stickers with associated graphics should be used to call out special storage instructions and warn of any hazards.

8. Collaboration with the forensic laboratory should be established to ensure item descriptors aid the forensic laboratory in identifying and prioritizing the analysis of evidence items.

9. Packages containing numerous miscellaneous items should be described by their specific type/category within the chain-of-custody documentation. For example, "miscellaneous toiletries" is an acceptable description, whereas "miscellaneous items" is unacceptable because it is too general.

10. Whenever feasible, color-coded labels with appropriate text should be used to designate specific types of evidence to facilitate proper storage and prevent erroneous destruction.

3.6 Phase A Step 5: Evidence Sealing

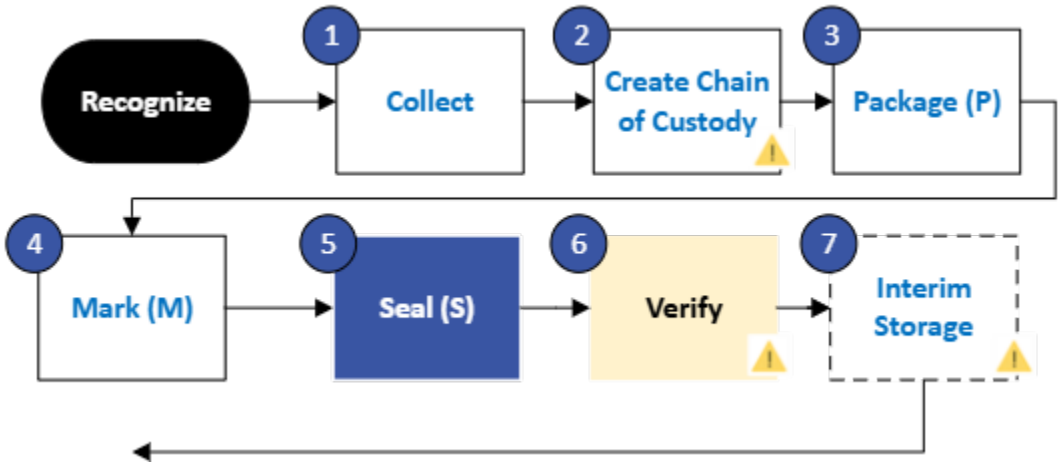

Figure 3-5. Phase A Step 5 Evidence Sealing

Agency policies vary regarding sealing practices, and many of these variations involve geographic considerations such as dry versus humid or hot versus cold climates. The primary goals of sealing evidence packages are to ensure the contents do not escape the packaging container and to identify whether the packaging seal has been compromised. These two goals require different types of seals.

The primary seal aims to keep the package intact and prevent its contents from escaping. Sealing methods include self-adhesive packaging materials, heat seals, packing tape, etc. The setting or facility where evidence collection occurs may guide the sealing method for a specific collector. For example, healthcare settings and forensic laboratories may not allow the use of staples due to the risk of a skin puncture injury to the recipient.

The secondary seal, commonly known as an evidence seal or security seal, aims to preserve the integrity of the evidence and its chain of custody through the use of frangible tape specifically designed to break easily upon tampering. When applied to a package, the seal must cover the flap or seam to ensure that the frangible seal breaks to indicate the opening of the package/container or tampering. Once applied to the package or container, the collector writes their signature/initials and the date across the frangible seal, ensuring they overlap the seal and the surface of the package/container. It should be noted that, due to its fragile nature, frangible tape should not be used in most instances to secure a package closed.[32] Instead, it should be used in conjunction with other, stronger types of seals such as those mentioned above for keeping the package intact.

Evidence seals are available in various colors and designs and may bear the agency name. Some agencies may use different colors to designate the entity responsible for applying the seal. For

[32] Frangible tapes are often suitable protective and security seals for small envelopes and containers. Larger items, such as large paper bags and cardboard boxes should be sealed with a stronger primary seal prior to the application the frangible security seal.

example, police officers may apply red evidence seals, while the forensic laboratory may use blue evidence seals.

Key Takeaways for Phase A Step 5, Evidence Sealing

1. Any law enforcement agency or organization handling evidence should have written policies and procedures for the application of evidence seals. These should include acceptable equipment, instructions on properly sealing the various packages used, and common scenarios encountered by collectors.

2. Any law enforcement agency or organization handling evidence should have written policies and procedures for the evaluation of evidence upon receipt to ensure the integrity of items' packaging and seals. These should also include contingencies on how to handle items that are not presented correctly so that improperly packaged or sealed evidence can be immediately addressed before accepting custody of the item.

3. Evidence seals must be signed with the collector's name or initials and collection date and may include personnel number or other designator.

4. The signature and date must be written to overlap the evidence seal and the package.

5. Each section within an organization may use a designated color of evidence seal.

3.7 Phase A Step 6: Verification

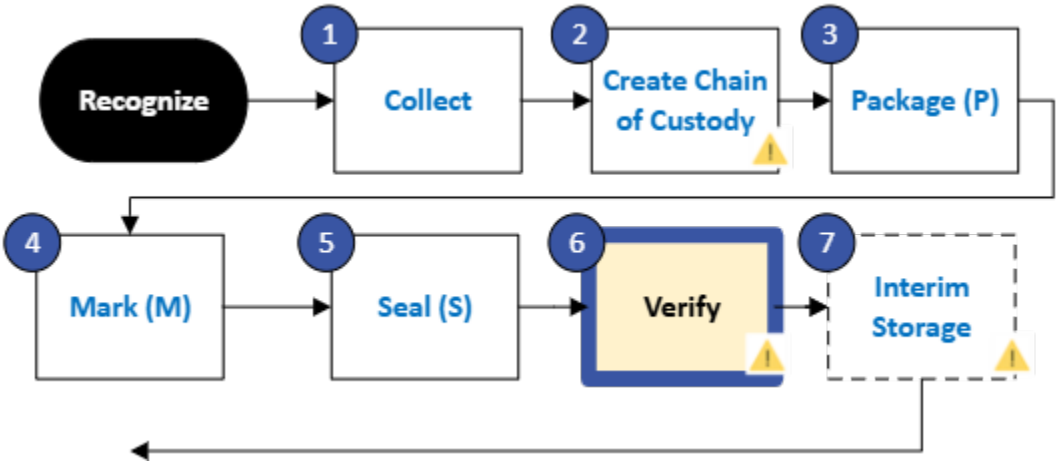

Figure 3-6. Phase A Step 6 Verification

Verification refers to the collector or another designee from the collecting agency reviewing and ensuring that packaging, marking, and sealing meet agency requirements. Evidence collectors should immediately address all incorrect packaging, marking, and sealing deficiencies before placing an item into interim storage and transferring it for intake.

Key Takeaways for Phase A Step 6, Verification

1. Any law enforcement agency or organization handling evidence should have written policies and procedures for verifying that packaging, marking, and sealing meet agency and evidence and property storage facility requirements.

2. Before accepting custody of evidence and property, recipients should immediately address all incorrect packaging, marking, and sealing deficiencies directly with the collector.

3.8 Phase A Step 7: Interim Storage

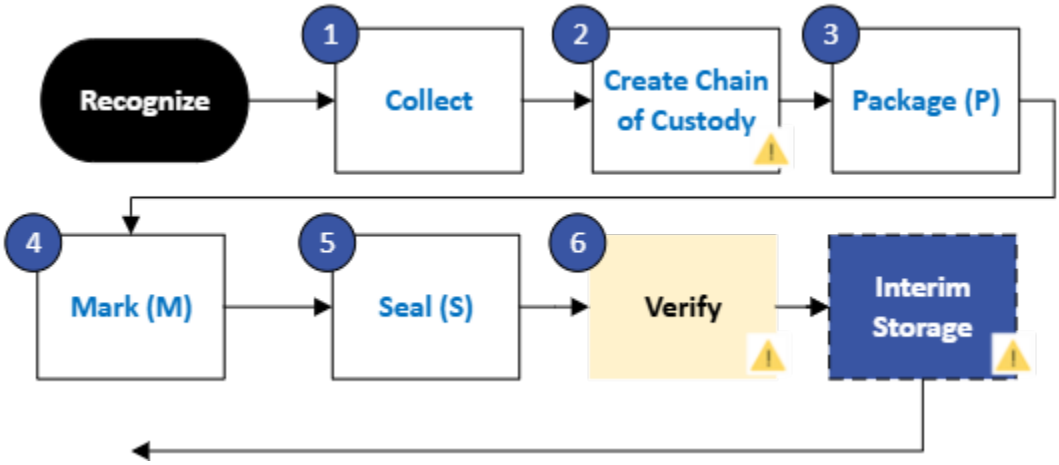

Figure 3-7. Phase A Step 7 Interim Storage

Interim storage refers to storing evidence in a secure temporary location before transferring items for permanent storage. The interim storage process should ensure the chain of custody continues to be maintained and allow for logging and tracking of each item. Examples include evidence cages at off-site locations used before transportation to the main evidence storage facility or laboratory, evidence lockers at workstations within a laboratory for storage prior to, during, or immediately after analysis, and evidence lockers in healthcare settings. During interim storage, it is important to ensure items from different cases or events are not commingled to prevent cross-contamination. Written procedures should describe the applicable use of interim storage and decontamination processes for such units after evidence is removed and transferred to another location.

Key Takeaways for Phase A Step 7, Interim Storage

1. Any person handling evidence and using interim storage must maintain the chain of custody for each item.

2. Before placing an item in interim storage, verify that it is correctly packaged, marked, and sealed according to agency guidelines.

3. Items held in interim storage should be logged and tracked, including the date and time they were placed in storage and by whom, as well as the date, time, and name of the person removing them from interim storage.

4. When placing evidence in interim storage, avoid commingling items from different cases or events unless all items are packaged and sealed to prevent cross-contamination.

4. Intake

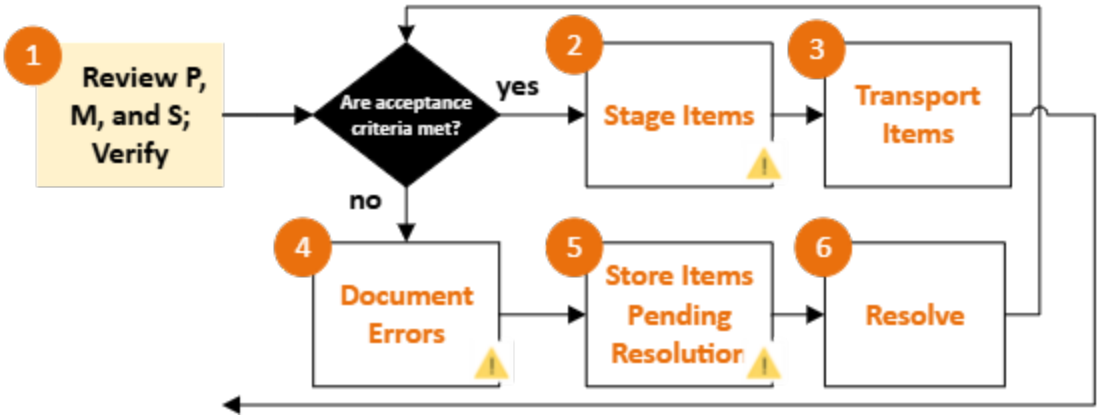

Figure 4. Phase B – Intake

After collection and packaging, evidence is transferred to the custody of staff at a storage facility for intake. The intake process is a critical part of the evidence lifecycle as the item's integrity relies upon the security and tracking measures within the evidence/property room. This section provides an overview of the components of the intake process and outlines what each step should encompass.

4.1 Phase B Fundamentals

The intake process includes reviewing an item's packaging, marking, and sealing (PMS) to ensure it meets agency acceptance criteria. Intake policies and procedures should include methods for addressing PMS deficiencies with the collector or the person making the transfer. When PMS is verified, items are staged prior to entry into the evidence management system. Once entered, the evidence custodian will transport items to the appropriate storage area based on evidence or property type and liability classification. The steps of the intake process, depending on agency size and resources, may involve multiple people. Therefore, it is essential to clarify who is responsible for each step of the process to prevent loss or the entry of erroneous information into the evidence management system.

4.2 Phase B Step 1: Review Packaging, Marking, and Sealing (PMS) and Verify

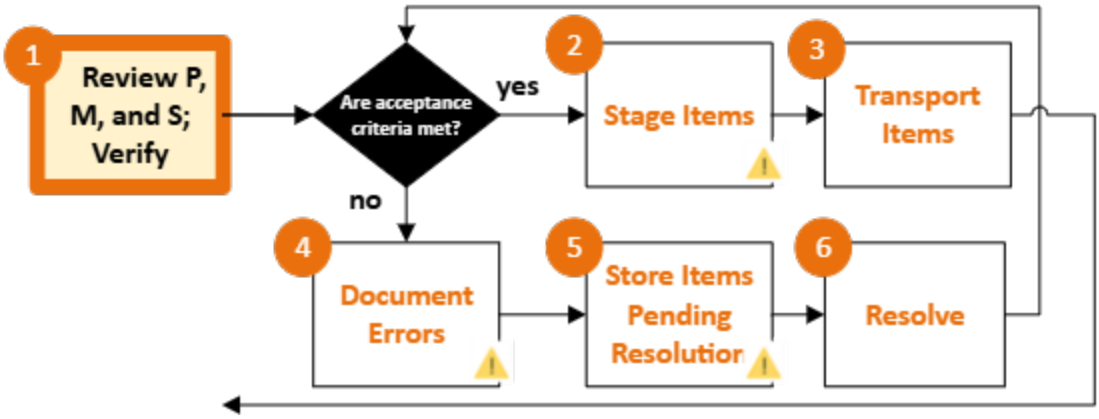

Figure 4-1. Phase B Step 1 Review P, M, S; Verify

Every agency should have a written procedure for receiving items into the evidence room. At a minimum, the document should cover the packaging, marking, and sealing requirements described in Phase A process steps 3, 4, and 5. Additionally, the agency must outline the enforcement of submission criteria and the methods for correcting deficiencies. The policy must be in place before reviewing evidence for accuracy. The evidence custodian will compare all submissions against the policy to ensure they meet agency standards.

First, the person conducting intake will make a visual examination to ensure that packaging does not show any signs of leaking or tearing that would compromise the integrity of the evidence. They will also check the packaging against the description of the items being submitted. These checks will verify that the packaging is appropriate for the submission type and that all items are secure within the container (e.g., box, envelope, bag). The custodian will verify evidence seals are present, including closure seals and frangible seals, and that all markings are present and meet agency requirements.

All property and evidence packaging will contain case information unique to an item or set of items. The formatting and appearance of information on the package or container varies across agencies. At this stage, information should be inspected by intake personnel for uniformity and, if handwritten, legibility. Some agencies may require submitting paperwork with evidentiary items. If so, case information on the evidence container must be compared with any related paperwork to verify consistency between the two.

Many agencies use an electronic evidence management system that requires the collector or evidence custodian to enter items into the system. When items are entered into the system by the collector, the evidence custodian must compare all physical components of the submission, including packaging and paperwork, with the electronic record for accuracy. When items are entered into the evidence management system by a custodian, a second custodian can verify that the data entry is accurate and matches the physical components of the submission.

Acceptance Criteria

Once the person conducting intake reviews the submitted item, they determine whether acceptance criteria are met. If they are, the item moves into staging to continue the intake process (Phase B Step 4). If they are not, any observed issues must be addressed before proceeding.

Due to a wide variety of possible errors, agency policy should allow intake personnel discretion when determining whether an error rises to the level of requiring correction based on how it impacts the submission. The policy should also provide a method of enforcement, such as allowing intake personnel the right of refusal. The individual reviewing items would use the established policy to determine whether the submitted items meet agency standards and grant them the authority to reject any deficient submissions. For example, a custodian may determine that a minor typographical error in an item description, such as "empty backpak," passes inspection since it does not significantly impact the accuracy or integrity of the submission. In contrast, if an item's physical packaging states that it contains a "1 one-dollar bill," but it is entered electronically with a description of "2 one-dollar bills," then this should be a mandatory correction as it significantly impacts the accuracy and integrity of the evidence management system.

When items are deficient, the next step is to identify who can correct the problem. The agency must determine which errors require a collector (e.g., a patrol officer) to appear onsite to correct the deficiency. Another consideration is the chain of custody. The agency must determine whether or not it is worth having custodians modify packaging and insert themselves into the chain of custody. An evidence custodian or forensic scientist can quickly correct minor errors such as typographical errors and missing information, provided they notify the collector and the collector approves the change. Communicating error corrections should always occur between the collector and custodian to ensure accuracy, prevent unethical behavior or accusations, and provide for documentation of the communication.

As discussed in Phase A, the collector's role is to package and secure property and evidence following established guidelines before submitting it for secure storage. The collector/submitter should correct errors that compromise the item's integrity, such as improper packaging, unsecured seals, and significant errors in documentation. An organization should provide guidance on whether the collector or a custodian can fix errors such as incorrect packaging, an unsigned or undated seal, a typographical error, missing information, or a computer error as well as a process for doing so.

Key Takeaways for Phase B Step 1, Review P, M, S; Verify

1. Any agency or organization responsible for the intake of property and evidence should have a written policy outlining the acceptance criteria by which that entity will accept submissions. This policy should include packaging, marking, and sealing requirements.

2. Upon receiving property and evidence, the packaging, marking, sealing, attached paperwork, and electronic data entry (when applicable) must be examined to ensure accuracy and policy conformity.

3. Agencies should have a section within their policy that identifies what may be enforced by the evidence custodian and provides the custodian with the right to refuse deficient submissions.

4. Any errors identified as having a significant impact on the accuracy and integrity of a submitted item should be considered a mandatory correction that must be made by the collector.

5. After submitting an item for secure storage, consultations on error corrections should always occur between the submitter and custodian to ensure accuracy, prevent unethical behavior or accusations. These consultations should be conducted in writing.

6. When the evidence custodian enters items into an electronic evidence management system, a second custodian should verify that the data entered matches the physical elements of the submission.

7. Custodians should be allowed to use discretion when identifying errors to ensure the appropriate correction level.

Phase B Step 2: Stage Items

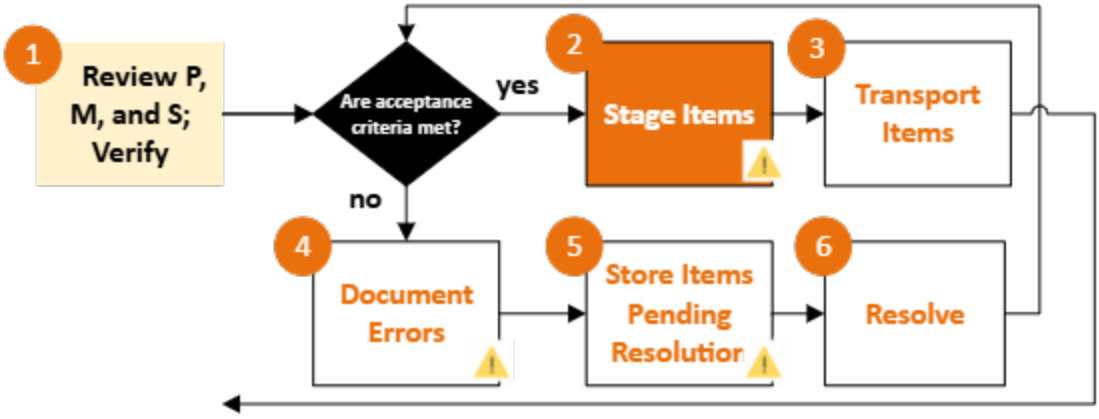

Figure 4-2. Phase B Step 2 Stage Items

Items that meet all acceptance criteria next move to a staging area in preparation for storage. Packaging, information listed within reports, attached paperwork, or data entered into electronic evidence management system are all components that can aid a custodian in deciding the appropriate storage location for submitted items.

All aspects of the item and accompanying paperwork aid in determining an appropriate storage location for the evidence. For example, an item's package and label may indicate special

storage needs, such as biohazard content, requiring placement in a storage environment appropriate for the specified hazard; information found in a report or evidence management system may indicate the anticipated length of storage, thereby influencing location selection; and the attached paperwork and forms may reveal transfer authorization to a laboratory or court.

There are three basic types of locations: long-term, short-term, and temporary. Long-term storage refers to areas where items experience little to no movement and serve as archives. Evidentiary items relating to homicide or sexual assault investigations often require a long-term storage location due to the likelihood of being retained by the agency.

A short-term storage location houses items expected to move more frequently, such as a storage area containing found property and items for safekeeping. These are typically authorized to be released back to their owners or disposed of within a short time. Another example is items submitted to a laboratory where they may spend substantial time but will eventually be returned to a more permanent location.

Temporary storage locations house items for a short time (defined as less than 72 hours in the survey), typically for a specific purpose. Once that purpose is fulfilled, the item will move on to another assigned location that may be temporary (e.g., the passing of an item to another analyst for additional laboratory work) or more permanent (e.g., return of an item from an analyst to the evidence vault in a laboratory). Items should not stay in temporary areas for substantial amounts of time. Examples of temporary storage locations include designated areas within an evidence room for preparing items to be transferred to a laboratory or scheduled for owner pick-up and storage lockers assigned to specific analysts in a laboratory for safekeeping while analysis is being performed.

Whether short-term, long-term, or temporary, the determination regarding the type of storage location for each item is made during the staging phase of the evidence management process.

As with the size and space allocated for items pending resolution, the size and space allocated for each type of storage outlined above will vary in accordance with the size of the agency responsible for managing the evidence and the volume of evidence they typically receive. Some large, high-volume agencies may have several off-site locations, each containing designated rooms for specific item types while smaller agencies may have one evidence room where all items are stored regardless of the type. Regardless of the size, once an item moves from staging to storage, the chain of custody must be updated to reflect the item's movement.

Key Takeaways for Phase B Step 2, Stage Items

1. Evidence custodians should follow clear policies and procedures for determining a generalized storage location for each submitted item and any associated subsamples, whether short-term, long-term, or temporary.

2. The staging location should be situated to promote efficient workflow processes.

3. Packaging containers, markings, and accompanying documents should support safe and efficient evidence management processes from intake to staging to storage.

4. Once an item moves from staging to storage, the chain of custody must be updated to reflect the item's movement.

4.3 Phase B Step 3: Transport Items

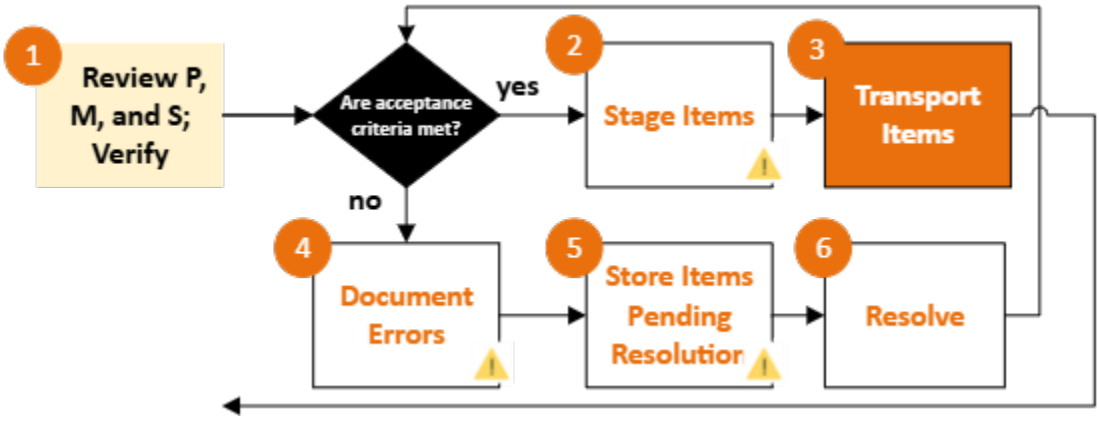

Figure 4-3. Phase B Step 3 Transport Items

Authorization for transporting items should be established before any movement occurs. Agency policy may specify blanket authorization for transporting items meeting the criteria outlined in the policy. For example, the policy might state that an evidence custodian may transport items to an internal storage facility most suitable for the item type. However, they cannot transport items externally without prior authorization from a supervisor or the officer/agent. An example of transport situations requiring prior authorization is provided in Figure 5. Depending on the agency's needs, authorization may be as simple as an email or a signed form. The destination of an item should never be at the sole discretion of the custodian unless permitted by existing policy.

Agency policy should establish a plan for transporting evidence requiring a controlled environment. Travel between the intake facility and another location may vary in distance and time required and should be considered before any movement occurs. Taking a refrigerated item to another facility within 5 minutes may not require additional equipment. However, driving the same item for two hours to a laboratory would require environmental control throughout the trip. Another consideration for evidence transportation is security and ensuring

the selected transport method provides adequate security measures. Additional security must always be considered for the movement of high-liability items.

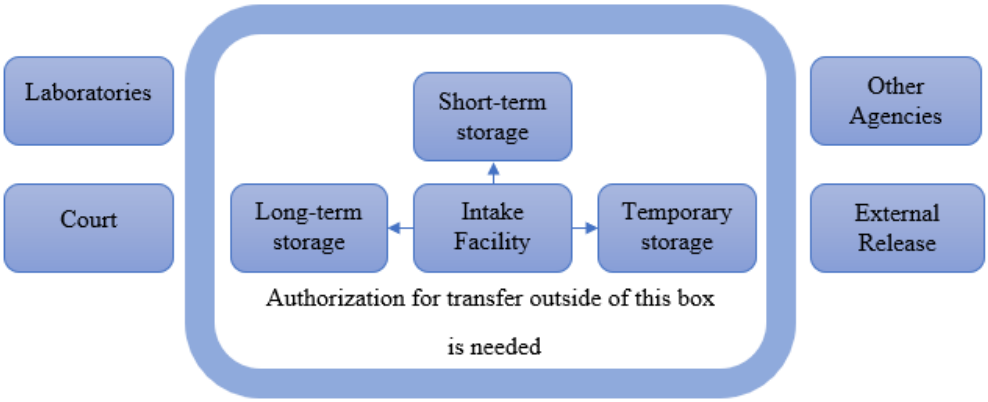

Figure 5. Evidence Transportation Diagram Showing Need for Separate Authorization.

Slightly fewer than half of the respondents (47%) indicated that their organization takes precautions to maintain evidence requiring cold storage during transportation. Of those who indicated this type of precaution is not taken (41%), law enforcement agencies (55%) and crime/forensic laboratories (22%) were the most represented. Likewise, of those respondents who indicated that they are unsure of their organization's practice (12%), crime/forensic laboratories (41%) and law enforcement agencies (39%) were the most represented. Personnel responsible for transporting evidence should have resources available for cold storage. [SR 2.9.1]

Transfer of evidence/property between organizations is a common issue during policy discussions regarding evidence/property management and related law enforcement functions.[33] While most respondents (80%) indicated that they have no challenges when transferring evidence/property between organizations, 20% responded that they face challenges with these transfers, including difficulty transporting evidence/property with unique requirements (e.g., cold storage); different policies, procedures, and forms amongst organizations; incompatible electronic systems; and challenges related to collecting or retrieving items. [SR 2.2.1]

[33] For example, see discussions of the former National Commission of Forensic Sciences (NCFS), National Institute of Standards and Technology, Forensic Science Program, "National Commission on Forensic Science (archive)" website, https://www.nist.gov/forensic-science/interdisciplinary-topics/national-commission-forensic-science (Accessed August 8, 2025)

Key Takeaways for Phase B Step 3, Transport Items

1. Agencies should establish policies and procedures for the transportation of evidence.
2. Authorization for transporting items should be established before any movement occurs. This authorization may be established as a blanket statement in written polices; however, it may differ for internal movement as opposed to external movement.
3. An evidence custodian should not have sole discretion over where evidence is transported unless such decisions are permitted by existing policy.
4. Agency policy should establish plans for transporting evidence that requires a controlled environment, including cold storage.
5. Selected transport methods must comply with agency policy and provide adequate security during transport.

4.4 Phase B Step 4: Document Errors

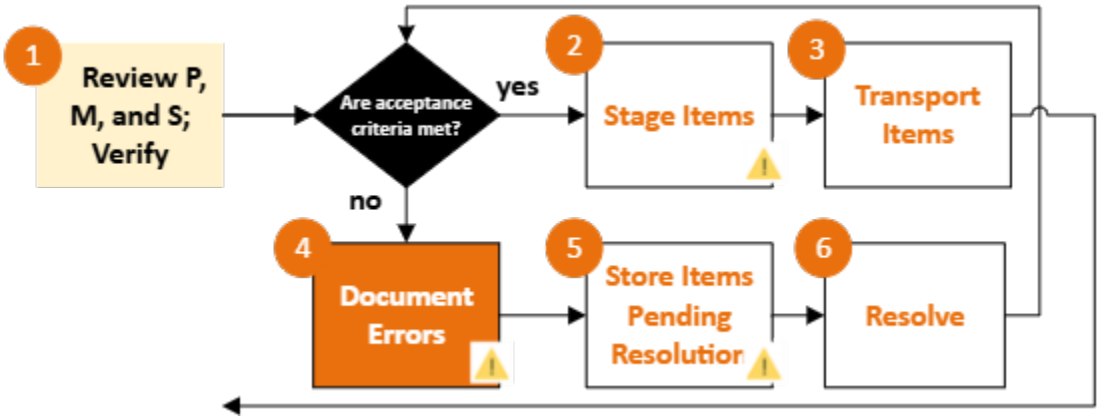

Figure 4-4. Phase B Step 4 Document Errors

Items that are improperly packaged, marked, or sealed in violation of stated acceptance criteria cannot be transported until errors are documented and resolved. Upon identification of any errors, the person conducting intake should document the errors in accordance with their procedure(s)[34] and communicate any discrepancies directly to the collector/submitter.

In some instances, the observed error may require action on the part of the collector/submitter, while in others, the intake personnel may have the authority to make the correction. Regardless of the circumstances, the action taken must be documented.

[34] Documentation formats will vary across agencies based on the methods used for evidence management available (e.g., paper, spreadsheet, electronic management systems).

When recording the error and corrective action taken, the record should include sufficient detail to adequately identify the item, the error, the date and time, the method of correction, and the individuals involved in the process. Including these details in the record validates the exchange and should align with agency policy. Agencies may use a template providing fields for the required information to record communications and actions. Use of such templates creates consistency and promotes compliance with agency policy.

Once an error has been corrected, the record of that correction must be retained. The record explains the action that was taken and corroborates any physical changes that stakeholders may view later in the item's lifecycle. Record retention practices will vary depending on statutes, specific agency requirements, and the systems used to record and track evidence.

Tracking errors that occur routinely may improve processes in an agency. Having a system to consolidate this information could provide insight into policy areas needing further clarification. It may reveal that a group of evidence collectors is repeating the same mistakes, thereby allowing the agency an opportunity to provide training. In the long run, implementing consistent practices to promote accountability will foster trust between stakeholders and improve work quality.

Key Takeaways for Phase B Step 4, Document Errors

1. Agency policy should include established methods for preserving records, documenting errors, communicating with stakeholders, and performing corrective actions.

2. Adequate documentation reflecting errors observed and corrective actions taken should accompany all errors that are identified.

3. Agencies should establish methods to consolidate correction data in a retrievable format to better evaluate recurring issues and increase accountability.

4.5 Phase B Step 5: Store Items Pending Resolution

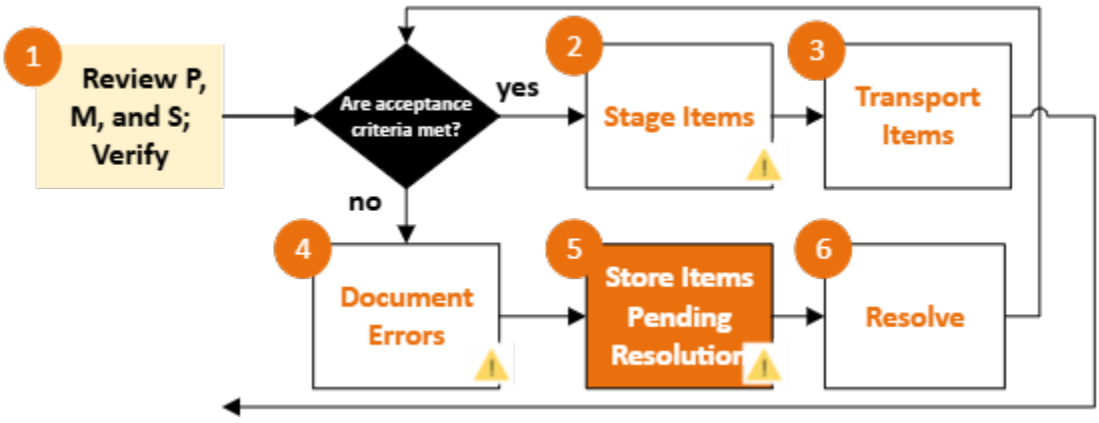

Figure 4-5. Phase B Step 5 Store Items Pending Resolution

Agencies receiving evidence should have a secure, temporary storage location designated for items requiring corrective action. Designated areas prevent items from being misplaced or lost, ensure these items are readily accessible for corrective action, and prevent these items from moving forward in the evidence management process prior to corrective actions being taken. Many agencies refer to this designated area as *pending resolution*.

Pending resolution locations vary based on an agency's resources and needs and may consist of a rolling cart, a designated area on a counter, a specific bin/container on a designated shelf, or any other designated area as long as it is specific for this purpose.

Depending on the types of evidence going through the intake process, an evidence room may contain several pending resolution locations. For example, an out-of-compliance item requiring refrigeration requires a temporary storage space that is refrigerated while an out-of-compliance item requiring ventilation would require temporary space in a fume hood. Depending on agency size and evidence volume, this might require a section of a refrigerator or fume hood or the entire volume of either location. The same considerations apply to high-liability items. To prevent the existence of too many temporary locations, an agency could store all pending resolution items in a high-liability area. Regardless of type, they must be held in compliance with agency policy until they are corrected.

Items should not sit in a temporary location for any substantial amount of time. To prevent this, agencies should establish enforceable policies that place suitable time limits for efficient completion of corrective actions (e.g., three business days on the short end to two weeks at maximum[35]). Enforcement of these timeframes requires routine inspections of pending resolution locations. The portion of policy addressing the evidence custodian could, for example, state that all items within the pending resolution area shall be reviewed once per week for compliance. Items should stay in the pending resolution location until the collector resolves all errors or the errors are reviewed and deemed acceptable.

When making corrections to any documentary information associated with the item, it is best to strike through the incorrect information instead of obliterating, erasing, or removing it by another means—for example, correct “1 dollar bill” by drawing a line across the one and writing in a 2. Additionally, the person correcting information on the item should use a unique signature or initials written adjacent to the correction. This process makes the correction transparent and corroborates the information provided in documentation and the chain of custody.

One method for promoting prompt error corrections is using a correction locker. A correction locker is a secure area to which access is restricted to the individual who is required to correct

[35] Depending on the situation, a corrective action may require the presence of the original submitter. This may require time to establish contact and, in larger jurisdictions, may require travel time. To this end, the evidence management unit that accepted the item requiring action should take these variables into consideration when establishing their policies. On the other end of the spectrum, small local agencies may have greater control over these variables (e.g., it is easier to bring a submitter in for corrections when the agency is small and local) so they can decrease the timeline in order to ensure a faster and more efficient response.

the error. Some correction lockers are secured by fingerprint technology, while others may use unique codes or keys, providing only specific individuals access to the area. Items can be secured in this area for the collector to access.

When using a correction locker, it is imperative that the technician who opens the locker documents it on the chain of custody and documents the placement of the item into the correction locker on the chain of custody. Further, the correcting submitter must mark on the chain of custody that they retrieved it from the correction locker and resubmitted it into a locker. Failure to document the transition of items between lockers represents a misuse of correction lockers and interrupts the chain of custody for that item.

Chain of Custody

Changing an item's location, even temporarily pending resolution, requires an update to the chain of custody. Having the temporary placement reflected on the chain of custody report allows for a fluid and accurate representation of the item's history and corroborates associated records. When a collector must take custody of the item to make physical changes to the packaging, the release and return on the chain of custody must be documented.[36]

If an item must be repackaged, the original packaging should be kept with the item whenever feasible. This activity preserves the original markings that may be required for identification purposes and any trace evidence that may have transferred to the interior surfaces of the original packaging.

Key Takeaways for Phase B Step 5, Store Items Pending Resolution

1. Agencies receiving evidence should have a secure, temporary storage location designated for items requiring corrective action.

2. Agencies should establish a timeframe suitable to their needs for completing corrective actions and ensure items pending corrective action are stored in compliance with agency policy.

3. Policies should indicate the expected timeframe for corrective actions to occur (e.g., three business days to two weeks), and how often pending resolution items are reviewed (e.g., once per week).

4. When a collector must take custody of the item to make physical changes to the packaging, the release and return on the chain of custody must be documented.

[36] Note that this process is much simpler with electronic tracking systems. The items can be scanned to and from individuals and into locations. Every action is documented, the chain of custody can be easily viewed, the location of any given item can be easily determined, and comprehensive reports can be generated for evaluation.

4.6 Phase B Step 6: Resolve

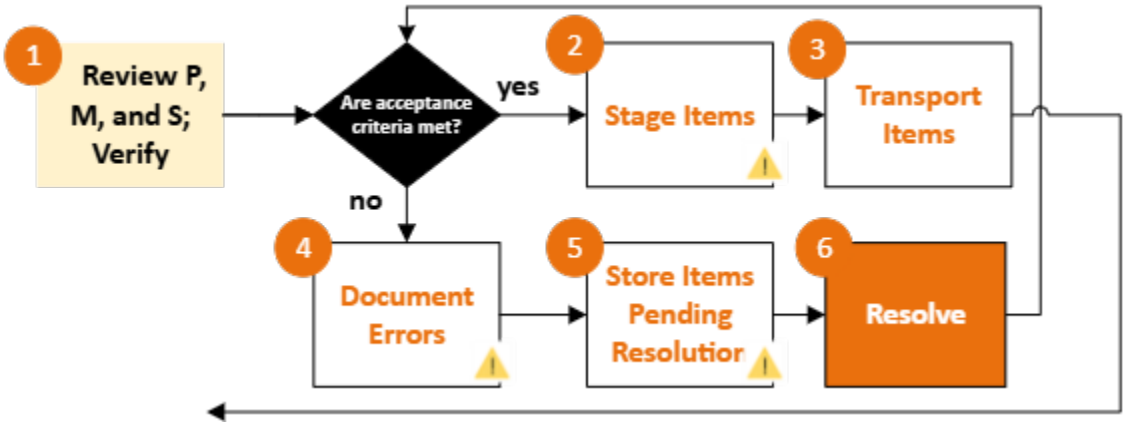

Figure 4-6. Phase B Step 6 Resolve

Once the error is corrected, the collector or custodian will resubmit the item for review to determine whether the acceptance criteria are met. The item continues to cycle through the process until all errors have been appropriately corrected.

5. Evidence Storage and Preservation

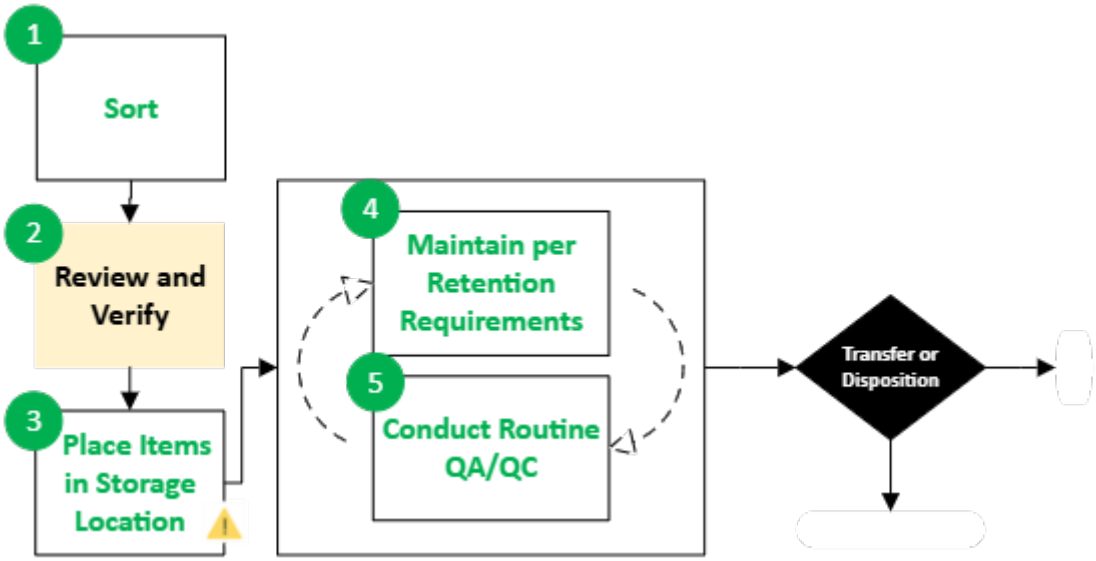

Figure 6. Phase C – Evidence Storage and Preservation

5.1 Phase C Fundamentals

The storage environment and preservation considerations for every type of evidence item are beyond the scope of this report. However, these considerations are critical for efficient workflow and tracking and for preventing loss, degradation, and/or cross-contamination.[37] Additionally, variables such as facility layout and equipment availability affect storage location, item retrieval, inventory counts, and auditing processes.

A goal of the evidence handlers survey was to identify differences in operational functions among the various organizations storing evidence/property. The majority (77%) of the respondents indicated their organization stores evidence/property both short- and long-term. Long-term storage of evidence/property has resource implications for all organizations that store evidence/property for long periods. [SR 2.2.1]

Ninety-eight percent of respondents indicated that their organization has dedicated space for evidence/property items. (Of those who did not, private industry (38%) and medical examiner/coroner's office (29%) were most common.) Identifying a specific space to store evidence/property for a short or extended period is widely considered an essential requirement for the appropriate management of evidence/property to ensure its integrity and prevent tampering or loss. Organizations with minimal inventories may deem it appropriate to store

[37] Federal Bureau of Investigation, Handbook of Forensic Services, 2019, https://www.fbi.gov/file-repository/laboratory/handbook-of-forensic-services-pdf.pdf/view. (Accessed August 8, 2025)

evidence in a shared or multi-purpose space. However, this counters best practice and may negatively impact the evidence/property (e.g., degradation, cross-contamination) or the potential usefulness of evidence to be subjected to forensic analyses or presented in court. [SR 2.2.1]

About one-third (31%) of respondents indicated that they conduct total inventories annually, with 11% disclosing that they do not know and 13% reporting that they never conduct a 100% inventory. Of respondents who do not conduct complete inventories or are unsure of their organization's inventory practice, 45% conduct partial, rotational, or high-liability inventories. Full inventories should be conducted during set time periods by any organization handling evidence/property, whether the period is annual or every five years. Full inventories are critical to ensure that items that may be purged are removed from the inventory, thereby making room for incoming items. Furthermore, 100% inventories help ensure that items are not lost or misplaced and are stored in the location specified in the tracking system. Organizations should be supported to ensure they have the proper resources and enough personnel to complete scheduled inventories, whether total or partial. [SR 2.8.1]

Some respondents indicated their organization does not have a tracking system to know the number of items received and purged on a monthly (29%), annual (23%), or multi-year basis (27%). Coupling the prevalence of this lack of practice with the amount of evidence/property in organizations' inventories when this survey was administered (respondent estimates ranged from 0 items to a billion total items[38]), there are challenges that may need to be addressed. The high number of items demonstrates the need to develop sustainable practices for effective operations. Furthermore, this data shows the importance of purging evidence/property items when appropriate to make space for incoming items.[SR 2.8.1]

The estimate of inventory items shows how overwhelming it may be to conduct a complete inventory, demonstrating the need for sustainable and achievable practices for all organizations handling evidence/property to function effectively. Over half of the respondents (56%) indicated their organization does not destroy/dispose of more items than are received yearly. The purging of evidence/property through the correct means (e.g., destruction, release to owner) when purging is appropriate (e.g., exceeding the required retention duration) is necessary to offset the intake levels of evidence/property. Prevention of unsustainable inventory growth requires regularly checking the retention status of inventory items to establish whether retention is required or if items have met or exceeded retention storage duration requirements (i.e., state statutes). [SR 2.8.1]

[38] Four respondents reported very large numbers in the survey (999,999,999 items, 728,000,000 items, 500,000,000 items, and 100,000,000 items). Although these numbers may be accurate, they were removed from the data for calculation of the average number of items held by various organizations. Once removed, averages ranged from several hundred items held by clinics and healthcare agencies to several hundred thousand items held by law enforcement and forensic laboratories. See Question Q65 in NIST SP 1500-33B for more information.

5.2 Phase C Step 1: Sort

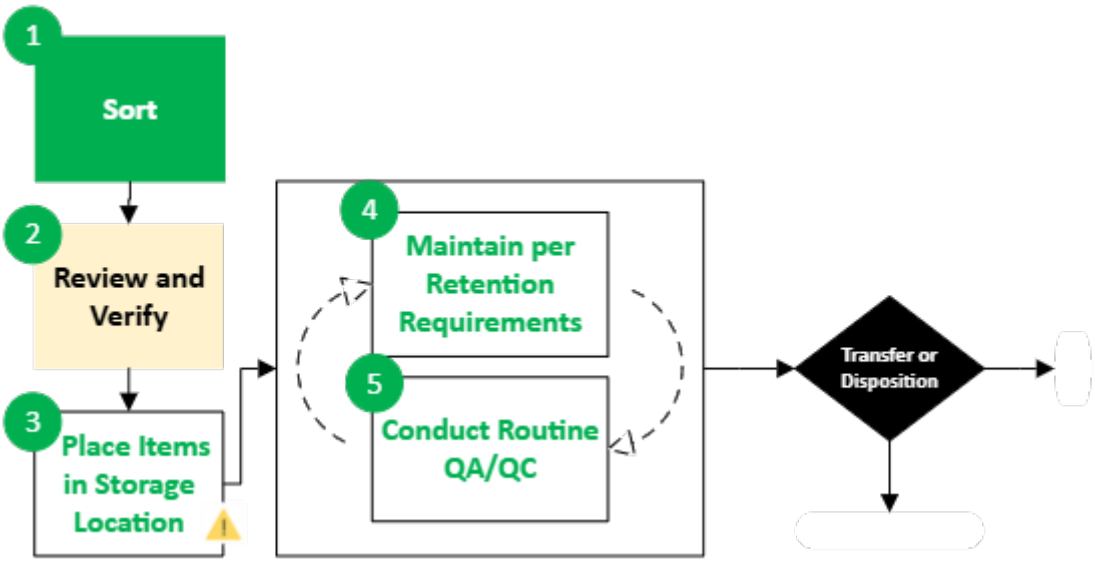

Figure 6-1. Phase C Step 1 Sort

Recall that the last step of Phase B involved transport of the evidence to a location for storage. Once the items reach that location, they must be sorted and checked again. The items must be stored in locations and under conditions that meet their individual storage and preservation requirements. The sorting of items is dependent on several variables including case status, liability status, expected length of storage, size of items, item-specific hazards, and appropriate environmental conditions (temperature, humidity) for the item type.[39] Storage areas for high-liability items should include additional security measures such as entry and exit logs, limited access features, and security camera coverage. Property that moves quickly in and out of the evidence facility may be assigned to a specific location for ease of retrieval.

Sectioning the evidence facility based on evidence type, status, and specific storage needs for items allows for more efficient movement and retrieval of items to and from the designated storage areas. (See Figure 7 for an example layout.) Such a layout would include designated areas for high-value items, general-liability items, volatile items, and items requiring refrigeration or frozen storage. The size of items is also a consideration. In addition to space requirements large items present specific safety hazards including lifting and falling concerns. For these reasons, large items should be stored low to the ground and may require designated areas with extra space. Small items can be easily lost or inadvertently moved with other items (e.g., small packets stuck to or mixed in with evidence from unrelated cases). To this end,

[39] Although there may be a desire to store items associated with a single case or individual together, there are reasons why this is not a good idea. Items that require specialized storage conditions or present specific hazards must always be stored in accordance with their specific requirements. If not stored correctly, the evidence management team may be exposed to hazards or the evidence could suffer loss, contamination, or degradation. Hazardous, high-liability, and perishable items should never be stored in a general retention area. And because of space constraints, specialized storage areas should not be used as a convenience for storage of general items.

evidence storage facilities should have dedicated space for storage of small items, such as in filing bins.

Appropriate climate controls are required to store specific categories and types of evidence. Storage allocation and resources for a given agency depend on several factors, including agency size, funding, inventory volume, and the type of evidence held at the physical location. Each agency should be able to properly store all evidence collected and held to prevent contamination and degradation. If an agency does not have the means to maintain climate control for certain categories of evidence, alternative storage arrangements should be in place.

As a quality control measure, cold storage equipment (freezers and refrigerators) should be electronically monitored with a system that records temperature over time and automatically alerts custodians if a unit loses power or is out of the appropriate temperature range. A discussion of climate control considerations for every category and type of evidence is beyond the scope of this report.

Sorting will help maintain a well-organized evidence room. It requires employees to be intentional and thoughtful. Even though agencies may function differently overall, sorting is an effective and practical strategy to reduce errors. All agencies should have a standard operating procedure regarding their storage scheme to clarify the sorting process for evidence room personnel.

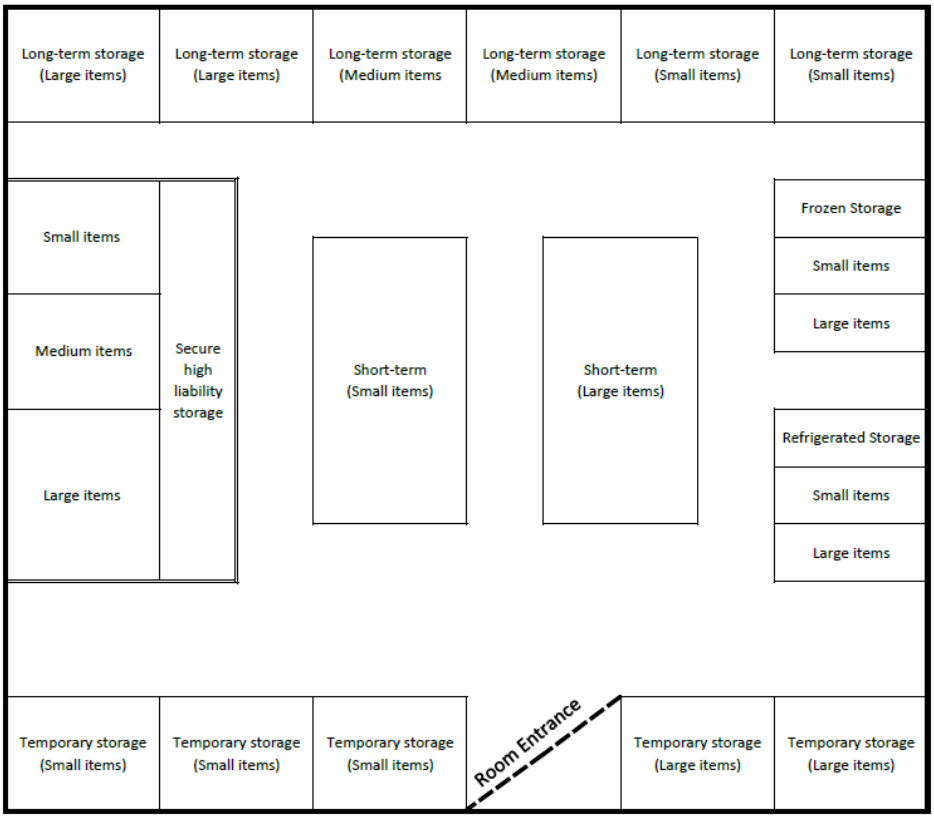

Figure 7. Evidence Room Layout Example

Survey respondents indicated that security of evidence/property rooms within their organizations includes key-card access (69%), video surveillance (55%), and steel-frame doors (55%). Regarding high-liability items, 70% of the respondents indicated security measures for these item types. Security is a fundamental requirement to ensure that only those with proper authorization can access these areas. Security features such as video surveillance help prevent intra-organization theft and are critical in ensuring the integrity of stored evidence/property items in the storage area. Lack of appropriate security measures can have adverse consequences, especially for items holding evidentiary value in court. [SR 2.9.1]

The majority (77%) of respondents indicated their organization logs individuals who access the evidence/property room. Of the respondents indicating that this is not their organization's practice (18%), the most commonly represented organization types were law enforcement (31%) and crime/forensic laboratories (27%), with the most commonly represented organization classification being local (54%). Of those respondents who indicated that logging is their organization's practice, 67% reported logged manually, while 61% logged electronically. (Respondents could choose multiple answers.) [SR 2.9.1]

Logging individuals who access the evidence/property room should be a standard practice. Although electronic logging is strongly recommended as it removes possible instances of human error or oversight (e.g., forgetting to log the time an individual entered or left the property/evidence room), it may represent a high investment cost. Organizations that do not currently log identities of individuals who access these spaces and do not have the means to invest in key cards or advanced biometrics could begin by manually logging this information through a card file or paper logbook at a minimum. [SR 2.9.1]

Security features in evidence/property rooms are variable, dependent on the organization type, the size of the space dedicated for evidence/property storage, and the availability of funding to invest in more advanced features. Security of evidence/property items is a critical component of evidence management. Many of these security features double as safety precautions to ensure that evidence/property room personnel and the items they manage are safe from potential hazards (e.g., biohazards, drugs, weapons) or emergencies (e.g., fires). Over half of the respondents indicated that refrigerators (78%), temperature-controlled spaces (77%), and freezers (70%) are present in their organization's evidence/property areas. Cold storage and temperature-controlled spaces are fundamental for ensuring evidence items such as blood are correctly stored. Certain evidence items can degrade at room temperature, which can adversely affect forensic analyses. [SR 2.9.1]

The survey included a question about the storage of non-report/non-investigative sexual assault kits (SAKs) in particular. The same number of respondents indicated that their organization collects these (42%) compared to those who do not (42%). There was considerable variation in who stores collected SAKs and for how long. SAK intake and storage is an evidence/property management function that varies significantly across jurisdictions depending on the jurisdiction's applicable laws and policies and organization-specific protocols. The data

collected in the survey can be used to guide work towards development of best practices and standardization of the management and handling of SAKs.[40] [SR 2.2.1]

Key Takeaways for Phase C Step 1, Sort

1. Agencies receiving and storing evidence and property should establish efficient processes for sorting items based on case status, liability status, length of expected storage time, size, and appropriate storage climate for the item type.

2. Organizing the evidence room into sections with designated space for long-term, short-term, cold, large, small, high-liability, and hazardous storage enables employees to quickly and safely navigate storage and retrieval of items.

3. Agencies are responsible for maintaining appropriate climate control measures to ensure the integrity of items collected and stored in the facility.

4. The storage scheme should be described in a standard operating procedure that is easily accessible to evidence room personnel.

5. The storage plan should include enhanced security (e.g., cameras, alarms, two-person authorization for access) for high-liability items.

[40] Note that the Bureau of Justice Assistance's Sexual Assault Kit Initiative (SAKI) provides funding to support the inventory, tracking, and testing of stored SAKs; see https://bja.ojp.gov/program/saki/overview. (Accessed August 8, 2025)

5.3 Phase C Step 2: Review and Verify

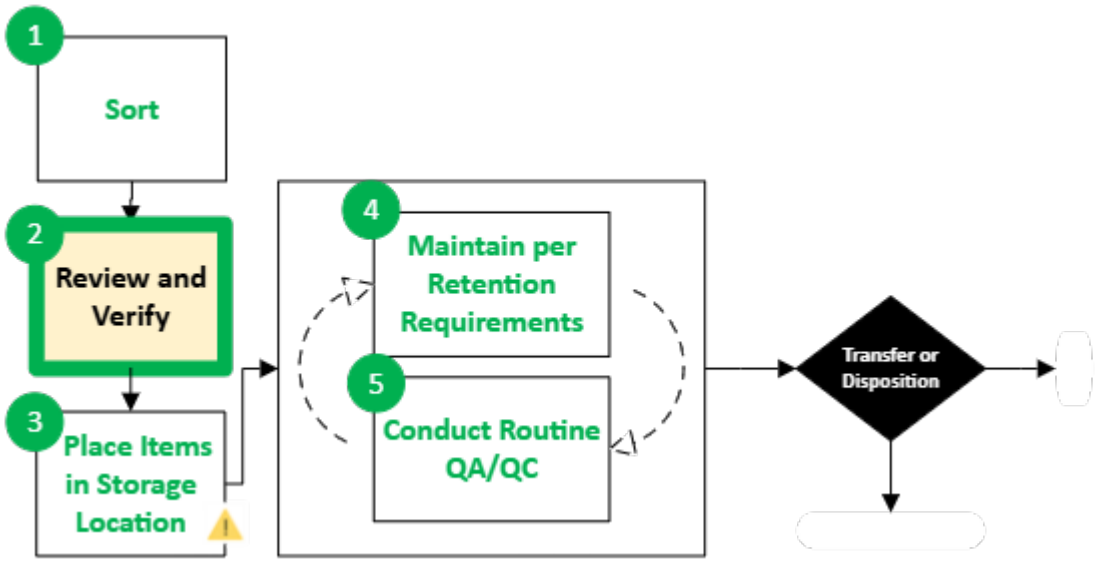

Figure 6-2. Phase C Step 2 Review and Verify

Before placing an item in its location, the item should be checked again. This process can be as simple as visually matching the markings on the package or label to the markings on the location for a match and ensuring that the item type and size are suitable for the location. The process may include review by additional personnel if staffing allows. This final verification is a simple step that helps to ensure proper storage and prevent mishaps and audit findings later in the item's lifecycle.

Takeaway for Phase C Step 2, Review and Verify

1. Incorporating a final verification step when placing an item into storage is a simple way to ensure proper storage and prevent mishaps and audit findings later in the item's lifecycle.

5.4 Phase C Step 3: Place Items in Storage Location

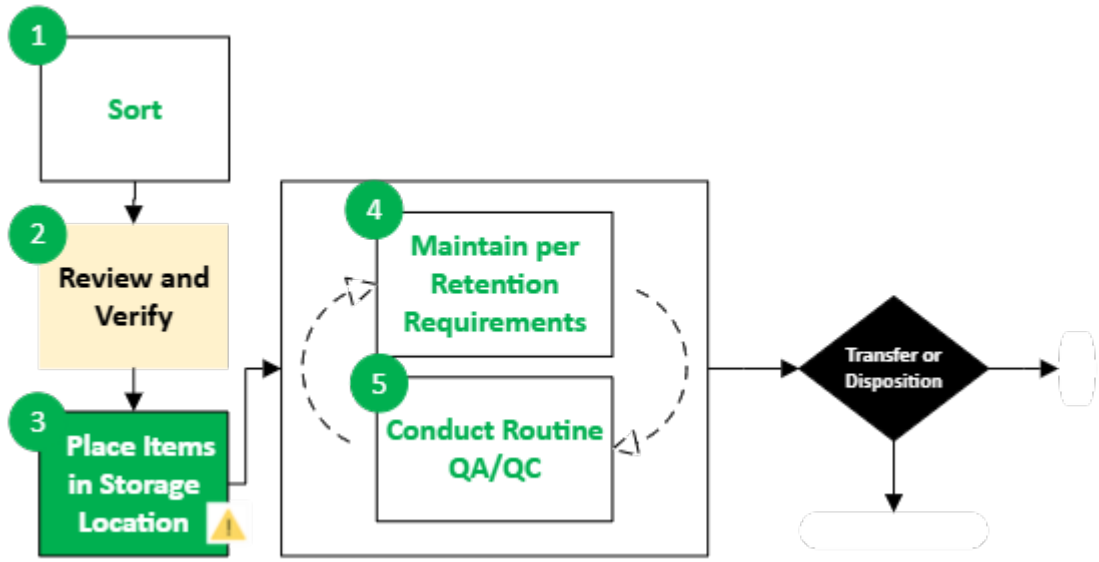

Figure 6-3. Phase C Step 3 Place Items in Storage Location

After final review and verification, evidence and property items are placed in the appropriate storage location and their respective chains of custody are updated.

5.5 Phase C Step 4: Maintain per Retention Requirements

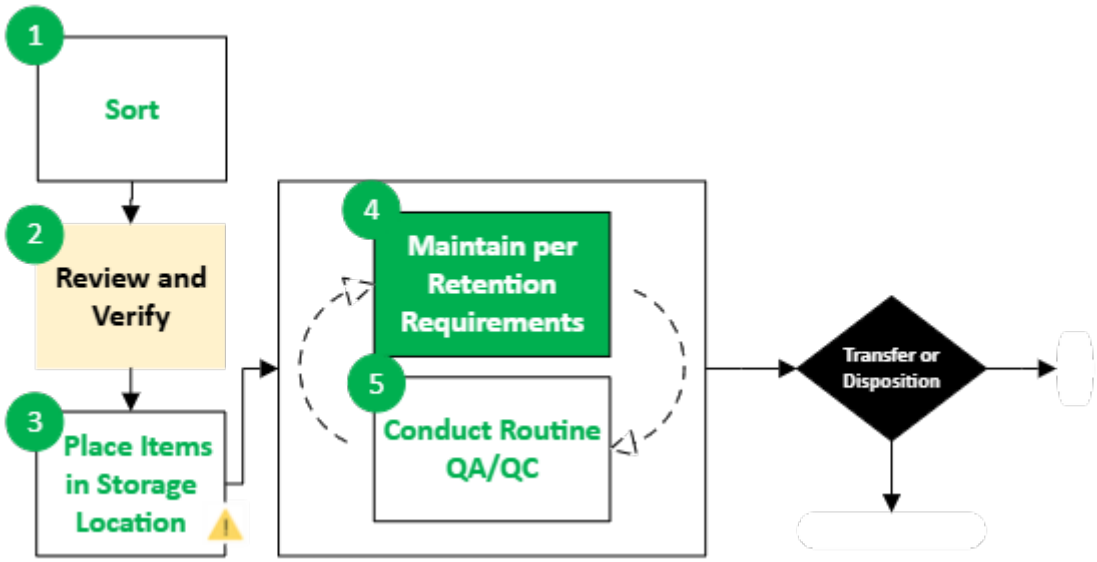

Figure 6-4. Phase C Step 4 Maintain per Retention Requirements

Retention periods differ based on item category, item type, type of crime, and jurisdiction of the agency. For example, retention periods for found property will differ from items of evidence associated with a crime. Additional regulatory or reporting considerations will also affect retention periods for a given item. For instance, retention periods for items submitted to the National Integrated Ballistic Information Network (NIBIN), a national database for the comparison of firearms related evidence, tend to be longer due to the expectation that the item be retained for future comparisons in the event a match is encountered. The Technical Working Group on Biological Evidence Preservation provided a list of evidence preservation laws in their report.[41] With advances in DNA technologies, many states have revised legislation regarding the statute of limitations for specific types of crimes. Such legislation directly affects retention periods and retention policies.

Retention requirements vary by state and require clear agency policies that address retention of a specific item of evidence or evidence from a specific type of crime classification. The retention policy should extend to accompanying documents and reports associated with the evidence as well as subsamples isolated from the evidence. Agencies must reduce evidence retention to maximize storage capacity and facilitate effective evidence management.

Key Takeaways for Phase C Step 4, Maintain per Retention Requirements

1. Evidence retention requirements can be complex and require clear agency policies to guide evidence custodians.

2. Evidence retention policies must be maintained to comply with evolving statutes and regulations, particularly in light of DNA technology advancements.

3. Retention policies should extend to the documents and reports associated with the evidence as well as subsamples isolated from the evidence.

[41] Ballou, S. et al. The Biological Evidence Preservation Handbook: Best Practices for Evidence Handlers, NISTIR 7928, National Institute of Standards and Technology, Gaithersburg, MD (2013) https://doi.org/10.6028/NIST.IR.7928 (Accessed August 8, 2025)

5.6 Phase C Step 5: Conduct Routine QA/QC

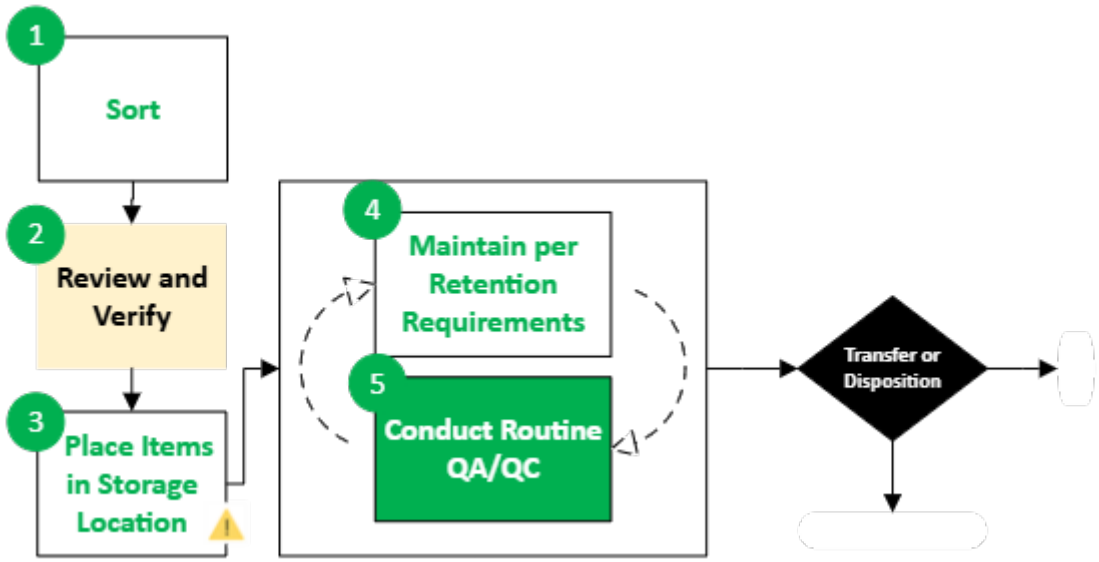

Figure 6-5. Phase C Step 5 Conduct Routine QA/QC

When an evidence room custodian is asked about QA/QC policies and practices, inventories and audits are often their first responses. However, QA and QC activities should occur at all stages of the evidence lifecycle. QA/QC measures ensure the security and integrity of the evidence and the safety of evidence custodians and other personnel. Despite the importance of maintaining consistent and rigorous quality management, many agencies do not have a designated employee or group of employees responsible for quality control.

The QA/QC process and results of audits and inspections should be documented, including any issues discovered, any root cause analyses performed to determine and learn from the source of the issues, and any corrective actions taken to remediate issues that were uncovered. The results of inspections should be reported to management.[42] When issues are identified, actions must be taken to attain and maintain compliance with policies.

Of respondents indicating their organization has QA/QC policies in place, about a third have a designated individual (33%) or team/unit (30%) to manage QA/QC functions. It is essential to have objectivity when conducting and evaluating QA/QC measures to ensure the organization's consistent performance. [SR 2.5.1]

In specific organizations, such as court systems where the inventory of evidence/property items is low or in smaller organizations where the inventory consists primarily of non-evidentiary

[42] If the agency with oversight of the evidence storage facility is accredited, any findings may need to be reported to the accrediting body as a matter of policy.

property, QA/QC appears to be less of a common practice. Due to the potential importance and value of the items obtained during investigations and other criminal justice-related purposes, having a designated QA/QC unit is key to ensuring adequate and consistent performance of the organization's evidence management functions. [SR 2.5.1]

Nearly three-fourths of the respondents (73%) indicated their organization performs evidence/property room audits. The majority of those respondents (81%) indicated that corrective actions are required as a result of audit findings. [SR 2.8.1]

Audits are essential to ensure that organizations properly handle receipt, inventory, and purging. Audits ensure that proper recordkeeping procedures (e.g., chain of custody) are followed.[43] While internal and external audits can benefit organizations that manage evidence/property, internally conducted audits can serve an ongoing, preventative function while external audits may allow for a more impartial review of practices. Organizations should participate in routine, ongoing, and documented audits to ensure adherence to all policies and procedures relevant to the management of evidence/property. And while it is essential to take corrective actions, they must be non-punitive to promote a healthy work culture, which should also be an element evaluated during audits. [SR 2.8.1]

Key Takeaways from Phase C Step 5, Conduct Routine QA/QC

1. QA/QC measures are critical to ensuring the security and integrity of the evidence and the safety of evidence custodians and others entering the evidence and property area.

2. Whether internal or external, the outcomes of audits should be documented, the results reported to management, and issues addressed.

[43] Ballou, S. et al. The Biological Evidence Preservation Handbook: Best Practices for Evidence Handlers, NISTIR 7928, National Institute of Standards and Technology, Gaithersburg, MD (2013) https://doi.org/10.6028/NIST.IR.7928 (Accessed August 8, 2025)

6. Transfer and Release

An agency maintains evidence and property items in a storage area until disposition. An item's disposition is generally the final link in the evidence chain of custody. A disposition only occurs with appropriate authorizations and approvals established by statute and agency policy. Generally, a final disposition occurs when evidence or property is not required for court purposes and does not constitute a violation of law or court order. While items are in the custody of an agency pending a final disposition, evidence and property may be temporarily released or permanently released for specific purposes or activities.

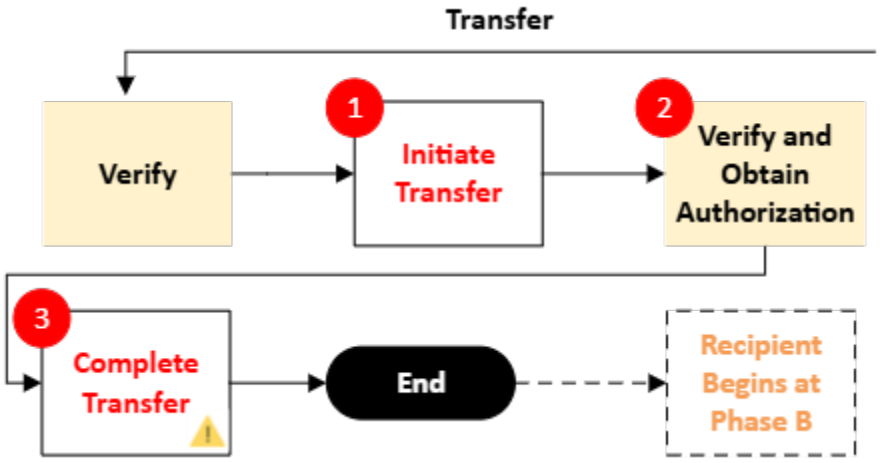

Figure 8. Phase D – Transfer and Release

6.1 Phase D Fundamentals

Temporary release is a mechanism to temporarily move an item from storage for a particular purpose. After fulfilling the purpose requiring temporary release, the intent is to return the item to the primary storage location and area. In most situations, temporary releases occur between members of the same agency. Reasons for temporary release (transfer) include the following:

- Correction of an error made at the time of collection of the item
- Investigative purposes
- Analysis (e.g., forensic laboratory, digital analysis)
- Court appearance
- Evidence viewing by attorney
- Covert/undercover operations
- Release with intent to permanently release to an authorized entity when an agency member acts as an intermediary.

Permanent release is a mechanism to permanently remove the item from the primary storage facility, resulting in relinquishing custody of the item. An item's permanent release may also be the item's final disposition. Reasons for permanent release include the following:

- Release to the rightful owner
- Release to court (court retains custody of the item)
- Release by court order
- Release to another jurisdiction (e.g., another police department or criminal justice institution)
- Release for authorized disposal.

Authorization/Documentation

Documented approvals and authorizations to release are required for all items of evidence or property, whether stored temporarily or permanently. The authorization process and documentation requirements (e.g., type of authorization required, who and with what level of authority, when approval is received, how to document approval) should be specified in agency policies and communicated to affected personnel. Local, state, or federal statutory requirements for evidence and property transfers, releases, and necessary authorizations are considered when developing agency policy.

Documenting transfer authorization may occur through written forms, electronic forms, or electronic tracking systems, and the same methods may initiate or prompt transfer authorizations. Accessibility of the release authorization and accompanying documentation is necessary, regardless of the system. All process steps must be completed and documented according to the agency's release policy. Failure to do so may result in loss of items, breaks in the chain of custody, release of an item to the wrong person or agency, or release of an item for an inappropriate purpose. When releasing items to an individual, verification of the person's identity should be an agency requirement. For accountability reasons, the release or destruction of certain items (e.g., high-liability materials) often requires a witness as a matter of policy

Chain of Custody

When an item is released from or returned to the primary storage location (facility and area within the facility), the chain of custody report must reflect the item's movement.

Monitoring

The temporary release of items requires monitoring to ensure the evidence and property are returned to the storage location and area within the timeframe prescribed by agency policy. For example, temporary releases for investigation may require return of the item to the storage area within 30 days. Monitoring allows for proper control of the evidence and should be routine, ongoing, and facilitated by manual or electronic prompts. The agency policy and

procedures should address measures to be taken when timeframes are exceeded or discrepancies are observed.

Collaboration and Coordination

As agencies may process and handle hundreds or more items daily, collaboration and coordination amongst those making the release and those receiving the items are key to effectively completing this step. Agency policy can provide for routine temporary release authorizations without obtaining individual authorization for the transfer/release of each item. Examples include:

- Direct submission of specified evidence items to a forensic laboratory
- Automatically directing found property to a designated facility or location after a prescribed period
- Holding found property for a prescribed period and then permanently releasing for disposition according to agency disposition procedures
- Upon completion of forensic analysis, automatically releasing/transferring items to a designated facility or location.

Key Takeaways for Phase D, Transfer and Release

1. All agencies should have policies that comply with statutes and regulations, directing the release of evidence and property for both permanent and temporary storage.

2. Approvals and authorizations to release are required and documented for all items of evidence or property, whether stored temporarily or permanently.

3. As with all phases of the evidence lifecycle, the chain of custody must be maintained and documented during transfer to permanent and temporary storage locations.

6.2 Phase D Steps 1 through 3

When receiving a request to release a stored item, the evidence custodian must ensure that the request includes appropriate authorization documented according to agency policy. The item can then be released upon approval of the request and with required updates to the chain of custody. It is the responsibility of the person releasing the item to verify the identity of the person receiving the item; this verification must be documented.

If the release is permanent, appropriate documentation (e.g., the person's signature when released to the owner) must be obtained, and the record must be maintained according to agency policy. When the activity requiring a temporary release is complete, the item is returned to the storage area or other location as directed by agency policy.

During temporary transfers, an item is released from or returned to the primary storage location (facility and area within the facility) with required updates to the chain-of-custody. If

the recipient does not return an item within the designated period, the monitoring process should trigger a notification to return the item.

Key Takeaways for Phase D Steps 1 through 3, Initiate, Verify Authorization, and Complete Transfer

1. Written agency policies and procedures are required to address:

    - types of releases (temporary or permanent) that are allowed
    - type of authorization required and how that authorization is obtained and documented
    - required documentation
    - how releases are conducted (the physical process)
    - monitoring requirements (e.g., when the item needs to be returned, how monitoring is conducted)
    - appropriate chain of custody entries, verifications, and required documentation
    - auditing process to verify that releases are being conducted per policy.

2. Designated manual or electronic forms are used to obtain, track, and maintain the authorization/approval for release; such forms focus on obtaining the required information and employ consistency throughout the transfer/release process.

3. Routine monitoring is essential for items required to be returned to storage area to ensure that items are being returned per policy.

4. Evidence releases should be subject to routine, documented audits to ensure that all required authorizations were appropriately obtained, documented, maintained, and accessible.

5. Routine, ongoing, and documented audits should be performed to ensure adherence to all transfers and releases policies.

6. Electronic systems have several benefits that help to streamline evidence transfers and releases to make them more efficient. These include the ability to:

    - automate processes that issue, prompt, document, and maintain all required authorizations, and track releases
    - automatically update the chain of custody to record and track releases
    - facilitate prompts (emails or other electronic notification) to those having custody of items for return and to document the return of the item
    - assist the audit process by identifying the location of specific items and generating reports to determine what is being stored, where it is, and how long it has been there.

7. Disposition

Inventory disposition is the ongoing review of stored property and evidence using investigative tools to determine the retention status of associated evidence items—that is, whether the items may be released or processed for disposal. Disposition decisions rely on the status of the case in question, applicable federal, state, and local statutes, and the organization's retention policies. Disposing of stored items enables organizations to manage inventory and recapture storage space to prevent inventory growth.

Organizations must develop a systematic and proactive approach to reviewing property and evidence item disposition. Commonly, the receipt of a court order or the need to create space for newly impounded items prompts the disposition process. The logistics of requests and authorization for disposition could be simplified through the use of interoperable electronic systems by agencies, courts, and detention facilities.

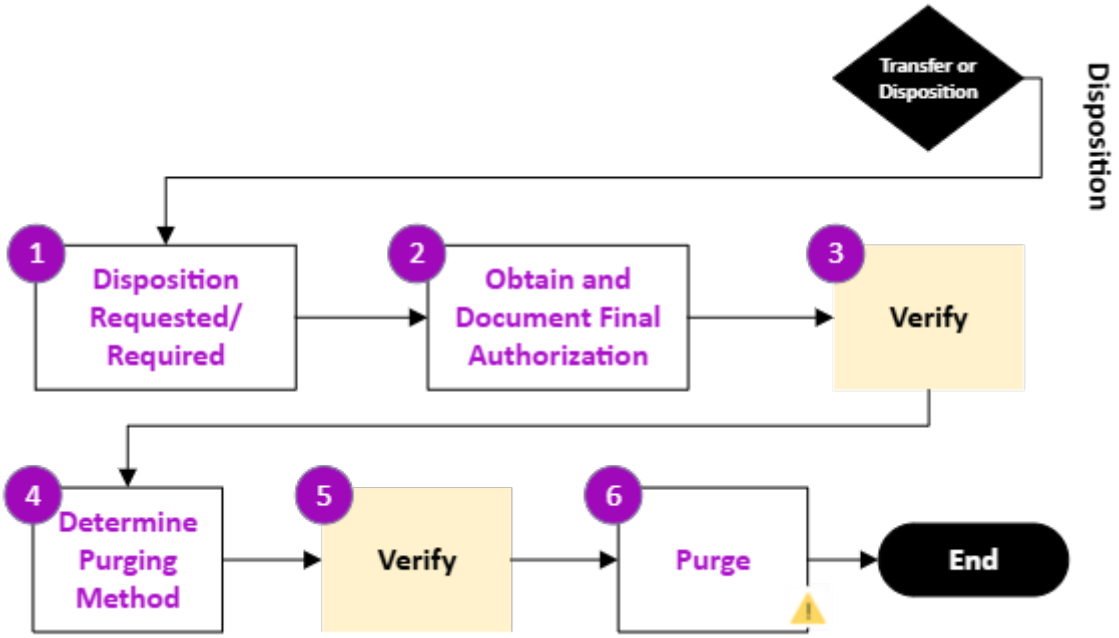

Figure 9. Phase E – Disposition

7.1 Phase E Fundamentals

Occasionally, blanket disposition policies are instituted to quickly identify and remove items from the evidence and property room. Organizations must proceed with caution when taking this approach. The erroneous release or destruction of evidence could lead to negative publicity that discredits the organization. Blanket disposition policies should only be enacted in collaboration with counsel after review of statutes and should only apply to low-level crimes, non-evidentiary property, and safekeeping items.

Disposition decisions related to evidence should be the responsibility of investigative personnel who are most familiar with and are assigned to the case. Investigators review cases associated with evidentiary items to determine the items' case status and appropriate disposition. Investigative tools include the organization's internal case management and records systems, court records, and other federal, state, and local criminal justice databases. Considerations of local, state, and federal regulations concerning possession of firearms, ammunition, and other such items will also affect disposition determinations.

When evidence and property room personnel are responsible for the disposal of items, it should only include non-evidentiary items and low-level crimes such as misdemeanors. Identifying recovered stolen property and ensuring that rightful owners are located requires due diligence.

Following retention, release, or disposal decisions, the disposition status must be recorded in the electronic evidence management system or, in the case of paper-based systems, recorded relevant forms that are forwarded to the evidence and property room. When developed in consultation with stakeholder agencies to ensure interoperability, electronic management systems can provide automated disposition processes. In the absence of an electronic system, an evidence retention grid or retention flowchart is a useful tool for the evidence custodian (Figure 10).

Although most often considered in the context of law enforcement agencies, other entities such as healthcare facilities should also maintain policies regarding the disposition of items collected, packaged, marked/sealed, and placed in secure storage. Such items may include non-investigative sexual assault kits, clothing, and other items received from a patient or a patient's guardian during medical forensic encounters. The reason for retaining the items rather than transferring them to law enforcement should be documented.

Key Takeaways for Phase E, Disposition

1. Organizations must develop a systematic, proactive approach to reviewing and disposing of property and evidence within their respective inventories.

2. Blanket authorizations should only be applied in collaboration with the organization's general counsel, relevant government attorneys, and review of applicable statutes.

Investigative personnel should provide information regarding the case to inform the disposition of evidence and property.

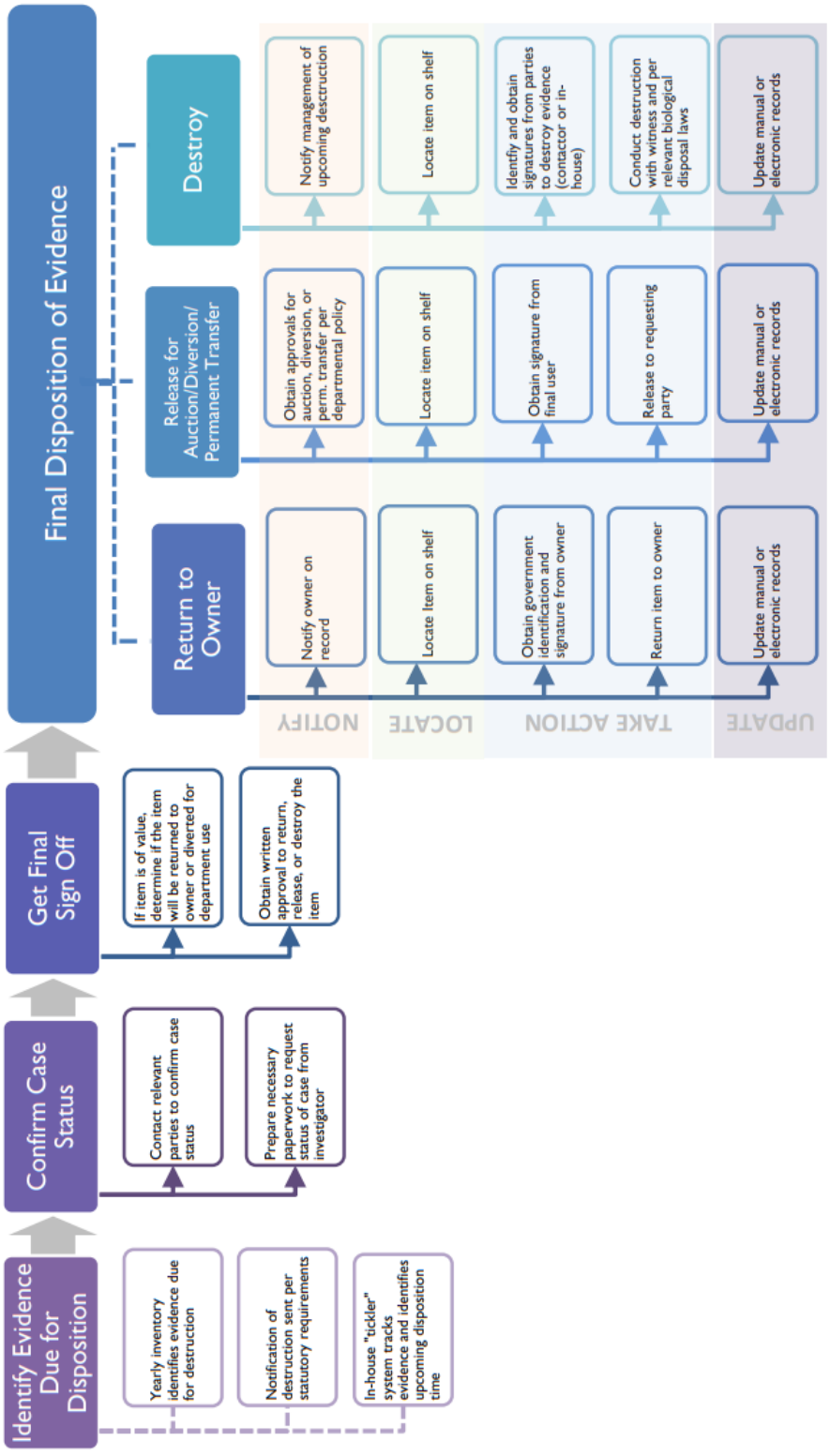

Figure 10. Retention Flow Chart from Biological Evidence Preservation Report

7.2 Phase E Steps 1 through 5

The processes used for conducting dispositions and who should be conducting them must be detailed in agency policies and procedures. That being said, the first step in this process is typically to conduct appropriate research to identify items for disposition. Once identified, a decision to retain or dispose is made.

If a decision is made to retain, the item remains in storage. If the decision is to dispose, final authorization must be obtained according to agency policy and in compliance with statutes and regulations. Once the item and authorization are verified, the next step is determining the appropriate purging method for the item category and type. Before purging, the item and authorization are once more verified. The item is then scheduled for purging.

7.3 Phase E Step 6: Purge

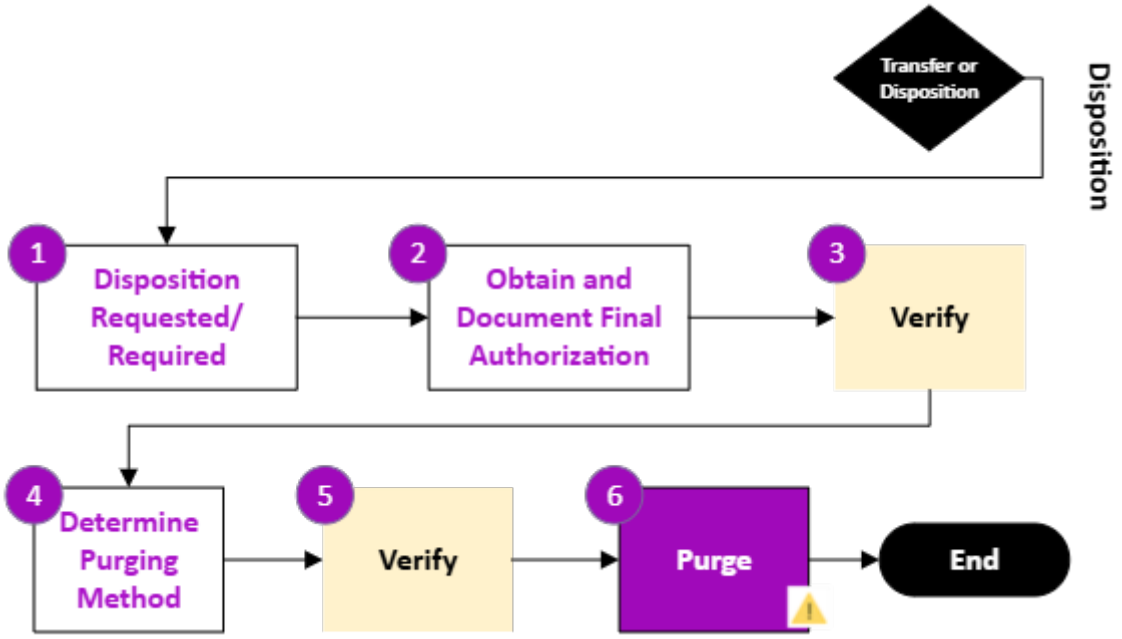

Figure 9-1. Phase E Step 6 Purge

Purging stored items enables evidence handlers to effectively manage inventory and make space available for incoming items. The evidence and property room's ability to purge largely depends on the agency's disposition policies and processes. Enough items must be routinely dispositioned for release or disposal to maintain inventory levels and prevent unsustainable growth. The evidence and property room policies and procedures should outline the different disposal options aligning with federal, state, and local regulations in collaboration with the agency's legal counsel.

Purging is achieved by disposing of items or releasing them to claimants and owners. When preparing to process items for disposal, the evidence custodian must determine whether the

items are suitable for auction, donation, or diversion. If the items are not eligible for repurposing, they may be discarded in the trash, recycled, or destroyed by various means (e.g., shredding, incineration). Ensuring that the disposal methods align with the agency's policy, mitigate potential liability, and are carried out in a safe and reliable manner is essential.

Statutes may require evidence and property rooms to receive final authorization from local courts before purging items. For example, regulations may stipulate filing a petition to receive a court order or an affidavit attesting that the processes meet all statutory requirements. Notifications to claimants and owners may be required when purging items. These items usually do not require court authorizations or affidavits unless they remain unclaimed and must be purged from inventory through disposal.

Once any necessary final authorizations are received, the purging process begins. Evidence and property room procedures should aim to preserve the integrity of the items, thwart misappropriation, and prevent erroneous destruction. The mistaken destruction of evidence associated with an active investigation or court case could result in a mistrial and discredit the agency.

Items processed and awaiting disposal may be at higher risk for theft if agency identifiers are removed during the preparation processes. Incorporating two-person integrity verification into the purging processes is highly recommended and most prudent when processing high-liability items. The location for disposal of high-liability items should also have enhanced security (e.g., cameras, alarms, and two-person authorization for access). A third-party audit of items processed for purging conducted by personnel from other organizations is also good practice. Evidence and property can be purged in many ways including auction, destruction, diversion, and donation, depending on the item itself. Custodians should consult their organization’s policies as well as statues and regulations in their jurisdiction.

Survey respondents indicated overwhelmingly that the prosecutor (98%), judge/court order (98%), and submitting/case investigator (93%) are the mechanisms used to determine the disposition of evidentiary items. Evidence/property room personnel (84%), submitting/case investigator (67%), and judge/court order (50%) were the most common responses when identifying who is responsible for the disposition of property items. [SR 2.7.1]

Half of the survey respondents indicated that they regularly send requests to department members for *evidence* disposition; 39% regularly send *property* disposition requests to department members. Requests are also routinely sent to prosecuting agencies for disposition of evidence/property (42%) and non-evidentiary items (24%). This data shows that routine requests for evidence/property item disposition are more commonly sent to department members than prosecuting agencies, which can be a concern if prosecuting agencies are not contacted before the disposition of evidence relevant to a criminal investigation. [SR 2.7.1]

A substantial number (39%) of the respondents indicated that a need for space is the factor that drives the initiation of the disposition process, and 22% indicated that the disposition process is conducted when time is available. Again, the absence of a robust system for monitoring and auditing inventories and removing evidence/property may result in loss, degradation, and inappropriate disposition. [SR 2.7.1]

Preventing unsustainable inventory growth requires regularly checking the retention status of inventory items to establish whether retention is required, or items have met or exceeded retention storage duration requirements (i.e., state statutes). Of those respondents who indicated their organization purged evidence, less than half (41%) indicated their organization has an established schedule/pre-determined inventory goal for purging evidence/property. [SR 2.7.1]

An efficient evidence management system allows purging (1) if necessary and (2) upon receipt of appropriate approvals to prevent unsustainable growth in inventory levels. [SR 2.7.1]

Key Takeaways for Phase E Step 6, Purge

1. Evidence and property room purging procedures and processes should be developed with the aim of preserving the integrity of items, thwarting theft, and preventing erroneous destruction.

2. Agency policies and procedures should align with applicable statutes or regulations influencing handling and disposal methods.

3. Regular audits should be conducted to ensure that evidence is being stored in its specified location for the required length of time and to identify items that are subject to purging.

4. Policies and procedures should ensure that evidence/property is safe for disposition without jeopardizing active cases or potential future analyses.

5. The evidence inventory management process can be streamlined through routine disposition processes for release or disposal.

6. Two-person integrity verifications should be incorporated into the purging processes for accountability.

7. Evidence and property personnel should be familiar with local, state, and federal regulatory entities governing:

    - the available methods of destruction, such as auction and diversion.
    - the various items encountered and applicable waste streams, such as hazardous and biohazard items, drugs, and firearms.

8. Any items that are being moved to the purging phase should be checked to determine whether the designated purging process is appropriate and the items are free of any materials that might cause a liability (e.g., anything going to auction should be checked for safety and examined to determine whether it is free of hidden contraband such as drugs, firearms, or money).

Appendix A. Standards and Guidance Documents for Evidence Management.

General Applications	Document ID	URL*
ANAB** Accreditation Requirements for the Management and Operation of Property and Evidence Control Units	ANAB AR-3181	https://anab.qualtraxcloud.com/ShowDocument.aspx?ID=28610
ASTM D4840-99 (2018) E1 Standard Guide for Sample Chain-of-Custody Procedures	ASTM D4840-99 (2018) E1	https://webstore.ansi.org/standards/astm/astmd4840992018e1
ASTM Standard Practice for Examining and Preparing Items That Are or May Become Involved in Criminal or Civil Litigation	ASTM E860-22	https://compass.astm.org/document/?contentCode=ASTM%7CE0860-22%7Cen-US
ASTM Standard Practice for Collection and Preservation of Information and Physical Items by a Technical Investigator	ASTM E1188-23	https://store.astm.org/e1188-23.html
ASTM Standard Guide for Physical Evidence Labeling and Related Documentation	ASTM E1459-24	https://store.astm.org/e1459-24.html
ASTM Standard Practice of Receiving, Documenting, Storing, and Retrieving Evidence in a Forensic Laboratory	E1492-11 (Reapproved 2017)	https://store.astm.org/e1492-11r17.html
FBI Laboratory Division Handbook of Forensic Services		https://www.fbi.gov/file-repository/laboratory/handbook-of-forensic-services-pdf.pdf/view

Forensic Science Regulator of the UK: Code of Practice		https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/statutory-code-of-practice-for-forensic-science-activities/forensic-science-regulator-code-of-practice-accessible#the-forensic-science-regulator-act-2021
IACP Property and Evidence Control		https://www.theiacp.org/sites/default/files/2021-03/Evidence%20Control%20Formatted%2003.03.2021.pdf
IFSA Minimum Requirements for Crime Scene Investigation		https://www.ifsa-forensics.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/10/IFSA-MRD-Crime-Scene-2021-English.pdf
ILAC Modules in a Forensic Science Process	ILAC G19:06/2022	https://ilac.org/publications-and-resources/ilac-guidance-series/
ISO Forensic Analysis – Part 2: Recognition, Recording, Collecting, Transport and Storage of Material	ISO 21043-2-2018	https://www.iso.org/standard/72041.html
NATA General Accreditation Criteria: Legal Management of Facility Activities (Forensic Operations Module)		https://nata.com.au/files/2025/03/Forensic-Operations-Module.pdf
NIJ Crime Scene Investigation: A Guide for Law Enforcement	NCJ 178280	https://www.ojp.gov/pdffiles1/nij/178280.pdf.
NIJ Death Investigation: A Guide for the Scene Investigator	NCJ 308955	https://www.ojp.gov/pdffiles1/nij/308955.pdf
NIJ/NIST Forensic Science Laboratories: Handbook for Facility Planning, Design, Construction, and Relocation	NIST IR 7941	https://doi.org/10.6028/NIST.IR.7941

NIJ/NIST RFID Technology in Forensic Evidence Management: An Assessment of Barriers, Benefits, and Costs	NIST IR 8030	https://doi.org/10.6028/NIST.IR.8030
OSAC 2021-N-0018 OSAC Standard for On-Scene Collection and Preservation of Physical Evidence	OSAC 2021-N-0018	https://www.nist.gov/system/files/documents/2021/04/07/2021-N-0018_Standard%20for%20On-Scene%20Collection%20and%20Preservation%20of%20Physical%20Evidence_DRAFT%20OSAC%20PROPOSEDv2.pdf
Anthropology	**Document ID**	**URL**
ANSI/ASB Scene Detection and Processing in Forensic Anthropology	ANSI/ASB Standard 135	https://www.aafs.org/asb-standard/scene-detection-and-processing-forensic-anthropology
OSAC Skeletal Sampling and Preparation	OSAC 2021-N-0100	https://www.nist.gov/document/osac-2021-n-0010-standard-skeletal-preparation-and-sampling-forensic-anthropology-version-0
Controlled Substances	**Document ID**	**URL**
IFSA Minimum Requirements for Identification of Seized Drugs		https://www.ifsa-forensics.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/10/IFSA-MRD-Drugs-2021-English.pdf
UNODC Guidelines for the Safe Handling and Disposal of Chemicals Used in the Illicit Manufacture of Drugs		http://www.unodc.org/documents/scientific/Disp.Manual_English.pdf
UNODC Guidelines on Representative Drug Sampling		http://www.unodc.org/documents/scientific/Drug_Sampling.pdf

Digital Evidence	Document ID	URL
AES Recommended Practice for Forensic Purposes – Managing Recorded Audio Materials Intended for Examination	AES-27	http://www.aes.org/publications/standards/search.cfm?docID=29
ASTM Standard Practice for Examining Magnetic Card Readers	ASTM E3017-19	https://compass.astm.org/document/?contentCode=ASTM%7CE3017-19%7Cen-US&page=1
IFSA Minimum Requirements for Digital and Multimedia Evidence Analysis		https://www.ifsa-forensics.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/12/IFSA-MRD-Digital-and-Multimedia-Evidence-Version-1-2021-English-FINAL.pdf
ISO/IEC Information Technology – Security Techniques – Guidelines for Identification, Collection, Acquisition, and Preservation of Digital Evidence	ISO/IEC 27037	https://www.iso.org/standard/44381.html
NIJ Electronic Crime Scene Investigation: A Guide for First Responders	NCJ 219941	https://www.ojp.gov/pdffiles1/nij/219941.pdf
SWGDE Best Practices for Archiving Digital and Multimedia Evidence	SWGDE 19-F-003	https://www.swgde.org/19-f-003/
SWGDE Data Integrity Within Computer Forensics	SWGDE 06-F-001	https://www.swgde.org/06-f-001/
SWGDE Best Practices for Vehicle Infotainment and Telematics Systems	SWGDE 12-F-004-3.2	https://www.swgde.org/12-f-004/
SWGDE Best Practices for Computer Forensic Acquisitions	SWGDE 17-F-002-2.0	https://www.swgde.org/17-f-002/
SWGDE Best Practices for Acquiring Online Content	SWGDE 21-F-001-1.1	https://www.swgde.org/21-f-001-2/
SWGDE Best Practices for Internet of Things Seizure and Analysis	SWGDE 23-F-003-1.0	https://www.swgde.org/23-f-003/

SWGDE Best Practices for Digital Evidence Acquisition, Preservation, and Analysis from Cloud Service Providers	SWGDE 23-F-004-1.1	https://www.swgde.org/23-f-004/
SWGIT Best Practices for Archiving Digital and Multimedia Evidence (DME) in the Criminal Justice System	V1.1 2012.01.13	https://www.swgde.org/swgit_15/
SWGIT Best Practices for Maintaining the Integrity of Digital Images and Digital Video	V1.1 2012.01.13	https://www.swgde.org/swgit_13/
Document Examination	**Document ID**	**URL**
ANSI/ASB Standard for the Preservation and Examination of Charred Documents	ANSI/ASB Standard 127	https://www.aafs.org/asb-standard/standard-preservation-and-examination-charred-documents
ANSI/ASB Standard for the Preservation and Examination of Liquid-Soaked Documents	ANSI/ASB Standard 128	https://www.aafs.org/sites/default/files/media/documents/128_Std_e1.pdf
IFSA Minimum Requirements for Forensic Document Examination		https://www.ifsa-forensics.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/06/IFSA-MRD-Documents-Version-1-2023-FINAL-for-website.pdf
OSAC 2022-N-0035 Standard for On-Scene Collection and Preservation of Document Evidence	OSAC 2022-N-0035	https://www.nist.gov/system/files/documents/2023/01/04/OSAC%202022-N-0035%20Standard%20for%20On-Scene%20Collection%20and%20Preservation%20of%20Document%20Evidence.REGISTRY%20VERSION.pdf

Fire and Explosives	Document ID	URL
ASTM Standard Practice for Preserving Ignitable Liquids and Ignitable Liquid Residue Extracts from Fire Debris Samples	ASTM E2451-21	https://compass.astm.org/document/?contentCode=ASTM%7CE2451-21%7Cen-US
NIJ Guide for Explosion and Bombing Scene Investigation	NCJ 181869	https://www.ojp.gov/pdffiles1/nij/181869.pdf
NIJ Guide for Investigating Fire and Arson		https://nij.ojp.gov/topics/articles/guide-investigating-fire-and-arson
NIJ Fire and Arson Scene Evidence: A Guide for Public Safety Personnel	NCJ 181584	https://www.ojp.gov/pdffiles1/nij/181584.pdf
NFPA Guide for Fire and Explosion Investigations	NFPA 921	https://www.nfpa.org/codes-and-standards/nfpa-921-standard-development/921
Footwear and Tire	**Document ID**	**URL**
ANSI/ASB Best Practice Recommendation for Photographic Documentation of Footwear and Tire Impression Evidence	ANSI/ASB Best Practice Recommendation 050	https://www.aafs.org/asb-standard/best-practice-recommendation-photographic-documentation-footwear-and-tire-impression
ANSI/ASB Best Practice Recommendation for the Detection and Collection of Footwear and Tire Impression Evidence	ANSI/ASB Best Practice Recommendation 052	https://www.aafs.org/asb-standard/best-practice-recommendation-detection-and-collection-footwear-and-tire-impression
ANSI/ASB Best Practice Recommendation 126 Best Practice Recommendation for Casting Footwear and Tire Impression Evidence at the Crime Scene	ANSI/ASB Best Practice Recommendation 126	https://www.aafs.org/asb-standard/best-practice-recommendation-casting-footwear-and-tire-impression-evidence-crime-scene
OSAC 2022-S-0032 Best Practice Recommendation for the Chemical Processing of Footwear and Tire Impression Evidence	OSAC 2022-S-0032	https://www.nist.gov/document/osac-2022-s-0032-bpr-chemical-processing-footwear-and-tire-impression-evidenceregistry

Forensic Biology	Document ID	URL
IFSA Minimum Requirements for DNA Collection, Analysis, and Interpretation		https://www.ifsa-forensics.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/10/IFSA-MRD-DNA-2021-English.pdf
NIJ Mass Fatality Incidents: A Guide for Human Forensic Identification	NCJ 199758	https://www.ojp.gov/pdffiles1/nij/199758.pdf
NIJ/NIST The Biological Evidence Preservation Handbook: Best Practices for Evidence Handlers	NIST IR 7928	http://dx.doi.org/10.6028/NIST.IR.7928
SWGDAM Guidelines for the Collection and Serological Examination of Biological Evidence		https://www.swgdam.org/_files/ugd/4344b0_b3deba7a272b4b268d7f522840607410.pdf
Medical Examination	**Document ID**	**URL**
CDC Infant Death Investigation: Guidelines for the Scene Investigator		https://www.cdc.gov/sudden-infant-death/media/pdfs/2024/04/SUIDI-Guidelines-Singles_tag508.pdf
Sexual Assault	**Document ID**	**URL**
ASTM Standard Guide for Sexual Assault Investigation, Examination, and Evidence Collection	ASTM E1843-20	http://www.astm.org/Standards/E1843.htm
ASTM Standard Practice for Preservation of Evidence in Sexual Violence Investigation	ASTM E2123-20	http://www.astm.org/Standards/E2123.htm?A
A National Protocol for Sexual Assault Medical Forensic Examinations	NCJ 228119	https://www.justice.gov/ovw/media/1367191/dl?inline
NIJ National Best Practices for Sexual Assault Kits: A Multidisciplinary Approach	NCJ 250384	https://www.ojp.gov/pdffiles1/nij/250384.pdf

Toxicology	Document ID	URL
ANSI/ASB Best Practices for Specimen Collection and Preservation for Forensic Toxicology	ANSI/ASB Best Practices Recommendation 156	https://www.aafs.org/asb-standard/best-practices-specimen-collection-and-preservation-forensic-toxicology
Trace Evidence	**Document ID**	**URL**
ANSI/ASTM Standard Guide for the Collection of Soils and Other Geological Evidence for Criminal Forensic Applications	ASTM E3272-23	https://compass.astm.org/document/?contentCode=ASTM%7CE3272-23%7Cen-US
OSAC Proposed Standard for Forensic Trace Evidence Recovery	OSAC 2023-N-0027	https://www.nist.gov/document/osac-2023-n-0027-standard-guide-forensic-trace-evidence-recovery-version-20

*All URLs were accessed August 8, 2025.

** Acronyms:

AES	Audio Engineering Society
ANAB	ANSI National Accreditation Board
ANSI	American National Standards Institute
ASB	Academy Standards Board
ASTM	American Society for Testing and Materials
CDC	Centers for Disease Control and Prevention
ENFSI	European Network of Forensic Science Institutes
FBI	Federal Bureau of Investigation
FSR	Forensic Science Regulator, UK
IACP	International Association of Chiefs of Police
IFSA	International Forensic Strategic Alliance
ILAC	International Laboratory Accreditation Cooperation
ISO	International Organization for Standardization
ISO/IEC	International Electrotechnical Commission
NATA	National Association of Testing Authorities, Australia
NFPA	National Fire Protection Association
NIJ	National Institute of Justice
NIST	National Institute of Standards and Technology
OSAC	Organization of Scientific Area Committees for Forensic Science
SWGDAM	Scientific Working Group for DNA Analysis Methods
SWGDE	Scientific Working Group on Digital Evidence
SWGIT	Scientific Working Group on Imaging Technology
UNODC	United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime

Appendix B. Glossary

Chain of custody: chronological record of the transfer, handling, and storage of an item from its point of collection to its final return or disposal

Correction locker: a secure area for storage of evidence to which access is restricted to an individual; in the context of this report, this type of storage would be used by a designated individual who is required to correct an error

Disposition: transfer of ownership from one party to another or disposal

Diversion: redirection of an item for a different purpose

Evidentiary value: ability of evidence to provide proof in legal proceedings

Evidence management: the processes involved in determining how, when, where, and for how long physical evidence should be stored

Found property: lost or abandoned items found in public

General liability evidence: all evidence items that are not high liability

High-liability evidence (or high-value evidence): items such as firearms, drugs, money, and jewelry, which require greater levels of caretaking due to the risk of theft

Impound: to take into custody of the law or a court

Interim storage: storing evidence in a secure temporary location before transferring for permanent storage

Long-term storage: areas where items experience little to no movement and serve as permanent placement

Non-evidentiary property: material objects lost or abandoned or held for safekeeping; may also include seized or forfeited property in connection with a criminal investigation held by law enforcement agencies under local, state, or federal statutes

Non-report/non-investigative sexual assault kits: a forensic evidence collection kit (also known as a rape kit) that is collected from a victim of sexual assault without the victim immediately reporting the assault to law enforcement

Physical evidence: material objects potentially related to the commission of a crime under investigation or adjudication

Probative value: ability of evidence to prove or disprove a specific fact

Property: non-evidentiary items impounded or seized from the community and stored for safekeeping

Quality assurance: in the survey, quality assurance was defined as standardized procedures, methods, or philosophy for collecting, processing, or analyzing data, that is performed on an ongoing basis and aimed at maintaining or improving the appropriateness and reliability of services

Quality control: in the survey, quality control was defined as the sum of all the activities that prevent unwanted (e.g., negative) change in the quality of services

Short-term storage: areas where items are expected to move in and out more frequently, such as found and safekeeping items

Temporary storage: a location where items are stored for a short time, typically for a specific purpose, then transferred to the next assigned location; in the survey, temporary storage was defined as less than 72 hours

Appendix C. NIST Example Chain of Custody Form[44]

Property Record Number: _____

Anywhere Police Department

EVIDENCE CHAIN OF CUSTODY TRACKING FORM

Case Number: _____ Offense: _____
Submitting Officer: (Name/ID#) _____
Victim: _____
Suspect: _____
Date/Time Seized: _____Location of Seizure: _____

Description of Evidence		
Item #	**Quantity**	**Description of Item** (Model, Serial #, Condition, Marks, Scratches)

Chain of Custody				
Item #	**Date/Time**	**Released by** (Signature & ID#)	**Received by** (Signature & ID#)	**Comments/Location**

APD_Form_#PE003_v.1 (12/2012) Page 1 of 2 pages (See back)

[44] Ballou, S. et al. The Biological Evidence Preservation Handbook: Best Practices for Evidence Handlers, NISTIR 7928, National Institute of Standards and Technology, Gaithersburg, MD (2013) https://doi.org/10.6028/NIST.IR.7928 (Accessed August 8, 2025)

EVIDENCE CHAIN-OF-CUSTODY TRACKING FORM
(Continued)

Chain of Custody				
Item #	**Date/Time**	**Released by** (Signature & ID#)	**Received by** (Signature & ID#)	**Comments/Location**

Final Disposal Authority

Authorization for Disposal

Item(s) #: _____ on this document pertaining to (suspect): _____
is(are) no longer needed as evidence and is/are authorized for disposal by (check appropriate disposal method)

☐ Return to Owner ☐ Auction/Destroy/Divert

Name & ID# of Authorizing Officer: _____ Signature: _____Date: _____

Witness to Destruction of Evidence

Item(s) #: _____ on this document were destroyed by Evidence Custodian _____ID#:_____ in my presence on (date) _____.

Name & ID# of Witness to destruction: _____ Signature: _____Date: _____

Release to Lawful Owner

Item(s) #: _____ on this document was/were released by Evidence Custodian _____ID#:_____ to

Name _____

Address: _____ City: _____State: _____ Zip Code: _____

Telephone Number: (____) _____

Under penalty of law, I certify that I am the lawful owner of the above item(s).

Signature: _____ Date: _____

Copy of Government-issued photo identification is attached. ☐ Yes ☐ No

This Evidence Chain-of-Custody form is to be retained as a permanent record by the Anywhere Police Department.