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## **Galveston police** lose more **evidence** in drug cases: **Evidence** could put a dozen or more court cases in jeopardy

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Jan. 30--GALVESTON -- Less than a year after guns, drugs and money went missing from a police **evidence** room, Galveston officials discovered more missing **evidence** this week from the same locked storage room.

The **evidence** -- drugs seized in arrests over the past 12 months -- could put a dozen or more court cases in jeopardy, officials said Thursday. Police Chief Charles Wiley warned that the small quantities of narcotics may turn out to be only a portion of the overall loss as investigators conduct a sweeping inventory of the disorganized **evidence** room.

Last May, a missing cache of **evidence** forced prosecutors to dismiss 21 criminal cases and led to the resignation of the police chief and a detective. A clerk who worked in the property room was fired and later indicted on theft charges.

Police discovered the latest losses this week when they went to destroy drugs that had already had their day in court and found that small baggies of marijuana, cocaine, hydrocodone and Xanax were no longer on the shelf.

Guns and money?

Worried, they began searching for **evidence** in pending cases and found more missing narcotics. They haven't even begun checking for other types of missing **evidence** -- such as guns or money -- Wiley said.

"We've only looked at drug cases because that's what brought it to our attention," he said.

In the meantime, prosecutors have put on hold every case that depends on police **evidence**, drug-related or otherwise.

"We basically did the same thing we did last year," said Joel Bennett, first assistant district attorney. "Cases are on hold until we can confirm that the **evidence** is still there and its integrity hasn't been compromised."

After the May discoveries, the city hired an auditor to recommend ways to prevent future losses. Her report documents a cramped and jumbled **evidence** storage system, with poorly labeled boxes and stacks of unneeded **evidence** dating back to the 1970s. She advised standardized policies for packaging, storing, and signing for **evidence**.

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On Thursday, Wiley could not name any specific steps the department had taken to clean up the **evidence** room since May.

"We have yet to ever have a complete, detailed inventory of every piece of property in that **evidence** room," he said. "It's just so voluminous, so monumental."

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