

INTERNATIONAL ASSOCIATION FOR PROPERTY & EVIDENCE

Property Room Standards

12. FIREARM HANDLING

Firearm – Policy

Firearms should be provided enhanced levels of security and documentation regarding their handling and ultimate disposition.

Firearm - Documentation

All firearms should be documented on their own separate property report, segregated from other items of general evidence due to its special handling and disposition needs. The booking officer should carefully note the identifying information of the weapon in order to accurately query its history. The Property Officer should verify this information when entering the weapon into the property system.

Firearm Packaging

Always check to see if a firearm is loaded before handling. Firearms should be packaged in a manner that permits efficient storage. In most cases, individual handguns should be packaged in handgun boxes, and individual long guns should be placed in long gun boxes. This permits the greatest efficiency when combined with adequate shelving.

Firearm Storage Area

Firearm storage should be a location where enhanced security separates it from other locations where items of general evidence are kept. The location may be a room created by security screen, or a secure closet. The firearm room should be constructed in a manner that would prevent unwarranted entry. Concrete block walls, chain link fencing or security screen are acceptable materials. Drywall construction is not recommended, but if necessary it should be fire-rated and reinforced with double thickness with security screen sandwiched in between.

The firearm room door should be of a solid core construction and have a locking mechanism that is secured with a dead bolt latch. Another alternative is to have a door made of security screening that cannot be unbolted at the hinges or the locking panel. The shelving in the firearm room should be designed for the efficient storage of both long guns and handguns. The use of firearm storage boxes for both handguns and rifles is highly recommended. The shelves in the firearm room should be adjustable to optimize the space available to fit the boxes in use. Not all firearms will fit in boxes, therefore wall racks or a hanging bag area should be available to store these exceptional sized

weapons. The storage scheme should be consistent with the overall storage scheme of the property room.

An electronic access system with a PIN that records who entered and when is recommended. Ideally, the firearm room should have both an entry alarm and a motion detector.

There should be documentation in the form of a tickler or suspense file that notes when items are out to the crime lab, out for investigation, and out to court. This suspense file will prompt the Property Officer to look for the item when it has not returned in a timely manner. All firearms, including those “ready for destruction” should be stored in the secure firearm room. They should be removed from the active inventory as soon as possible, but retained in a special designated and secured area in the firearm room. The firearm room may be a locked gun cabinet or even a padlocked drawer in a smaller agency.

Firearms - Transfer and Release Procedures

All releases of firearms should be specifically authorized in writing, and requests for firearms in court should require the officer to show a subpoena. Firearms should be returned at the end of the day unless they have been entered into court evidence and a signed receipt with a court stamp is returned.

Firearms, approved for release, should have the owner carefully screened for restrictions on the possession of firearms. This responsibility for checking the status of claimants should be assigned to one person and the authorization to release must bear the signature of the person granting the release to the owner.

Firearm Purging

Purge Review forms should be sent to the case investigator for disposition in a timely manner based upon the type of crime. Approval for the destruction of weapons should result in the weapon being taken off the active case file shelf and placed in a location labeled firearms “ready for destruction.” Destruction should occur only with a case investigator’s approval. Direction to retain the item should have a supervisor’s approval and a reason for retention.

Firearm Destruction

A firearm destruction list should be compiled and a court order signed by a magistrate should be obtained to limit liability. The actual destruction of firearms should be driven by how many firearms are being stored in the location called “Firearms for Destruction,” or by a pre-set calendar date. This threshold should be set by the amount of storage space available and by what constitutes a convenient number of weapons to destroy at one time. Generally speaking, smaller quantities that result from more frequent destruction details are easier to schedule than are large quantities. Under no circumstances should the

destruction record of a firearm be changed to reflect “Destroyed” until the actual destruction takes place.

Satisfactory destruction of firearms can be accomplished by saw-cutting, torching, smelting, or crushing. An independent witness should verify the serial numbers and destruction of these weapons. Disposal of firearms in the ocean, a lake, or landfill is **not** recommended and may be illegal.

The stripping of usable parts for use on departmental weapons may be permissible, if stipulated on the weapon destruction order signed by a magistrate.

The sale or trade of firearms for destruction to a licensed firearm dealer can be a potential liability to the organization if the weapon is used in another crime.

The diversion of weapons for departmental use is acceptable if it is actually put to use. The diversion application should include approval from a manager requesting the item, the chief administrative officer or departmental designee, the agency’s purchasing administrator, and a magistrate.