

Preface

The PURPOSE of this manual is to promote efficiency and simplicity in the Property handling procedures for all property coming into the possession of the West Manheim Township Police Department by establishing standardized packaging methods for evidence and other types of property which officers commonly encounter.

These guidelines will meet the specific needs of this police department, taking into consideration our employee base, material resources, storage facilities, and current handling procedures. The guidelines may differ from other law enforcement agencies, but will meet generally accepted police practices. They do not cover every circumstance that one may run into. If in doubt about a collection, packaging, or storage procedure, contact the appropriate agency (PA State Police, FBI, ATF, etc.) or refer to their published reference manuals.

This manual attempts to instruct the officer in packaging techniques through the use of photographs and text in a step by step approach. Following the instructions are “Points of Interest” which frequently contain important information pertaining to specific circumstances or packaging tips.

Due to space constraints, brevity is used and explanations are not always given for concepts that are considered basic police procedure. Certain phrases are common throughout the manual. Whenever they are given, the following can be referenced:

...**mark with identifiers**... = size and nature of the item permitting, the collecting officer should write his signature or initials, date, time, location collected, or other pertinent details with a permanent black marker, ink pen, or in some manner whereas the officer can positively identify the item and its source at a later date.

...**affix tag**... = refers to the Property Tag which should be completed with pertinent information, including description of property, location collected, case #, property log #, victim or defendant name, type of case, officer’s name, and date collected.

...**seal with evidence tape**... = use tamper proof tape marked as EVIDENCE and place along package openings to seal in contents, preventing loss or cross contamination and providing notice of unauthorized opening. The investigating officer should use a permanent marker or ink pen to write his signature and date & time sealed on the tape.

...**lab analysis**... = generally refers to the PA State Police Forensics Laboratory or Troop “H” in Harrisburg, PA. Most packaging methods should be suitable for other labs such as FBI, ATF, or privately operated labs.

...**attach Lab Request form**... = refers to the PA State Police “Request for Forensic Analysis” and should be completed (preferably typed) with all relevant information. The MS Word computer version requires four (4) copies of the form to be attached. (revised 11/06)

Preface (continued)

...**property log**... = refers to this department's Property Log or Property Record which should be completed with all relevant information. All property should be listed sequentially by number in the space provided. This number along with the Property Log page number, which is obtained from preprinted adhesive tabs, gives each item of property a unique identification number and is critical in tracking property. The Property Log also contains the "*chain of custody*."

...**master envelope or container**... = several items from the same case can often be placed together in a single "*master*" container for ease of storage and transport, if individually sealed or otherwise protected against cross-contamination. Large manila envelopes or "Store-all boxes" are useful for this purpose.

...**fasten plastic tie on the inside**... = plastic ties used to anchor an item inside a box to prevent shifting should be fastened with the knob or ratchet end of the plastic tie on the box's interior. The box will not lie as flat if the ratchet end is on the box's exterior.

In order to meet acceptable packaging standards, the collecting or investigating officer should make certain that all property with evidentiary value is placed in new or sterile containers and sealed with evidence tape or otherwise clearly labeled as EVIDENCE. A container is properly sealed if the contents cannot readily escape or become contaminated by an another source. Unauthorized opening should result in obvious damage to the container or its seal. If complete packaging of the item is not feasible, then the area to be analyzed must be covered or protected in some manner.

Evidence should be properly stored to prevent loss, alteration, cross-contamination, and access by others, including other officers. Procedures for Temporary Storage, Permanent Storage, and Disposition or Purging must be adhered to.

A strict "*Chain of Custody*" shall be followed. All persons who possess the item of evidence at any given time, whether for transfer to storage, transporting to lab, processing on station, photographing, displaying for witnesses, exhibiting in court, or otherwise, shall meticulously document all such possessions by recording their signature, date, time, and reason for controlling the evidence. The individuals involved in the chain of custody should be kept to a minimum.

The Property Officer has the right to refuse property not packaged in accordance with this manual. Such property will be returned to the investigating officer, via temporary storage, until satisfactory changes are made. Properly packaged items will be stored in the evidence room or other acceptable location.

Toby E. Wildasin, Property Officer

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