

Houston Forensic Science Center
Evidence Handbook

Client Services & Case Management Division



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1. Introduction and General Information

1.1. Introduction

- 1.1.1. We appreciate you selecting the Houston Forensic Science Center (HFSC) to be your forensic testing agency. We are committed to providing quality work, timely analysis, and professional customer service. We strive to work closely with you to exceed your expectations. To help us meet our goal of impeccable customer service, this evidence handbook has been created.
- 1.1.2. To allow us to better serve your needs, please ensure that you are using the most current version of this Evidence Handbook.
- 1.1.3. The current version of this handbook and discipline-specific evidence handling videos can be found on the HFSC website: <https://hfsctx.gov>.

1.2. Purpose

- 1.2.1. The purpose of this handbook is to acquaint you, our client, with the forensic services offered and submission guidelines set by HFSC. It is intended as a guide to assist clients in the proper method of evidence collection, packaging, submission, and requesting forensic services.

1.3. General Information

- 1.3.1. HFSC strives to provide high quality forensic services in the following disciplines:
 - 1.3.1.1. Seized Drugs
 - 1.3.1.2. Serological evidence testing for blood and semen
 - 1.3.1.3. DNA testing
 - 1.3.1.4. Firearms examinations (including serial number restoration)
 - 1.3.1.5. Toxicology (including alcohol analysis)
 - 1.3.1.6. Latent Prints
 - 1.3.1.7. Digital & Multimedia
 - 1.3.1.8. Crime Scene processing
- 1.3.2. When requesting crime scene processing services and/or submitting evidence to HFSC, clients permit and acknowledge the following:
 - 1.3.2.1. Once HFSC accepts a request for analysis or crime scene processing service, the accepted request is considered a contract between the requestor and HFSC.
 - 1.3.2.2. Our forensic experts will select the most appropriate testing methods to fulfill your request based upon the information provided. Testing methods used are available for review, upon request.
 - 1.3.2.3. It is the responsibility of the investigating agency to protect and provide security at the crime scene for the duration of the crime scene processing.
 - 1.3.2.4. HFSC may select the item(s) most appropriate for analysis or elect not to analyze all items based upon the needs and circumstances of the case. HFSC's Crime Scene Unit may select and collect the most appropriate item(s) relevant to the needs and circumstances of the case. This is not considered a change in contract.
 - 1.3.2.5. In instances where the requested analysis requires the consumption of all the evidence, the client will be notified.



- 1.3.2.6. Case-related discrepancies may result in the evidence being rejected. Analysis may not be conducted until all discrepancies are corrected. See below for more information.
- 1.3.2.7. All collected items of evidence from crime scenes will be returned to the requesting agency after they are properly documented and packaged for transfer.
- 1.3.2.8. All evidence will be returned to the **responsible** agency upon completion of testing.
- 1.3.3. HFSC may need specific information from the client in order to fulfill a request for analysis. In such circumstances, HFSC will contact the client in an attempt to obtain the needed information. If after five business days the client has not responded, HFSC **can** close the request.
- 1.3.4. After receiving the report, the client, in turn, may contact HFSC to discuss the services performed or to request other services.
- 1.3.5. Evidence not in the care, custody, or control of the Houston Forensic Science Center will not be retrieved/transported for court purposes.
 - 1.3.5.1. If evidence is needed in court, the requestor must obtain the evidence from the **responsible** agency.

2. Discrepancies

2.1. General Information

- 2.1.1. HFSC holds evidence to the highest of standards. Evidence must be submitted in a condition that ensures its unambiguous identification to a case or to an individual, as appropriate. The evidence must also be protected from loss, cross-contamination and/or deleterious change.
- 2.1.2. All evidence must be properly sealed.
 - 2.1.2.1. Please reference section 7 of this manual to see what constitutes a proper seal.
 - 2.1.2.2. Exceptions may be made for **evidence items that do not easily lend themselves to sealing such as large or bulky items.**
- 2.1.3. Evidence packaging seals are verified to ensure their integrity upon acceptance into the facility. Discrepancies in case related information may result in HFSC's refusal to accept or analyze the evidence in question. The following discrepancies may result in a notification to the client indicating the evidence has not been accepted for analysis:
 - 2.1.3.1. Inconsistent subject name (including when the name is not exactly the same on all documentation or evidence items and when the evidence and submission information do not match) when the evidence is associated with a particular individual (such as in biology or toxicology)
 - 2.1.3.2. Conflicts between dates of birth on evidence and submission form or LIMS equivalent, when the evidence is associated with a particular individual
 - 2.1.3.3. Inconsistent case identifiers on evidence and submission form or LIMS equivalent
 - 2.1.3.4. Evidence items not labeled with pertinent information (subject name and client case identifier)
 - 2.1.3.5. Outer-most evidence container improperly sealed
 - 2.1.3.6. Compromised evidence (i.e., leaking, cracked, or tampered container)
 - 2.1.3.7. Inconsistent descriptions between evidence received, submission form or LIMS



equivalent, and evidence documentation.

- 2.1.4. Minor discrepancies will be documented in the case record and may also be included in reports issued by HFSC.

3. Requests for Crime Scene Processing Services

3.1. Requests

- 3.1.1. Pending a contractual agreement, clients may request crime scene assistance 24/7 by calling the Crime Scene Unit at 713-929-6760, option 1.

3.2. Crime Scene Processing Services

- 3.2.1. Requests for crime scene processing services will be assessed based on the crime type, complexity of forensic services needed, available personnel, and the expected response time. The crime scene unit typically responds to the following case types:

3.2.1.1. **Homicides**

3.2.1.2. Officer Involved Shootings

3.2.1.3. **Child Deaths**

3.2.1.4. Aggravated Sexual Assaults

3.2.1.5. **Aggravated Robberies**

3.2.1.6. Aggravated Assaults

- 3.2.2. A search warrant and/or consent to search form may be necessary; if so, a copy shall be provided to the crime scene investigator (CSI) for review prior to the processing of the crime scene. If a search warrant is needed, please contact the Crime Scene Unit **after** obtaining the warrant.

- 3.2.3. It is the responsibility of the investigating agency to provide security at the crime scene for the entire duration of the crime scene processing.

4. Requests for Testing Services

4.1. Requests

- 4.1.1. HFSC may receive requests for forensic services through other means, such as telephone calls, emails, or delivery services. These requests are considered reviewed and accepted when the request is created in LIMS by section management or designee. HFSC will notify stakeholders if a request cannot be fulfilled. HFSC may forward evidence to other laboratories or request forensic investigation services from other investigation agencies on behalf of the stakeholder.

- 4.1.2. Generally, cases are worked on a first come, first serve basis. Clients are responsible for requesting the need for expediting a case. Cases may be worked on a rush/priority status.



4.2. Case Priorities

- 4.2.1. Case priorities will be established according to the following criteria:
 - 4.2.1.1. Crimes against persons (homicides, sexual assaults, etc.) take precedence over crimes against property.
 - 4.2.1.2. Cases set for court will be prioritized according to the notice provided. Priority status will be determined by the Section Manager or designee.
 - 4.2.1.3. Investigative priority cases that require immediate analysis.

5. LIMS Portal Procedure

5.1. Submitting Requests

- 5.1.1. When using a LIMS portal system to submit a request, please ensure all items of evidence being requested for testing are selected and all required fields are filled out as completely and accurately as possible.
 - 5.1.1.1. Electronic submissions serve as a contract between the client and HFSC.
- 5.1.2. For access to the LIMS portal system, please email wheresmyresult@hfsc.onmicrosoft.com.

6. HFSC Evidence Submission Form

6.1. General Information

- 6.1.1. The HFSC Evidence Submission Form is designed to ensure that HFSC has all the necessary information about the case and to assess its capabilities in meeting the client's request. Submission forms must be filled out as completely as possible and they MUST BE LEGIBLE. Please note that incorrect or incomplete submission forms may prevent the processing of evidence.
- 6.1.2. The current version of the HFSC Evidence Submission form can be downloaded from the HFSC website: <https://hfsctx.gov>.
- 6.1.3. If you have any questions regarding laboratory services, please call the laboratory at 713-929-6760 or email the Client Services & Case Management Division at triage@hfsctx.gov.

7. General Evidence Handling

The following principles are given for general guidance. HFSC's staff can answer questions regarding handling of evidence.

7.1. Labeling

- 7.1.1. To preserve the identity and chain of custody of each item of evidence, each sample or exhibit must be labeled. All outer evidence containers must be labeled. Labeling should not occur on the item itself; rather it should be on a tag attached to the item in an area not to be tested or on its individual container.
- 7.1.2. It is recommended that at minimum, outer containers should be labeled with the agency's case number and item number(s). For inner package labeling, refer to the discipline's section specific requirements. Other pertinent information may also be included,



depending on your agency's policies. It is highly recommended that an item numbering system be used when referring to item numbers on the submission form.

7.1.3. Small items should be placed in appropriate containers. **ALL EVIDENCE MUST BE LABELED AND PROPERLY SEALED.** Evidence seals are inspected to ensure they protect evidence from loss, cross-transfer, contamination, or deleterious change. An evidence container is properly sealed if the contents cannot readily escape and if entering the container results in obvious damage or alteration to the container or its seal. Tape should completely cover all openings to the evidence container. Heat sealed plastic bags are also acceptable if initials/signature is included on the seal. Please do not use staples as they do not constitute a proper seal and may present a safety hazard. All of these steps are taken in an effort to ensure that if a seal has been tampered with, it will be evident.

7.1.3.1. The following are *best practices* regarding seals:

7.1.3.1.1. All openings completely sealed with tape

7.1.3.1.2. Initials/signature are placed half-on and half-off of the seal on the outermost container/packaging

7.1.3.1.3. The date the seal was placed on the package is included, half-on and half-off the seal

7.1.4. Any items suspected of containing blood or other bodily fluids should be labeled as a "Biohazard".



7.1.5. Any items suspected of containing glass and/or sharp objects (such as syringes or knives) should be identified as such on the outer container.

7.2. Collecting and Packaging

7.2.1. When packaging evidence, the essential goal is to preserve the original integrity of the samples. For this reason, samples should be properly segregated and handled with gloves so that contamination does not occur. Evidence samples must be packaged separately. All envelopes and other containers used to package evidentiary items must be clean and not previously used.

7.2.1.1. Firearms that are suspected of being loaded or firearms that cannot be rendered safe must be clearly labeled as such.

7.2.2. Place the exhibits of one case in external containers that have been labeled with that case information only. Do not place the evidence from more than one case in the same external container unless that container is used only for the convenience of transport, does not have any case information on it, and is unsealed.

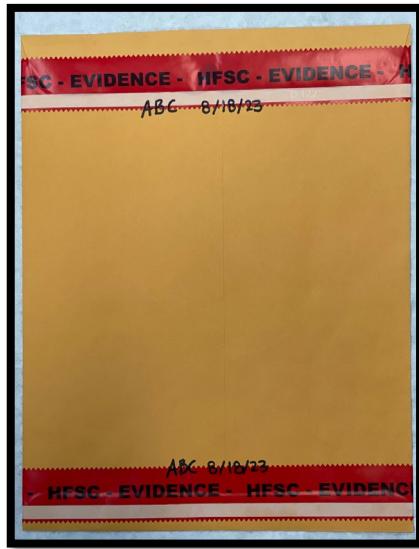


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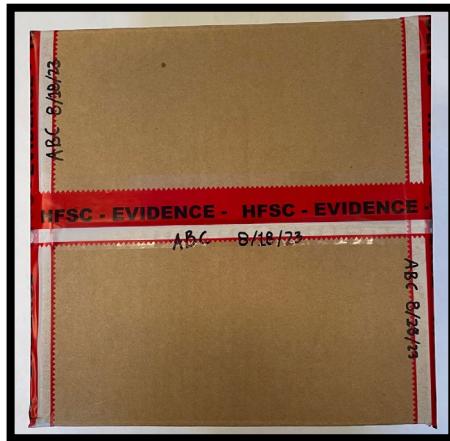
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An example of a properly sealed envelope:



An example of a proper seal on top of a box:





8. Crime Scene Processing Services

8.1. Scope

8.1.1. The Crime Scene Unit provides quality documentation, preservation, and collection of evidence present at crime scenes. The Crime Scene Unit will follow appropriate evidence collection and handling procedures delineated in this handbook when submitting evidence to the requesting agency after collection at the scene.

8.2. Crime Scene Services Offered

- 8.2.1. Evidence preservation and collection
- 8.2.2. Crime scene photography
- 8.2.3. Vehicle examinations
- 8.2.4. Impression casting and/or lifting
- 8.2.5. Latent print processing
- 8.2.6. Diagrams (both traditional computer diagrams and 3D diagrams)
- 8.2.7. Videography
- 8.2.8. Presumptive blood testing and chemical blood enhancement

8.3. Clandestine Laboratories

- 8.3.1. HFSC does not currently process clandestine laboratories.



9. Seized Drugs

9.1. Scope of Testing

9.1.1. The Seized Drugs Section provides quality analysis of evidence received for the presence of controlled substances including pharmaceutical and illicit drugs, botanical material, related chemicals and paraphernalia as well as dangerous drugs.

9.2. Submitting Evidence

9.2.1. Please complete a submission form for all requests not made through a LIMS portal system. Please reference the HFSC Submission Form at <https://hfsctx.gov> for instructions on how to fill out the form.

9.3. Collection/Handling Procedures

9.3.1. General Packaging

- 9.3.1.1. Submit drug evidence in an appropriately sized container.
- 9.3.1.2. The actual physical evidence may require additional packaging before placing in an outer container. Inner packaging may include zippered bags, heat sealed bags, plastic bottles, or other containers appropriate for the evidence being submitted. Examples: Place suspected small crack rocks in a zippered bag and seal in an evidence envelope for submission. Package liquids in spill-proof containers to prevent leaking.
- 9.3.1.3. Evidence from separate locations should be individually packaged and labeled appropriately before placing in an envelope or outer container for submission.
- 9.3.1.4. Multiple pieces of evidence collected from multiple suspects should be individually packaged and labeled appropriately before placing in an envelope or outer container for submission.
- 9.3.1.5. Large drug seizure evidence should be sub-divided into containers weighing no more than forty (40) pounds. Individual bundles weighing more than forty pounds do not have to be subdivided.
- 9.3.1.6. After the physical evidence is carefully placed in an outer container, the outer container is then ready for sealing. A proper seal is one in which there is no possibility that the packaged contents can be removed, altered or a substitution made without the seal being obviously disturbed. **Refer to 7.2.3.1 for recommendations on a proper seal.** Use tamper-evident tape, such as evidence tape or clear 2" packing tape.
- 9.3.1.7. An appropriate guideline to follow is to place a seal on all points of entry of the container, such as both ends of an envelope or the top and bottom of a box; further entrance into the container must be evident.
- 9.3.1.8. If evidence is being submitted for Seized Drugs analysis **as well as** Biology processing and/or Latent Print processing, then gloves should be worn and handling of packaging minimized to preserve latent print evidence. Submission information should clearly indicate that Latent Print **and/or** Biology processing is requested.



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9.3.2. Plant Material

9.3.2.1. There is a large quantity of moisture present in leaves of fresh plant material; therefore, it is best to package fresh or live plant material subject to mold or mildew in a breathable container such as a brown paper bag, box, or burlap bag to allow for continued drying before and after submission. Wet or fresh plant material placed in plastic will cause condensation and fungal growth. No analysis will be performed on plant material that has undergone excessive decomposition.

9.3.2.2. It is recommended that roots and dirt be removed from fresh plant material before submitting.

9.3.2.3. It is acceptable to package **dried** plant material in a zippered bag, however it is **best** to package moist plant material in paper bags or boxes to allow for continued drying after submission.

9.3.3. Liquids

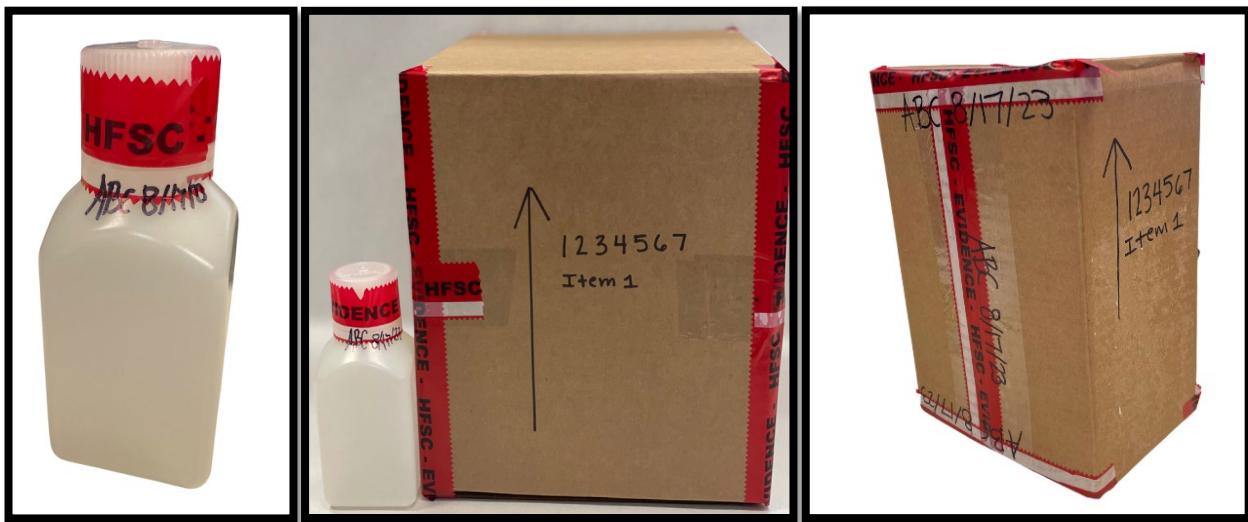
9.3.3.1. Package collected liquids in a sturdy plastic bottle 2/3 of the way full with a secure lid. When the volume is too large to fit one container, multiple containers are permitted.

9.3.3.2. It is acceptable to submit glass vials with liquid; however glass vials should be placed inside a zipper bag and packaged in such a way to minimize breakage.

9.3.3.3. Label bottles and or zipper bags clearly with item numbers and initials.

9.3.3.4. Prop bottles upright to reduce the chance of spillage. Please provide directional arrows on outer containers to indicate which end is up.

An example of proper evidence packaging:





9.3.4. Biohazard Evidence

9.3.4.1. Drug evidence confiscated from a body cavity, mouth, toilet, or other infectious environments are considered a biohazard and should be labeled and treated as such. The greatest safety hazard is associated with biological fluids and biological materials with syringes, razors, and broken glass. These items pose a threat to law enforcement and laboratory personnel for the transmission of HIV and Hepatitis. Universal Bloodborne Pathogen Precautions should be observed. Appropriate safety apparel such as eye protection, lab coat, and nitrile gloves should be used during collection and handling of biohazard evidence.



9.3.4.2. Collection

9.3.4.2.1. **Puncture resistant containers** should be used and appropriately labeled for any exhibits that are considered a “sharp” (for example, syringes, razor blades, broken glass or anything that could puncture the skin).

9.3.4.2.2. Ideally universal biohazard labels should be placed on all layers of packaging, containers, and submission form(s).

9.3.4.2.3. Syringes should be capped, preferably with **their** own needle cover, before placing in a puncture resistant container. It is best to leave any liquid contents in the syringe. Do not attempt to transfer the contents of the syringe to another container.

9.3.4.2.4. **Do not** submit syringes with exposed needles in an evidence envelope. If a syringe needle cannot be capped, then the syringe must be placed facing down in a container where the needle cannot puncture the packaging. An example of this packaging would be a syringe safety container or Nalgene bottle with a secure lid.

9.3.4.2.5. The syringe **will not** be analyzed if it is not appropriately packaged.



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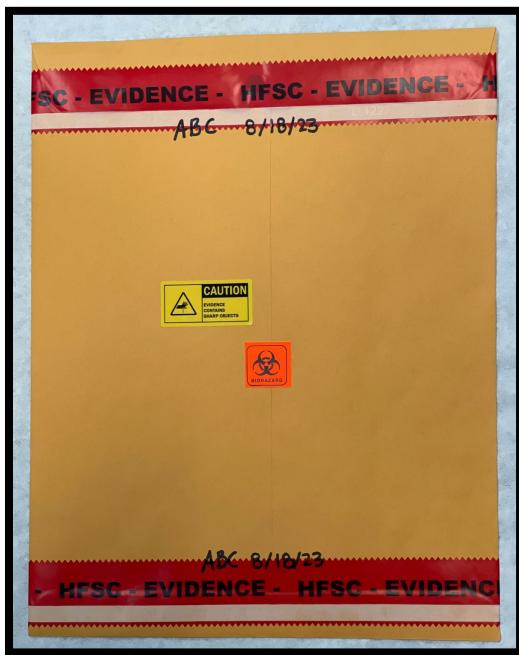
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An example of proper sharp biohazard evidence inner packaging:



An example of proper sharp biohazard evidence outer packaging:





10. Serology and DNA

10.1. Scope of Testing

10.1.1. Serological Evidence Testing for Blood and Semen

10.1.1.1. Serological testing identifies biological material, mainly blood and semen, using presumptive and confirmatory methods. Items can also be tested for possible touch DNA. When biological material is detected, the specimen is preserved for DNA analysis.

10.1.2. DNA Testing

10.1.2.1. For those cases where serological evidence is identified, the items are analyzed to develop DNA profiles. Each DNA profile is then compared to reference samples collected from known individuals associated with the case in an effort to match an unknown profile to a known individual.

10.1.2.2. The Combined DNA Index System (CODIS) is an investigative tool that enables the laboratory to exchange and compare both known and unknown DNA profiles on the local, state, and national levels. For more information on CODIS, please visit <http://www.fbi.gov/about-us/lab/biometric-analysis/codis/codis-and-ndis-fact-sheet>.

10.2. Submitting Evidence

10.2.1. Please complete a submission form for all requests not made through a LIMS portal system. Please reference the HFSC Submission Form at <https://hfsctx.gov> for instructions on how to fill out the form.

10.2.2. All evidence for serology/DNA testing that is associated with an HPD incident shall be submitted to the HPD Property Room.

10.2.3. For information regarding sample submission limits, please refer to the Forensic Biology Case Management Policy. This document can be found at <https://hfsctx.gov> under the *Evidence Submission* tab.

10.2.4. For all other submitting agencies, please contact HFSC at 713-929-6760 or via email at triage@hfsctx.gov if you have any questions or require assistance.

10.3. Collection/Handling Procedures

10.3.1. Identifying DNA Evidence

10.3.1.1. The list below identifies some common items of evidence that you may need to collect, the possible location of the DNA on the evidence, and the biological source containing the DNA.



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Evidence	Possible Location of DNA on the Evidence	Source of DNA
Baseball bat	Handle, end	Sweat, skin, blood, tissue
Hat, bandana, or mask	Inside	Sweat, hair, dandruff
Eyeglasses	Nose or ear pieces, lens	Sweat, skin
Facial tissue, cotton swab	Surface area	Mucus, blood, sweat, semen, ear wax
Dirty laundry	Surface area	Blood, sweat, semen
Toothpick	Tips	Saliva
Used cigarette	Cigarette butt	Saliva
Used stamp or envelope	Licked area	Saliva
Tape or ligature	Inside/outside surface	Skin, sweat
Bottle, can, or glass	Sides, mouthpiece	Saliva, sweat
Used condom	Inside/outside surface	Semen, vaginal or rectal cells
Blanket, pillow, sheet	Surface area	Sweat, hair, semen, urine, saliva
"Through and through" bullet	Outside surface	Blood, tissue
Bite mark	Person's skin or clothing	Saliva
Fingernail, partial fingernail	Scrapings	Blood, sweat, tissue

10.3.2. Evidence Collection and Preservation

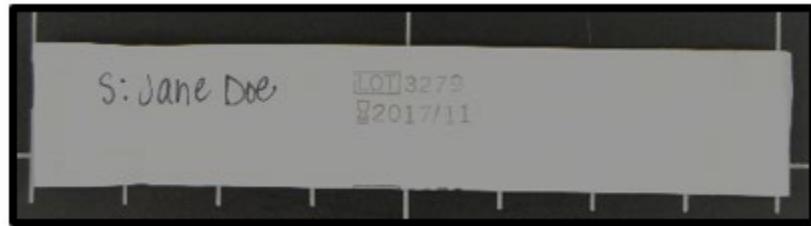
10.3.2.1. Clients and laboratory personnel should work together to determine the most probative pieces of evidence and to establish priorities. Biological material may contain hazardous pathogens such as the human immunodeficiency virus (HIV) and the hepatitis B virus that can cause potentially lethal diseases. Conversely, the collecting officer could contaminate the evidence sample with his/her DNA. Given the sensitive nature of DNA evidence, clients should always contact laboratory personnel or evidence collection technicians when collection questions arise.

10.3.2.2. For buccal swab collection, always use a sterile swab to collect evidence. It is recommended to collect two buccal swabs from the interior of the individual's mouth. Use two swabs to rub the inside of both cheeks of the mouth for up to fifteen seconds to have epithelial cells deposit onto the swab. It is acceptable to place the swabs back into the sleeve of the swab packaging. It is best to write the name of the individual with whom you have collected the sample. The swab should then be placed in an envelope with the outer labeling noting the number of buccal swabs present, the identity of whom the swabs belong, and if the individual is a suspect, complainant, or elimination.

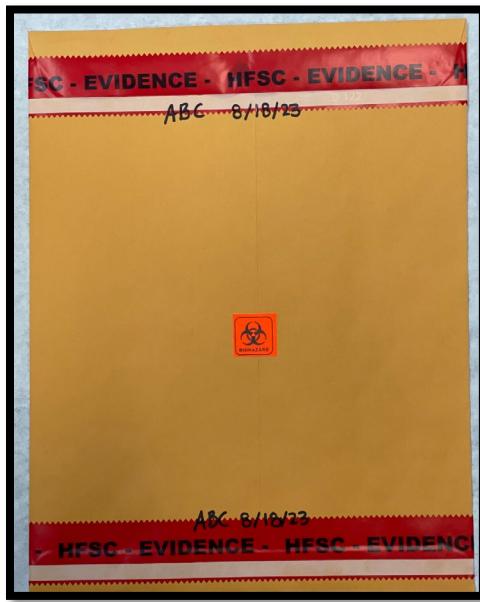
10.3.2.3. After the physical evidence is carefully placed in an outer container, the outer container is then ready for sealing. An evidence container is properly sealed if the contents cannot readily escape and if entering the container results in obvious damage or alteration to the container or its seal.



An example of proper buccal swab inner evidence packaging:



An example of proper buccal swab outer evidence packaging:



10.4. Contamination

10.4.1. Extremely small amounts of DNA can be used as evidence, therefore, greater attention to contamination issues are necessary when identifying, collecting, and preserving DNA evidence. DNA evidence can be contaminated when DNA from another source gets mixed with DNA relevant to the case. This can happen when someone sneezes or coughs over the evidence or touches his/her mouth, nose, or other part of the face and then touches the area that may contain the DNA to be tested. DNA technology called polymerase chain reaction or "PCR" replicates or copies DNA in the evidence sample. Therefore, the introduction of contaminants or other unintended DNA to an evidence sample can be problematic. With such minute samples of DNA being copied, extra care must be taken to prevent contamination. If a sample of DNA is submitted for testing, the PCR process will copy whatever DNA is present in the sample; it cannot distinguish between the evidentiary DNA and DNA from another source.

10.4.2. To avoid contamination of evidence that may contain DNA, always take the following precautions:

10.4.2.1. Wear gloves and change them often.



- 10.4.2.2. Use disposable instruments or clean them thoroughly before and after handling each sample.
- 10.4.2.3. Avoid touching the area where you believe DNA may exist.
- 10.4.2.4. Avoid talking, sneezing, and coughing over evidence.
- 10.4.2.5. Avoid touching your face, nose, and mouth when collecting and packaging evidence.
- 10.4.2.6. Air-dry evidence thoroughly before packaging, or place in a container that "breathes."
- 10.4.2.7. Put evidence into new paper bags or envelopes, not plastic bags. Do not use staples.

10.5. Transportation and Storage

- 10.5.1. When transporting and storing evidence that may contain DNA, it is important to keep the evidence dry and at room temperature. Once the evidence has been secured in paper bags or envelopes, it should be sealed, labeled, and transported in a way that ensures proper identification of where it was found and proper chain of custody. **Never place evidence that may require DNA analysis in plastic bags** because plastic bags will retain damaging moisture. Direct sunlight and warmer conditions also may be harmful to DNA, so avoid keeping evidence in places that may get hot, such as a room or police car without air conditioning. For long-term storage issues, contact the laboratory.

10.6. Elimination Samples

- 10.6.1. As with fingerprints, the effective use of DNA may require the collection and analysis of elimination samples. It often is necessary to use elimination samples to determine whether the evidence comes from the suspect or from someone else. For example, in the case of a residential burglary where the suspect may have handled household items, an officer should identify appropriate elimination candidates, such as household members.
- 10.6.2. These samples may be needed for comparison with the DNA found on the household item to determine whether the DNA is probative evidence. In homicide cases, be sure to collect the victim's DNA from the medical examiner at the autopsy, even if the body is badly decomposed. This may serve to identify an unknown victim or distinguish between the victim's DNA and other DNA found at the crime scene.
- 10.6.3. When investigating sexual assault cases, it may be necessary to collect and analyze the DNA of the victim's recent consensual partners, if any, to eliminate them as potential contributors of DNA suspected to be from the perpetrator. If this is necessary, it is important to approach the victim with extreme sensitivity and provide a full explanation of why the request is being made. When possible, the help of a qualified victim advocate should be enlisted for assistance.
- 10.6.4. HPD Sexual Assault Information Line: 713-308-1400; HPD Sexual Assault Information Email: sainfo@houstonpolice.org.
- 10.6.5. For more information on DNA and DNA evidence collection, please visit:
 - 10.6.5.1. <http://www.forensicsciencesimplified.org/dna/resources.html>
 - 10.6.5.2. <https://www.ncjrs.gov/pdffiles1/nij/bc000614.pdf>

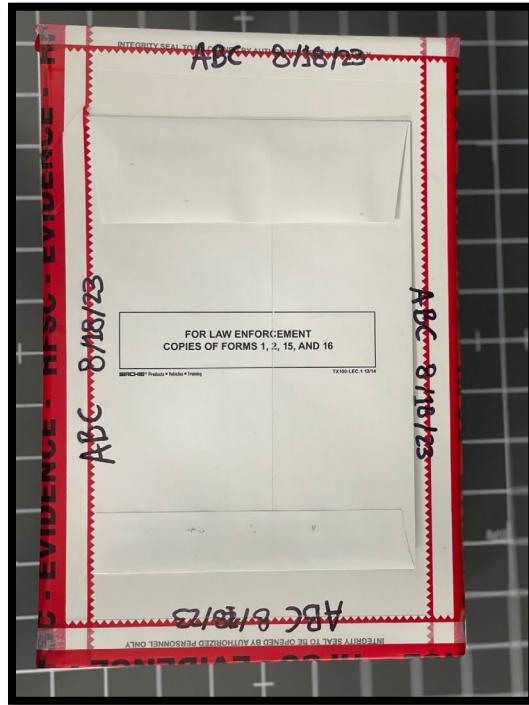


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Examples of a properly sealed sexual assault kit:





11. Firearms

11.1. Scope of Testing

11.1.1. The Firearms Section provides the examination and comparison of firearms and firearm related evidence. In addition, the Firearm Section processes items for entry/review into the ballistic imaging system (IBIS) to determine whether or not a particular firearm was fired in a prior incident.

11.1.2. Below is a summary of the evidence items that can be examined and information that can be obtained from the examinations:

Evidence	Examined and Possible Determinations
Fired projectile (bullet)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Caliber family, possible specific caliber• List of possible firearm manufacturers that fired the item• If multiple projectiles, were they fired from same firearm or multiple firearms?
Fired cartridge case	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Caliber• Possible manufacturer• Entry into NIBIN database• If multiple casings, were they fired in the same firearm or were multiple firearms used in the offense?
Fired projectile or cartridge case and firearm	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• If fired from/in the submitted firearm
Shot pellets / shot wads	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Size of shot pellets• Gauge of shotgun slug• Gauge of wad
Firearm	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• General condition and if mechanically functional• Amount of pressure required to release hammer or firing pin• Test firing to obtain test specimens for comparison• Test fire for acquisition into the NIBIN database• Serial number restoration• Barrel and overall length of long guns for conformance to statutory requirements

11.1.3. IBIS is the Integrated Ballistic Identification System and is to firearms what the Automated Fingerprint Identification System (AFIS) is to fingerprints. IBIS is the imaging component of NIBIN, the National Integrated Ballistic Information Network, the nationwide network of imaging units. IBIS collects images of fired cartridge cases and compares them against images of other fired cartridge cases (from known and unknown firearms), filtering out and displaying potential matches. If an analyst reviews the potential matches



and is confident the system has identified an association, a NIBIN Lead Notification is released to the affected agencies/divisions. The items will not be microscopically compared without a follow-up request from a client.

11.1.4. The HFSC IBIS units automatically search the other **regional** NIBIN partner to determine if a firearm was fired in a prior incident outside of our immediate geographic region. If a client has information leading him/her to believe that a specific firearm **or cartridge case** may **be linked to a crime in another part of the country**, please notify HFSC (giving the specific location) and request that a search of that local NIBIN database be conducted for a possible match. We will gladly conduct this manual search. **Manual searches can only be conducted for items entered into NIBIN by HFSC.**

11.2. Submitting Evidence

- 11.2.1. Please complete a submission form for all requests not made through a LIMS portal system. Please reference the HFSC Submission Form at <https://hfsctx.gov> for instructions on how to fill out the form.
- 11.2.2. Firearms - record the gun type (semiautomatic pistol, revolver, etc.), manufacturer, caliber, model, and serial number.
- 11.2.3. Fired cartridge cases – package the items so they are properly **secured** in the container. This may require placing the items in an inner container before they are placed in an outer envelope.
- 11.2.4. Fired bullets – package the items so they are properly **secured** in the container. This may require placing the items in an inner container before they are placed in an outer envelope. Be mindful of sharp edges on many bullets and fragments. These sharp edges can protrude through thin packaging, creating a hazard as well as potential holes in the packages.
- 11.2.5. Biohazardous material – any evidence submitted to the firearms section for testing that is or is suspected of being contaminated with biohazardous material (including ALL projectiles) will be cleaned with a disinfecting solution before analysis proceeds.
- 11.2.6. **If items of evidence need to be processed for prints or swabbed for contact/blood (DNA), those requests must be made before or concurrently with any firearms request. Not all items may be suitable for print processing or DNA testing.**

11.3. Firearms to be rendered safe

- 11.3.1. If a firearm associated with an HPD case cannot be submitted to the HPD property room because it cannot be safely unloaded, it may be submitted directly to HFSC. Firearms from other clients will be evaluated and accepted on a case-by-case basis.
- 11.3.2. During regular business hours, firearms that cannot be safely unloaded may be submitted directly to HFSC. After regular business hours, firearms may be submitted to the HFSC evidence lockers located at **500 Jefferson**. All firearms submitted in this way must be accompanied by a completed submission form **or a portal request**.
- 11.3.3. Firearms that are suspected of being loaded or firearms that cannot be rendered safe must be clearly labeled as such.
- 11.3.4. Be aware that firearms submitted for unloading may need to be destroyed in the unloading process. If a firearm needs to be analyzed, contact HFSC before submitting for



unloading.

11.4. Collection/Handling Procedures

- 11.4.1. The collection process is relatively simple and not damaging to any of these items. Any damage that has occurred has normally been a result of firing, impact, or accidental. However, "damage" can occur when attempting to mark items. While marking of the actual item can be accomplished without affecting any analyses, it is strongly recommended that the evidence NOT BE **directly** marked. "Damage" can occur in the form of altering or affecting any microscopic marks or patterns that may be present and useful for analyses and comparison. Therefore, the preferred method of marking for future identification is to mark the outer container with the appropriate information (may be a label or handwritten).
- 11.4.1.1. After the firearm has been completely unloaded **and any source of ammunition removed**, DO NOT place ANY foreign objects in the barrel or in the action of the firearm! **Zip ties through the action are acceptable as a way to hold the firearm open.**
- 11.4.1.2. If unfired cartridges are submitted with a firearm, package the cartridges separately from the firearm. Both the packaged cartridges and the firearm can be submitted in the same outer container.
- 11.4.1.3. If a firearm is recovered in liquid, submit the firearm in a water-tight container filled with liquid where it was recovered from. This will help prevent corrosion of the firearm prior to analysis. **Do not allow the firearm to dry before submitting.**
- 11.4.1.4. **Plastic** bags are acceptable if the items are dry. Breathable packaging, **like paper envelopes**, should be used for bloody/**damp** items. If items are contaminated with blood or other body fluids, affix a biohazard sticker or mark the packaging clearly.

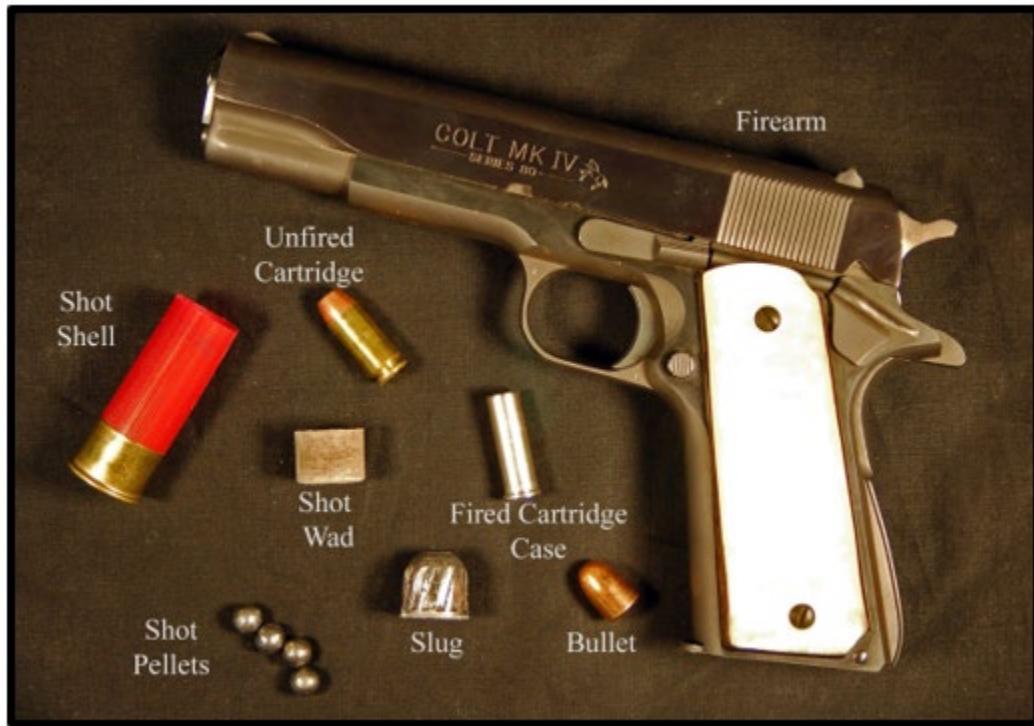


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An example of items typically submitted for analysis:





12. Toxicology

12.1. Scope of Testing

12.1.1. The discipline of Toxicology provides analysis for the presence of alcohol and other drugs in biological specimens. The laboratory typically performs alcohol analysis and drug screening/confirmation analysis on samples associated with driving under the influence, sexual assaults and other offenses.

12.2. Submitting Evidence

12.2.1. Please complete a submission form for all requests not made through a LIMS portal system. Please reference the HFSC Submission Form at <https://hfsctx.gov> for instructions on how to fill out the form.

12.2.2. All evidence for toxicology testing that is associated with an HPD incident shall be submitted to the HPD Property Room or a designated submission location approved by HFSC.

12.3. Collection/Handling Procedures

12.3.1. Outer containers of blood and urine must be labeled with agency case number. Blood samples should be collected in grey top tubes which contain potassium oxalate and sodium fluoride when possible. Additional information such as the sample donor's name, agency case number, date and time of collection as well as the individual collecting the sample should be included on the specimen itself, if available for the cases not collected with the HFSC collection kit. For the HSFC collection kits, the Specimen ID Form must contain necessary identifiers and the Specimen ID Number on the specimens must be consistent with the number on the Specimen ID Form. Any information regarding an indication of drug use other than alcohol can be included in the submission documentation.

12.3.2. At a minimum, the sample(s) should be in a sealed container to prevent the possibility of undetected tampering with the contents. A proper seal is one in which there is no possibility that the packaged contents can be removed, altered or a substitution made without the seal being obviously disturbed. **Refer to 7.2.3.1 for recommendations on a proper seal.** Use tamper-evident tape, such as evidence tape or clear 2" packing tape.

12.3.3. All samples should be stored under refrigeration prior to submission to HFSC.

12.4. General Toxicology Kit Collection Packaging Instructions

12.4.1. The HFSC collection kit comes complete with everything needed for blood collection. The components include: a povidone-iodine prep pad, two or more grey top blood collection tubes containing potassium oxalate and sodium fluoride, **blood collection set**, two blue security box seals, Specimen ID Form, and outer plastic foam container.



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1. During collection, it is necessary to use the povidone-iodine prep pad to clean and prepare the collection surface area. **Do not use alcohol based prep pads to prepare the collection surface area.**
2. After sample collection, it is important to verify that the blood tubes are properly sealed across the top with the Specimen Seals for the HFSC collection kit. For the other kits, the blood tubes must be labeled properly with the donor's name, agency case number, and/or date of birth. The date and time of collection as well as the individual collecting the sample are useful information. In addition, it is necessary to verify that the information on all of the blood tubes collected match one another.
3. The next step is to place the blood tubes inside the plastic foam container and place the Specimen ID Form back into the pouch on the back of the HFSC collection kit. Verify that the information on the blood tubes match the information on the other evidence pieces including the labels affixed by the submitting agency's evidence storage unit.

HFSC requires the consistent and correct spelling of first and last names on all items of evidence, evidence labels, and case related documentation.

4. Seal the plastic foam container with the blue security seals provided.
 - It is recommended that all seals are initialed.
 - An evidence container is properly sealed if the contents cannot readily escape and if entering the container results in obvious damage or alteration to the container or its seal.
5. At a minimum, the evidence container should be labeled with the agency case number, item number and a biohazard sticker.

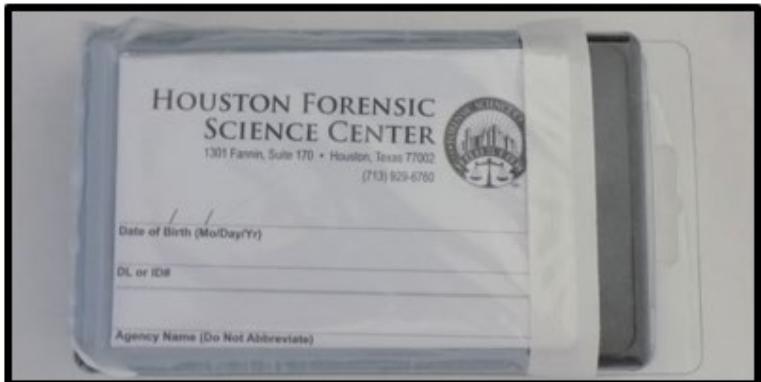


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An example of an HFSC collection kit and its contents:





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An example of a proper, complete collection kit submission form and tubes seals:

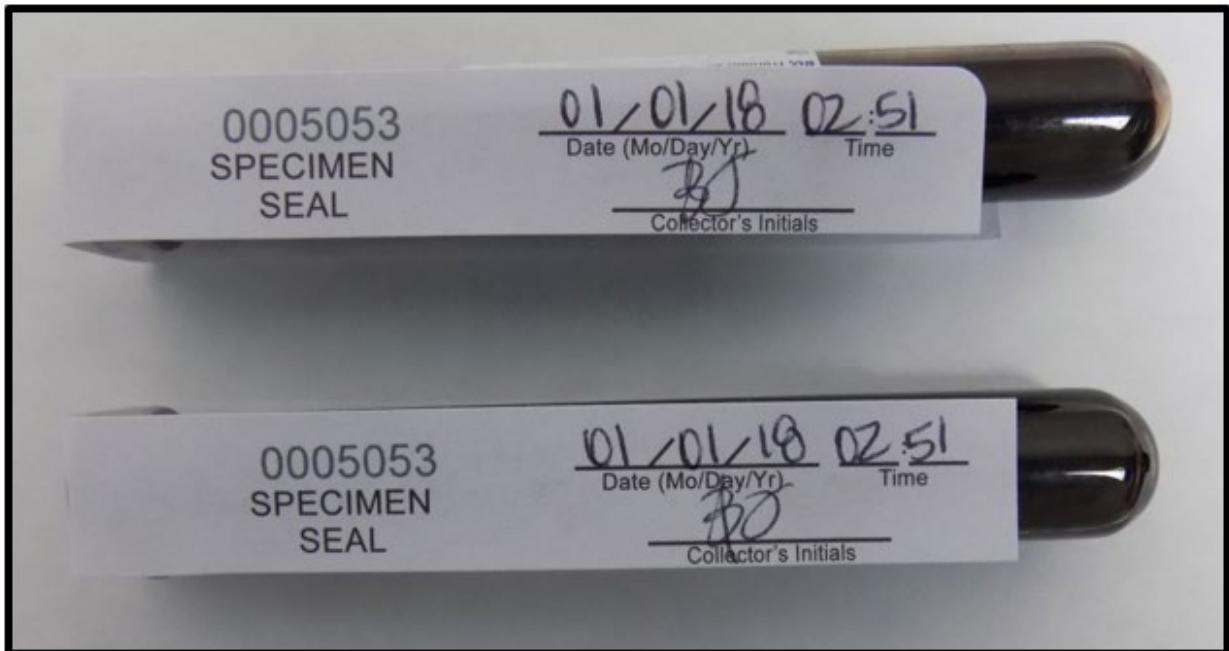
	Place Lab Number Label Here <i>(PRINT ALL INFORMATION CLEARLY)</i>	HOUSTON FORENSIC SCIENCE CENTER 1301 Fannin, Suite 170 • Houston, Texas 77002 (713) 929-6760
Subject Name: <i>Doe</i> Last Name <i>John</i> First Name MI Submitting Agency: <i>1234567-89</i> (Do not include assisting agency information) <i>A. Johnson</i> Submitting Officer	Date of Birth (Mo/Day/Yr) <i>07/16/90</i> DL or ID# Agency Name (Do Not Abbreviate) <i>Houston Police Department</i> Agency Case Number <i>987654</i> Payroll # Work Phone Number/Email <i>832-123-4567</i>	
Type of Case: Fatality <input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No		
Sample Collection: <i>01/01/18</i> Date Collected (Mo/Day/Yr) <i>02:51</i> Time (Military)	<i>Ben Taub</i> Sample Collection Facility	
Collector: <i>B. Jackson</i> Signature of Collector <i>B. JACKSON</i> (PRINT) Collector's Name (First, MI, Last)	<i>01/01/18</i> Date (Mo/Day/Yr) <i>bjackson@gmail.com</i> Email Address <i>832-981-1111</i> Phone #	
Notes:		
Issued By: HFSC Toxicology Section Issue Date: March 15, 2016		



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An example of proper HFSC collection kit outer packaging:



An example of proper liquid toxicology packaging:





13. Latent Prints

13.1. Scope of Testing

13.1.1. A full-service friction ridge laboratory, the Latent Print Section utilizes state-of-the-art forensic technology to process a wide range of evidence for the detection, development, and identification of latent fingerprints, palm prints, and footprints. A latent print is an invisible chance reproduction of the friction ridges of the fingers, palms, and soles of the feet that may be left on objects with which a person comes in contact.

13.1.2. In addition to having a staff of latent print examiners that are capable of comparing unknown latent prints for identification or exclusion, the section also has the capability to search developed or submitted unknown latent prints through various automated fingerprint identification systems that maintain records of finger and palm prints of known individuals. These systems include the Next Generation Identification System of the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) and other similar databases maintained by Harris County Sheriff's Office and the State of Texas.

13.2. Services Offered

13.2.1. Latent Print Processing

13.2.1.1. Items of physical evidence collected at scenes of crimes can be submitted to the section for chemical and physical processing to develop latent prints. Latent prints developed can then be compared to suspects, if known. If suspects are unknown, any developed latent prints will be analyzed for suitability by a latent print examiner and searched in one or more of the AFIS databases. **If suspects are known or suspected, please include the suspect's name, date of birth, and State Identification Number or FBI Number with the submission.** Also, if available, include fully rolled finger and palm prints of complainants or victims for elimination purposes.

13.2.2. Latent Print Comparisons

13.2.2.1. Latent Prints developed at crime scenes, such as latent lifts or photographs, can be submitted to the Latent Print Section for comparisons and AFIS searches. **If suspects are known or suspected, please include the suspect's name, date of birth, and State Identification Number or FBI Number with the submission.** Or original inked finger and palm prints can be submitted of the suspect(s) as well. Also, if available, include fully rolled finger and palm prints of complainants or victims for elimination purposes. Any latent prints not identified to submitted suspects will automatically be searched through one or more AFIS databases in order to try and identify the source of the latent prints.

13.2.2.2. Latent Prints developed at crime scenes with no known suspects, such as latent lifts or photographs, can be submitted to HFSC for searches through the Harris County Sheriff's Office, State of Texas, and the FBI's Automated Fingerprint Identification Systems in order to possibly identify the sources of the Latent Prints.

13.3. Submitting Evidence

13.3.1. Please complete a submission form for all requests not made through a LIMS portal system. Please reference the HFSC Submission Form at <https://hfsctx.gov> for instructions



on how to fill out the form.

- 13.3.2. All evidence for Latent Print Services that is associated with an HPD incident shall be submitted to the HPD Property Room.
- 13.3.3. Large items such as doors, windows, etc., can be submitted as evidence. However, technical personnel are available to help with proper handling and packaging of large items.
- 13.3.4. Technical personnel are available to help process immovable objects at crime scenes upon request.

13.4. Collection/Handling Procedures

- 13.4.1. If it is necessary to develop latent prints at the crime scene, use caution to prevent destruction of latent prints.
- 13.4.2. When collecting latent prints, always take the following precautions:
 - 13.4.2.1. Always wear gloves when processing latent prints.
 - 13.4.2.2. Avoid touching the area where you believe latent prints may exist.
 - 13.4.2.3. Ensure evidence collected is sealed in order to prevent the deposit of unintentional latent prints
- 13.4.3. When photographing and/or lifting latent prints apply the following techniques:
 - 13.4.3.1. Photograph all latent prints prior to processing.
 - 13.4.3.1.1. Use a tripod when photographing latent prints.
 - 13.4.3.1.2. Use 35mm lens capable of half size and full size reproductions.
 - 13.4.3.1.3. Photograph each latent print individually and include a scale within the frame of the picture. ALS or laser may be needed to visualize the latent print when capturing the image via photography.
 - 13.4.4. Regular or magnetic powder can be applied to latent prints. The powder color should contrast with the surface where the latent prints are located.
 - 13.4.5. Use a fiberglass filament brush, camel hair brush, or cotton to remove any excess powder. Clarity is lost by over brushing. For best results when attempting to remove excess powder, sweep lightly with the flow of the ridge lines of the prints and not across as this can damage the fragile prints.
 - 13.4.6. Photograph latent prints after processing, but prior to lifting.
 - 13.4.6.1. Use transparent tape for the latent lift.
 - 13.4.6.1.1. The color of the latent lift card should contrast with the color of powder used.
 - 13.4.6.1.1.1. Example: if black powder is used then a white lift card should be used for the latent lift
 - 13.4.6.1.1.2. Attach the latent lift to the glossy side of the submission card.
 - 13.4.7. Latent Print Submission Card
 - 13.4.7.1. At a minimum label latent lift card with the following information:
 - 13.4.7.1.1. Incident #/Agency case number
 - 13.4.7.1.2. Date the lift was obtained
 - 13.4.7.1.3. Person lifting the latent print
 - 13.4.7.1.4. A brief description of where/what the lift was obtained from
 - 13.4.7.2. A small sketch of the item or location is strongly preferred. This aids the Latent Print Examiner in the analysis phase.
 - 13.4.7.3. Latent lift cards should be submitted using an envelope, must be properly sealed



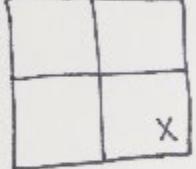
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and must contain the agency's case number. An evidence container is properly sealed if the contents cannot readily escape and if entering the container results in obvious damage or alteration to the container or its seal.

An example of completed latent lift card:

Case #	1234567	Date/Time	09:30 am 10-15-15
Type of Offense	Burglary		
Location	1234 Main Street Houston, TX		
Victim			
Prints Lifted From	Exterior Store front Window - bottom right corner		
Prints Lifted By	Officer L. Adams		
Diagram of Lift Location			
			
Lynn Peavey Company 800-256-6489			



14. Forensic Multimedia Unit

14.1. Scope of Testing

- 14.1.1. The Forensic Multimedia Unit (FMU) is responsible for the analysis of audio and video evidence in analog or digital form, **and digital evidence**.
- 14.1.2. Forensic Audio Analysis is the scientific examination of recordings for the purpose of increased speech intelligibility, attenuation of noise, and/or improvement of the overall audio quality of a recording. Forensic Audio Analysis can be applied to both analog and digital recordings. These recordings include but are not limited to: recordings from mobile devices, body microphones, answering machines, 911 call recordings, investigative interviews, and audio from surveillance video.
- 14.1.3. Forensic Video Analysis involves the scientific examination of video evidence. Video clarification is a process intended to improve the visual appearance of video recording sequences or specific features within the video recording.
- 14.1.4. **Digital Forensics** is the forensic analysis and retrieval of evidence from a variety of different digital media sources. These include, but are not restricted to computers, cellular devices, electronic tablet devices, digital storage media (thumb drives, flash cards, etc.), **digital camera memory (internal and removable media)** and other similar devices.
- 14.1.4.1. **Analysis is** conducted in a manner compatible with the type of crime being investigated. For example, for financial crimes, the examination often focuses on retrieving documents, spreadsheets, pictures of documents, emails and/or text messages pertinent to the investigation, etc. For child pornography, the search is mainly focused on contraband picture or video files. The forensic examiner will also attempt to determine how the contraband material was deposited on the device.

14.2. Submitting Evidence

- 14.2.1. Please complete a submission form for all requests not made through a LIMS portal system. Please reference the HFSC Submission Form at <https://hfsctx.gov> for instructions on how to fill out the form.
- 14.2.2. All evidence that is associated with an HPD incident shall be submitted to the HPD Property Room.

14.3. Collection/Handling Procedures for Forensic Audio and Video Analysis

- 14.3.1. FMU responds to scenes to collect DVR recorded information when investigators or business owners cannot retrieve it. Digital media evidence that requires a search warrant, court order, letter of consent, or prior written approval is the responsibility of the client. FMU will not retrieve evidence without proper legal documentation, as applicable.
- 14.3.2. If evidence is submitted to the laboratory that has been seized from a scene, submit the following:
- 14.3.2.1. DVR, including the power cord
 - 14.3.2.2. DVR passwords (if applicable)
 - 14.3.2.3. DVR ID or username (if applicable)
 - 14.3.2.4. Remote control (if applicable)
 - 14.3.2.5. System manuals (if available)



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14.3.3. It is important when seizing a DVR to document any differences/discrepancies (daylight savings time, etc.) between the time shown on the live view of the DVR compared to the actual time using a cell phone or other standard source.

14.3.4. Submit digital media evidence in an appropriate sized container under a proper seal. An evidence container is properly sealed if the contents cannot readily escape and if entering the container results in obvious damage or alteration to the container or its seal. Evidence that is submitted in-person to the FMU may be received unsealed if the evidence needs to be viewed with an FMU examiner.

An example of properly packaged evidence:





14.4. References/Resources

14.4.1. Caught on Camera, Best Practices for CCTV Systems

14.4.1.1. Produced by the FBI's Operational Technology Division, this 20-minute video shows how CCTV systems can be installed and maintained for maximum effect — not only for the business owner but for the needs of law enforcement as well.

14.4.1.1.1. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TRPVG9inn5w>.

14.4.1.1.2. https://www.rcfl.gov/file-repository/video_evidence_from_cctv_system_flipbook.pdf/view

14.5. Collection/Handling Procedures for Digital Forensics

14.5.1. Digital media evidence that is submitted without a search warrant, court order, written or verbal consent, or prior written approval from the applicable Section Manager will not be accepted by HFSC for examination.

14.5.2. For mobile devices such as mobile phones, smart phones, etc., it's important to protect the device(s) from having the ability to receive signals. This can be accomplished through one of the following ways:

14.5.2.1. Turning the mobile device OFF.

14.5.2.2. Removing the battery from the mobile device.

14.5.2.3. Placing device in a shielded bag such as faraday isolation bags to shield mobile devices from receiving or transmitting calls, text messages, or other communication signals that may alter or destroy the evidence.

14.5.2.4. Submit evidence in an appropriate sized container. Submit the charger and/or power cord(s) with the evidentiary device, if available.

14.5.2.5. Peripheral equipment not designed to store digital data (e.g., monitors and keyboards) will not be accepted unless those items are unique and are required to facilitate the examination.

14.5.2.6. After the evidence is carefully placed in an outer container, the outer container is then ready for sealing. An evidence container is properly sealed if the contents cannot readily escape and if entering the container results in obvious damage or alteration to the container or its seal.

14.5.2.7. Known passwords or unlock codes/patterns must be provided for digital evidence.



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Examples of properly packaged evidence:



14.6. Investigative Procedures

14.6.1. Digital Forensic Examiners utilize both investigative and forensic processes to retrieve requested evidence from source media. The person submitting evidence must provide sufficient information about their case in order to aid in the examination process. The type of evidence that is available for retrieval is also often dependent upon the type of device being examined.

14.6.2. If the investigator is requesting photographs of a victim or suspect, a comparison photograph is necessary. If emails or text messages are requested, email addresses, phone numbers, usernames, etc. are helpful in expediting the search. Keywords are also helpful in locating evidence, especially evidence that has been deleted. Please be as thorough with your request as possible. See **Appendix A** of this handbook for a list of crimes which may involve the use of a computer or other electronic media.



APPENDIX A

Crimes and Potential Evidence That May Be Recovered From Various Types of Electronic Devices

Child Abuse and Pornography Investigations:

- Chat logs
- Digital camera software
- E-mails, notes and letters
- Games
- Graphic editing and viewing software
- Images
- Internet activity logs
- Movie files
- User created directory and file names that classify images

Computer Fraud Investigations:

- Account data from online auctions
- Accounting software and files
- Address books
- Calendar
- Chat logs
- Client Information
- Credit card data
- Databases
- Digital camera software
- E-mails, notes and letters
- Financial asset records

Domestic Violence Investigations:

- Address books
- Diaries
- E-mails, notes and letters
- Financial asset records
- Telephone records

E-mail Threats, Harassment and Stalking Investigations:

- Address books
- Diaries
- E-mails, notes and letters
- Financial asset records
- Images
- Internet activity logs
- Legal documents
- Maps to victim locations
- Telephone records
- Victim background research

Financial Fraud and Counterfeiting

Investigations:

- Address books
- Bank logs
- Calendar
- Check and money order images
- Counterfeit currency images
- Credit card numbers
- Currency images
- Client information
- Databases
- E-mails, notes and letters
- False identification
- Financial asset records
- Images of signatures
- Internet activity logs
- On-line banking software

Homicide Investigations:



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- Address books
- Diaries
- E-mails, notes and letters
- Financial asset records
- Internet activity logs
- Legal documents and wills

- Maps
- Medical records
- Photos of victim / suspect
- Telephone records
- Trophy photos

Identity Theft Investigations

Hardware and Software Tools:

- Backdrops
- Credit card reader / writer

- Digital camera software
- Scanner software

Identification Templates:

- Birth certificates
- Check cashing cards
- Counterfeit insurance documents
- Counterfeit vehicle registrations

- Digital photo images
- Driver's licenses
- Electronic signatures
- Social security cards

Internet Activity Related to ID Theft:

- Deleted documents
- E-mail and newsgroup postings
- Internet activity logs

- On-line orders
- On-line trading information

Negotiable Instruments:

- Business checks
- Cashier's checks
- Credit card numbers
- Counterfeit court documents
- Counterfeit gift certificates

- Counterfeit loan documents
- Counterfeit sales receipts
- Money orders
- Personal checks

Narcotics Investigations:

- Address books
- Calendar
- Databases
- Drug recipes
- E-mails, notes and letters

- False ID
- Financial asset records
- Internet activity logs
- Prescription form images

Network Intrusion Investigations:

- Address books
- Diaries
- E-mails, notes and letters
- Financial asset records
- Internet activity logs

- Maps
- Medical records
- Photos of victim / suspect
- Telephone records
- Trophy photos



- Legal documents and wills

Software Piracy Investigations:

- Chat logs
- E-mails, notes and letters
- Image files of software certificates
- Internet activity logs

- Software serial numbers
- Software cracking utilities
- User created directories and file names which classify copyrighted software

Telecommunication Fraud Investigations:

- Cloning software
- Client database records
- Financial asset records
- Internet activity logs

- Electronic serial numbers
- E-mails, notes and letters
- Mobile identification numbers