



## 1. Policy Overview

The Houston Forensic Science Center (HFSC) firearms section strives to provide timely, high-quality forensic testing to its stakeholders. This includes working with clients to best understand and balance their needs with the section's limited resources. The intent of this policy is to provide clients with what information is needed to be able to fulfill their requests and prevent testing delays.

### 1.1. General Information

- 1.1.1. The firearms section only responds to requests made through the HFSC Portal. If an individual does not have access to the portal, access can be requested. Agencies/entities that do not have access to the Portal may make a request via email at [triage@hfsctx.gov](mailto:triage@hfsctx.gov).
- 1.1.2. When making a request it is critical to select all items that are needed for that area of forensic testing. Multiple items can be selected for one request.
- 1.1.3. Contact information provided should direct us to the person that can answer case-specific questions as additional information may be needed for testing.
- 1.1.4. Large or complicated requests may be split into multiple requests for simplicity of reporting. These changes will be communicated to the requesting stakeholder.
- 1.1.5. If a firearms request is for a NIBIN lead confirmation, then that information must be included in the request to ensure timely testing. Unless otherwise stated, leads will only be confirmed with a one-to-one comparison.
- 1.1.6. **If charges have been filed, please provide the county and cause number so we can best manage our caseload.**
- 1.1.7. When submitting a request if you are unsure of what you may need for testing, reach out to triage via [triage@hfsctx.gov](mailto:triage@hfsctx.gov) or 713-929-6760. Triage will direct you to a section representative to collaborate on the testing needed.

### 1.2. Priority Requests

- 1.2.1. For new priority requests, the requestor must use the Portal and select expedited handling.
- 1.2.2. For existing requests that are now being requested to be handled on priority status, send an email to [triage@hfsctx.gov](mailto:triage@hfsctx.gov).
- 1.2.3. All priority requests are evaluated by a team of representatives from HFSC and other stakeholders before being accepted. These priorities will be assigned an expected competition date on a case-by-case basis.
- 1.2.4. The firearms section is a small unit with limited number of firearms examiners. The section may devote up to 80% of its active examiners to priorities. At the issue date of this policy, the unit can process up to 4 priorities at a given time.

### 1.3. Item Specific Policies



#### 1.3.1. Firearms

- Firearms received with “Machine Gun Conversion Devices”, or MCDs (e.g., switches, lightening links, binary triggers) will be tested with those devices installed. Separate MCDs will not be installed on firearms to test their functionality.
- Functionality only requests and serial number restoration requests are generally treated lowest priority.

#### 1.3.2. Cartridge Cases

- The firearms section considers requests with more than twenty cartridge cases to be excessive.
- Requests with excessive cartridges cases will require a consult so that the requestor can prioritize the items to be tested.
- During consultation, the requestor will be asked which cartridges cases are the highest priority items in their portal request and what particular information they are trying to obtain from firearms testing. For example, a requestor may prioritize cartridge cases located near a particular evidence marker or location on a scene because it would yield more probative information to the investigation.
- If the above information is included in the Portal request a consultation may be waived by the firearms section.

#### 1.3.3. Bullets

- The firearms section will generally prioritize testing bullets associated with medicolegal and hospital numbers.
- If there are large numbers of bullets, the requesting stakeholder will be consulted to determine which bullet items are the most appropriate for testing.

#### 1.3.4. Unfired Ammunition

- Requests to compare unfired ammunition for similarity to fired evidence will only be completed if the items are determined to *not* be a standard commercial product.
- Requests to examine unfired ammunition for markings made by firearms will only be completed after consultation with the stakeholder and in extraordinary circumstances.

#### 1.3.5. Items Not Tested

- The firearms section does not test air guns (BB/pellet guns).

### 1.4. **Officer Involved Shootings**

1.4.1. When an Officer Involved Shooting (OIS) occurs the firearms section test fires the firearms of the officers involved in the shooting.

1.4.2. Firearms comparison requests related to an OIS will require a consult before further firearms testing will be conducted. This is to determine what comparisons are needed for criminal or civil matters.

### 1.5. **Policy exceptions**



1.5.1. To request an exception to this policy, contact HFSC's triage staff at [triage@hfctx.gov](mailto:triage@hfctx.gov) or 713-929-6760, and provide the following information:

- Name
- Email
- Phone number
- Case number
- Items that need testing
- Type of testing requested
- Reason for exception