



# Standard Guide for Physical Evidence Labeling and Related Documentation<sup>1</sup>

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## 1. Scope

1.1 This guide describes methods to be used for labeling physical evidence collected during field investigations; received in a forensic laboratory; or isolated, generated, or prepared from items submitted for laboratory examination.

1.2 Many types of physical evidence may be hazardous. It is assumed that personnel assigned to the collection, packaging, storing, or analysis of physical evidence will take precautions as appropriate to the evidence.

1.3 This guide offers a set of instructions for performing one or more specific operations. This standard cannot replace knowledge, skill, or ability acquired through appropriate education, training, and experience and should be used in conjunction with sound professional judgment.

1.4 *This standard does not purport to address all of the safety concerns, if any, associated with its use. It is the responsibility of the user of this standard to establish appropriate safety and health practices and determine the applicability of regulatory limitations prior to use.*

## 2. Referenced Documents

2.1 *ASTM Standards:*<sup>2</sup>

[E1188 Practice for Collection and Preservation of Information and Physical Items by a Technical Investigator](#)

[E1492 Practice for Receiving, Documenting, Storing, and Retrieving Evidence in a Forensic Science Laboratory](#)

## 3. Summary of Practice

3.1 Any individual item of evidence is marked with a numeric or alphanumeric designation that is unique and allows the origin of the item to be unequivocally established.

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<sup>2</sup> For referenced ASTM standards, visit the ASTM website, [www.astm.org](http://www.astm.org), or contact ASTM Customer Service at [service@astm.org](mailto:service@astm.org). For *Annual Book of ASTM Standards* volume information, refer to the standard's Document Summary page on the ASTM website.

## 4. Significance and Use

4.1 By following the procedures specified in this guide, any item of physical evidence will have a traceable audit trail by which the origin, past history, treatment, and analysis of the item can be determined.

4.2 By following these procedures, the chain of custody of any item of physical evidence will be maintained and documented.

## 5. Marking Evidence Upon Original Collection

### 5.1 General Requirements:

5.1.1 See Practice E1188 for the collection and preservation of items. Each item of evidence will be assigned a unique numeric or alphanumeric designator by the investigator who collects the evidence, or by someone designated to assign item numbers. The system used should ensure that items cannot be confused physically, and cannot be confused when referred to in records or other documents.

5.1.1.1 Similar evidence items may be collected as a group and assigned a single designator (for example, remains of fireworks paper collected within Sampling Quadrant 3, metal shavings from under lathe, pieces of broken glass from around northwest kitchen window, droplets of metal from area of origin). Follow the guidelines in Section 6 if any portion of the item is isolated from the remainder of the group (like for inspection, spot testing, or chemical analysis).

5.1.2 Whenever possible, sequential identifiers will be used for evidence associated with a particular incident, event, or scene.

5.1.3 The location and condition of each item should be documented prior to collection.

5.1.4 Each item should be properly protected in an appropriate manner.

5.1.5 Each item or its proximal container shall be marked or tagged with the following information:

5.1.5.1 Item number,

5.1.5.2 Case or incident number,

5.1.5.3 Identification of person who collected item,

5.1.5.4 Date item collected, and

5.1.5.5 Brief description.

5.1.6 If possible, the evidence should be sealed in a tamper-evident container.

5.1.7 See Practice **E1492** for further information on packaging and storing the evidence.

5.2 The following procedures are intended as an example of a procedure that will satisfy the requirements of **5.1**. They may be adapted to the requirements of a specific incident or agency as required.

5.2.1 At each scene, assign one individual to package, label, and inventory evidence.

5.2.2 Give each scene a separate identification number or alphanumeric. This may be the same as the incident or report number, or may be a combination of an incident or report number and a scene-specific number.

5.2.3 Give each item collected at a specific scene a unique sequential identifier.

5.2.4 Separately package and mark each item with the information called for in **5.1.5**.

## 6. Marking Items Produced During Examination in the Forensic Laboratory

### 6.1 General Requirements:

6.1.1 Any item isolated (sub-item), generated, or prepared during laboratory examination should be appropriately protected and the item itself or its proximal container marked with a unique designator that can be traced to the original evidence number. The system used should ensure that sub-items cannot be confused physically, and cannot be confused when referred to in records or other documents.

6.1.2 Laboratory records should reflect when the sub-item was isolated, by whom, how the sub-item was isolated, sample designation and description, packaging and storage conditions, and any analytical data.

6.2 The following is an example of a procedure that meets the requirements in **6.1-6.1.2**.

6.2.1 The isolated sub-item should be appropriately packaged and the sub-item or the container marked with the following information:

6.2.1.1 Laboratory case number,

6.2.1.2 Original item number,

6.2.1.3 Sub-item number,

6.2.1.4 Brief description of the item,

6.2.1.5 Date item prepared, and

6.2.1.6 Initials of examiner.

6.2.2 A typical numbering scheme is illustrated below:

Item 1—Coat  
 Item 1-1—Debris removed from front of coat  
 Item 1-1-1—Slide containing fiber(s) from debris  
 Item 1-1-2—Bundle containing hair from debris  
 Item 1-2—Debris from back of coat

## 7. Records

7.1 Contemporaneously made records should include the following information:

7.1.1 Date of receipt of evidence;

7.1.2 Method of packaging, marking and storage, specifically referring to packaging, marking, or storage that might affect the integrity of the evidence;

7.1.3 Details on items produced during examination in the laboratory as described in **6.2.1**, and

7.1.4 Information regarding the transfer of items to the level of detail required by your agency's policies, which shall include, at the minimum, the identification of both parties involved in the transfer and the date of the transfer.

## 8. Keywords

8.1 documentation; forensic science; labeling; physical evidence

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