Designation: E1492 – 11 (Reapproved 2017)

Standard Practice for Receiving, Documenting, Storing, and Retrieving Evidence in a Forensic Science Laboratory[1]

This standard is issued under the fixed designation E1492; the number immediately following the designation indicates the year of original adoption or, in the case of revision, the year of last revision. A number in parentheses indicates the year of last reapproval. A superscript epsilon (ε) indicates an editorial change since the last revision or reapproval.

1. Scope

1.1 This practice describes procedures and techniques for a forensic science laboratory to protect and document the integrity of items of physical evidence with respect to suitability for scientific testing, and admissibility as evidence in litigation.

1.2 This practice recommends generally accepted professional principles and operations, although the facts and issues of each situation require consideration, and frequently involve matters not expressly dealt with herein. Deviations from this practice should be based on specific articulable circumstances.

1.3 This practice 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.*

1.5 *This international standard was developed in accordance with internationally recognized principles on standardization established in the Decision on Principles for the Development of International Standards, Guides and Recommendations issued by the World Trade Organization Technical Barriers to Trade (TBT) Committee.*

2. Referenced Documents

2.1 *ASTM Standards:*[2]

E860 Practice for Examining And Preparing Items That Are Or May Become Involved In Criminal or Civil Litigation

E1188 Practice for Collection and Preservation of Information and Physical Items by a Technical Investigator

E1459 Guide for Physical Evidence Labeling and Related Documentation

3. Significance and Use

3.1 Prior to being presented in court, a foundation must be established showing how evidence was collected, who collected the evidence, where it was collected, who has had custody of the evidence, how the evidence has been processed, and when changes of custody have occurred.

3.2 Following the procedures outlined in this practice can serve to protect the chain of custody of the evidence while the evidence is at the forensic laboratory. Refer to Practice E1188 for chain of custody information and procedures prior to submission to the laboratory.

4. Procedure

4.1 *Receiving and Identifying the Evidence:*

4.1.1 When evidence from a particular incident is first brought to the laboratory, assign a unique numeric or alphanumeric laboratory case number, and use that case number when identifying the submitted evidence as well as all subsequent items of evidence submitted to the laboratory from the same incident or case. Laboratory numbering may adopt similar case numbers to those assigned by field investigators, consistent with Guide E1459.

4.1.1.1 Record the laboratory case number in a permanent laboratory record along with the following information: submitting agency and agency case number, date the case was received at the laboratory, name of the person receiving the evidence, and a listing of the items.

4.1.1.2 Identify the person delivering the evidence and record that person's name in the record of the chain of custody when evidence is delivered in person. Document shipping and receipt information for evidence received through a public carrier.

4.1.1.3 Items, or areas of items, that require protection from loss, cross-transfer or contamination shall be submitted in a sealed condition or sealed immediately upon receipt at the laboratory. When requested, the laboratory staff shall provide instructions to the submitter in proper methods of packaging evidence.

[1] This practice is under the jurisdiction of ASTM Committee E30 on Forensic Sciences and is the direct responsibility of Subcommittee E30.11 on Interdisciplinary Forensic Science Standards.

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

4.1.1.4 A laboratory employee competent to evaluate the material shall determine whether improper packaging has diminished or destroyed the value of the material for laboratory analysis.

4.1.1.5 If an item is submitted to the laboratory that has no apparent value, or diminished value as evidence, then the laboratory shall still take the necessary steps to preserve the chain of custody of that item. Notify the submitter as soon as practical regarding the value of the submitted evidence. Laboratory policy may dictate that improperly packaged evidence be returned to the submitter without analysis.

4.1.1.6 In the event that the material has value for laboratory analysis, the laboratory shall be responsible for ensuring that the evidence is properly packaged or repackaged and labeled at the time of submission.

4.1.2 Create and maintain a record that accurately reflects the chain of custody. The chain of custody shall reflect all pertinent information regarding internal transfers of evidence within the laboratory. Items sub-divided by the laboratory shall be labeled in accordance with Guide E1459 and shall be tracked through a documented chain of custody record.

4.1.3 If requested, provide a signed evidence receipt to the submitter.

4.1.4 Create a case file identified by the laboratory case number.

4.1.5 In addition to the laboratory case number, identify each item with a unique item designation. Laboratory designations may correspond to those assigned in the field.

4.1.6 If evidence received is other than as stated on the container or accompanying documents, or if the condition of the evidence is not as stated on the accompanying documents or container, document the discrepancy and notify the client or submitting agency as soon as possible.

4.1.7 Retain any packaging material necessary to maintain the chain of custody or which may be relevant to the integrity of the evidence

4.1.8 Maintain evidence in a secure condition while it is in custody of the laboratory.

4.2 *Documenting Test Procedures:*

4.2.1 Each individual laboratory shall maintain a current record identifying what evidence is in the laboratory for analysis, its current status, and the date the evidence is removed from the laboratory.

4.2.2 Retain all notes, test data, and other documentation generated during the inspection of the sample in a case file. If this is not possible, keep summary information or photocopies of original notes in the case file and refer to the location of the original documentation.

4.2.3 Retain copies of reports generated as the result of the examination or inspection of evidence in the case file.

4.2.4 Maintain case files in a secure location.

4.3 *Documenting Alteration of Evidence:*

4.3.1 Do not alter a piece of evidence any more than is absolutely necessary to obtain a valid analysis.

4.3.1.1 It is recognized that there are some types of analyses which require the consumption or substantial alteration of the evidence. Document such consumption or alteration of the evidence. When significant alteration or consumption of evidence is necessary for its evaluation, follow the procedures set forth in Practice E860, ensuring that the submitter is aware of and agrees that the evidence may be submitted to destructive testing, through either explicit or tacit acknowledgement or agreement.

4.3.2 Whenever possible, and when the accuracy of the analysis will not be affected, maintain an adequate portion of the evidence for testing by other methods or other laboratories.

4.3.3 Package and store items in a manner that best maintains sample integrity.

4.3.3.1 Different types of samples have different container requirements. The individual analyst is responsible for ensuring that the sample is properly packaged.

4.3.3.2 Document any conditions that prevent or interfere with the preservation of any sample in its submitted state.

4.3.3.3 If a laboratory has a written document or evidence storage policy, that policy should be followed. These types of policies are commonly found where samples are potentially hazardous or present in large volumes.

4.4 *Storage:*

4.4.1 Protect and store evidence in an orderly, traceable, and retrievable fashion and in a manner which preserves the integrity of the evidence.

4.4.2 Secure the evidence storage area from unauthorized entry.

4.4.3 Maintain adequate records for all evidence placed in the evidence storage area.

4.4.4 Establish procedures for routine maintenance of the contents of the evidence storage area.

4.5 *Documenting Removal of Evidence:*

4.5.1 When evidence is to be removed from the laboratory for return to the submitter, for presentation in court, for transfer to another facility or laboratory, for disposal, or for any other reason, make appropriate entries in laboratory records.

4.5.1.1 When evidence is picked up in person from the laboratory, the person receiving the evidence from the laboratory shall be properly identified and shall sign and date a receipt for the evidence. Maintain the signed receipt in the case file. Document shipping and delivery information for evidence returned or transferred to another facility via a public carrier.

5. Keywords

5.1 chain of custody; evidence documentation; evidence labeling; forensic science