

**CHAPTER 4**  
**EVIDENCE COLLECTION AND IDENTIFICATION**  
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## CHAPTER 4

### EVIDENCE COLLECTION AND IDENTIFICATION

1. PURPOSE. The purpose of this chapter is to provide guidance for the collection and proper identification of evidence, securing evidence in the field, and how to handle specific items and/or situations. The information presented is based upon industry best practices and recommendations from the California Department of Justice (DOJ), Bureau of Forensic Services (BFS).

2. CONSIDERATIONS PRIOR TO COLLECTION. Prior to collecting any evidence, the following key topics should be addressed. Refer to Chapter 3, Crime Scene Investigation and Management, of this manual, for further details on the topics below.

NOTE: If an investigator encounters a complex scene beyond the skills of the personnel assigned, the investigator should request the assistance of an allied agency or local laboratory crime scene investigator in order to ensure the highest level of integrity and preservation of the items to be collected.

a. Preservation of Evidence. The preservation of evidence should be a primary concern of the investigator. This can be accomplished through careful planning, restricting access to a scene, and knowledge of preferred methods for collecting various types of items.

b. Documentation of the Scene. Completely document the scene using notes, sketches, photographs, and video. The documentation of the scene will be ongoing throughout the collection process. A well-documented scene will enable the investigator to recreate the scene during the judicial process.

(1) Photograph the Scene. Depending on the nature of the crime and the area involved, the scene should be photographed prior to the collection of evidence. Video of the scene is also recommended.

c. Associated Evidence. Before collecting any physical evidence, consider associated evidence that could be destroyed during the collection process. For example:

(1) Storage or release of a stolen vehicle could destroy latent fingerprints.

(2) Careless handling of packaged drugs can destroy fingerprints potentially useful in establishing possession.

(3) Tire marks or footprints could be destroyed in the haste to gather other, more obvious evidence.

3. PHYSICAL EVIDENCE BULLETINS. The BFS has developed and published Physical Evidence Bulletins (PEB) as a resource to use for the collection of various types of evidence. The most current PEBs may be viewed at [oag.ca.gov/bfs/peb](http://oag.ca.gov/bfs/peb). Investigators should familiarize themselves with the PEBs in order to best preserve an item collected for testing and maintaining its integrity throughout the judicial process. (Refer to Figure 4-1 for a list of the PEB topics available.)

PEB	TITLE
MAP	Bureau of Forensic Services Facility Locations
PEB 1	Urine Forensic Alcohol
PEB 2	Blood Forensic Alcohol—Uniform Standards for Withdrawal, Handling, and Preservation of Blood Samples for Forensic Alcohol Analysis
PEB 3	Automobile Lights
PEB 4	Collection of Biological Materials and Reference Samples for DNA Analysis
PEB 4A	Authorization for Consumption of Biological Evidence Samples
PEB 5	Paint Evidence
PEB 6	Hair and Fiber Evidence
PEB 7	Collection of Evidence in Sexual Assault Investigations
PEB 8	Toxicology—Blood or Urine Samples for Forensic Toxicological Analysis
PEB 9	Glass Evidence
PEB 10	Fire Debris—Ignitable Liquid Evidence
PEB 12	Firearms Evidence Collection Procedures
PEB 13	Soil Evidence
PEB 15	Gunshot Residue (GSR) Collection
PEB 17	Collection and Submission of Latent Print Evidence
PEB 18	Digital Evidence Collection
PEB 22	Collecting Evidence from Human Bodies
PEB 23	Documentation of Shoe and Tire Impression Evidence
PEB 25	Controlled Substances
PEB 26	Clandestine Laboratory Samples
PEB 27	Toolmark Evidence Collection
PEB 29	Electronic Smoking Devices

Figure 4-1. Index of Physical Evidence Bulletins.

#### 4. SELECTION OF APPROPRIATE PACKAGING.

a. Containers and Packaging. Use suitable containers for the evidence involved. When evidence is collected, it should remain in the container in which it was originally discovered, if applicable. Specifically, drugs are most commonly discovered in some type of packaging prior to officers taking possession of the evidence. The drugs or other evidence should remain in the original packaging, be weighed, and then packaged in a departmentally approved manner. For other

items, the size of the container should correspond to the size of the object (i.e., use a small container to hold a small item). Also, consider the sample size, fragility, and toxicity. All containers should be new and clean to prevent contamination of samples. Containers, bags, jars, and other evidence supplies may be obtained through the Supply Services Unit. A list of available evidence supply items from the Supply Services Catalog can be accessed by clicking the following link [Supply Services Catalog](#).

b. Guidelines.

(1) Plastic, tamper-resistant bags should be used as often as possible to store evidence. They provide the best storage device for most evidence. Plastic bags shall not be used for packaging of items which may contain biological materials, such as blood, semen, saliva, blood stains, fingerprint evidence, living plant material (i.e., marijuana, psilocybin), or other moist items, as it can cause the specimens to retain moisture, which promotes bacterial growth and sample deterioration. Additionally, plastic bags should not be used when other agreements have been made with the crime laboratory or district or city attorney's office.

(2) Correspondence envelopes are often not sealed at the corners. Unsealed corners allow small particles of evidence to leak and become lost. If tape is used to seal the corners, avoid allowing the adhesive to contact the evidence. Adhesive on the tape can contaminate and invalidate testing of some types of evidence. Manila envelopes or kraft paper bags can be used for the storage of larger items and items which may contain biological materials such as clothing. Manila envelopes may also be subject to similar leakage; therefore, precautions should be taken.

(a) If it is necessary to use correspondence envelopes for the packaging of small particles of evidence that may be easily lost, place such items in a folded paper bindle to prevent loss of material, and secure with tape or a paper clip before placing in the container. Do not use staples to seal the paper bindle.

(b) Staples should not be used to seal evidence in any type of container. Staples make opening the container difficult, and they also leave small holes that can allow evidence to leak out.

c. Items of Unusual Size or Shape. Items which, due to their size or shape, do not lend themselves to standard packaging should be marked with a plastic ID tag. The plastic ID tag shall have the evidence number written on it in addition to a barcode label.

5. MARKING OF CONTAINERS AND LABELS.

- a. Evidence Tape Seals. All tape seals shall have the booking officer's initials, ID number, and date packaged written, so the markings are on both the evidence tape and the packaging.
- b. Attached Labels. Many kits, such as blood and urine kits, include labels. All of the information requested on the label should be completed.
- c. All Other Containers. All containers being submitted for storage in the evidence room shall have, at a minimum, the evidence number written on the packaging and have a barcode label affixed.

6. DOCUMENTING ITEM DESCRIPTION. When describing items for notation on a CHP 36, Property Receipt, or in the evidence records management system, they should never include assumptions or conclusions. Descriptions shall include where the item was located and who located the item if it is different from the booking officer. The date and time the item was collected should also be noted especially for complex scene investigations and search warrant seizures. Figure 4-2 shows a comparison of correctly and incorrectly completed descriptions.

- a. Excluded Information. Request for analysis, detailed descriptions of evidence, suspected origin of material, and similar information may be included in reports or on laboratory request forms, but should never be placed on exhibits, labels, or containers.

CORRECT	INCORRECT
PAINT FROM R/F OF 1990 FORD EXPLORER, LIC# OIA031, OFFICER C. OLIVER, ID #39898, 12/16/2024 @ 0730 HRS.	PAINT FROM R/F OF 1990 FORD, LIC# OIA031, WHICH TRANSFERRED FROM SUSPECT'S CAR. <i>(Includes officer's conclusion as to the origin of sample. This is inadmissible evidence unless you witnessed the accident and paint transfer. Officer's name, date, and time is not included.)</i>
PAINT FROM BUMPER OF SUSPECT VEHICLE. LIC# OIA031, OFFICER F. SMITH, ID #30648, 9/24/2022 @ 0400 HRS. <i>(All essential information included. Officer removed paint from bumper of suspect's vehicle which carried this license number.)</i>	PAINT FROM BUMPER OF SUSPECT VEHICLE FOR SPECTROGRAPHIC ANALYSIS AND COMPARISON WITH PAINT ON VICTIM'S CAR. <i>(Do not attempt to tell the laboratory which type of analysis to do. This is a container label and essential information is missing.)</i>
STAIN FROM HOOD OF 1992 INFINITY, LIC# VJH 747, SERGEANT S. HALL, ID #30348, 4/5/2020 @ 2230 HRS.	BLOOD FROM HOOD OF 1992 INFINITY, LIC# VJH 747, SERGEANT S. HALL, ID #30348, 4/5/2020 @ 2230 HRS. <i>(What if this stain is not blood? This label again includes a conclusion by the officer.)</i>
POSSIBLE FIBER MATERIAL SAMPLED FROM DAMAGED R/F AREA OF 1999 BMW 325i, LIC# 2EXN106, OFFICER. M. RUIZ, ID #30811, 6/7/2026 @ 0930 HRS.	FIBERS FROM FENDER OF SUSPECT'S CAR FOR COMPARISON TO VICTIM'S CLOTHING. <i>(Labels are for identification and not a place to give instructions or make requests. The above is incomplete for identification purposes and it's possible the fibers will turn out to be shredded vegetation or other material.)</i>

Figure 4-2. Examples of correct and incorrect notations.

7. SITUATIONS OR ITEMS REQUIRING SPECIAL HANDLING.

a. Large Quantities of Controlled Substances. Large quantities of controlled substances in excess of 10 pounds in gross weight, or 2 pounds for growing or harvested cannabis, may be destroyed without a court order pursuant to Section 11479 of the California Health and Safety Code (HSC) so long as specific requirements are satisfied. These requirements include random sampling and photographs of the seizure (refer to the section for specific information). It is important to note, only the excess (the amount greater than the 10 pounds of the controlled substance, or the amount greater than the 2 pounds of the cannabis) may be destroyed. To comply with the requirements of HSC Section 11479, the involved Division commander is the Commissioner's designee for purposes of destruction of controlled substances in excess of the aforementioned weights. No

action shall be taken toward the destruction of controlled substances pursuant to HSC Section 11479 without the approval of the Division commander and consultation with the Office of Internal Affairs (OIA). This section is primarily applied to large drug seizures associated with clandestine laboratories.

b. Large Quantities of Cannabis Products. Generally, the transportation of cannabis for commercial purposes by persons and entities licensed by the Bureau of Cannabis Control (BCC) or other cannabis control agencies is legal and governed by administrative regulations. This may include large quantities of cannabis and cannabis products. Violations of administrative regulations are not enforceable by the Department and shall not be the sole basis of a seizure. However, administrative violations (e.g., person transporting cannabis without a BCC license) may be an indicator of criminal activity and may warrant further investigation. Prior to seizing any amount of cannabis, officers must clearly identify a violation of a criminal law and take enforcement action (e.g., issue a citation or make an arrest). Officers seeking to verify cannabis licenses or report administrative violations may contact BCC on their 24-hour law enforcement contact number at [REDACTED] or by e-mailing [enforcement@cannabis.ca.gov](mailto:enforcement@cannabis.ca.gov). Refer to HPM 100.69, General Law Enforcement Policy Manual, for additional information.

(1) If an investigation results in the seizure of a large quantity of cannabis or other cannabis products for criminal offenses, and an Area is unable to adequately store the amount seized due to insufficient secured space within their evidence room, arrangements shall be made with an adjoining Area for storage of the seized items.

(2) The laws regarding cannabis products are evolving constantly and every county varies in its prosecution of criminal offenses for illegally possessed cannabis. Area commanders are responsible for meeting with their respective district or city attorneys and discussing the handling of large seizures of cannabis and other cannabis products such as edibles and concentrated cannabis. Consider discussing thresholds for what constitutes a large seizure and the storage capacity concerns of the Area. If a threshold amount is established, discuss an amount that must be retained for prosecution along with any additional documentation such as photographs and/or video, as well as the possible destruction for any amounts in excess of what is necessarily retained. Any agreed upon procedures between the district or city attorney and an Area shall be incorporated into the Area's standard operating procedures.

c. Clandestine Laboratories. Clandestine laboratories contain extremely dangerous chemicals. These chemicals can be explosive and cause death. A clandestine laboratory shall be treated as a hazardous chemical spill incident. The

criminal investigation should, whenever possible, be conducted by allied agency personnel, such as a DOJ Clandestine Lab Team or a Narcotics Task Force Team. They have the specialized equipment (chemical protective suits, breathing apparatus) needed to work safely in the hazardous environment of a clandestine laboratory. They also have the expertise necessary for successful prosecution of the case. If they assume the investigation, they will also arrange for the hazardous waste clean-up. For the most up-to-date contact information for the DOJ, Bureau of Investigation, refer to their website at [oag.ca.gov/bi](http://oag.ca.gov/bi).

(1) Disposal of Chemicals and Lab Equipment. If Department personnel conduct the investigation, disposal of the chemicals and lab equipment shall be handled at the scene by a licensed hazardous waste disposal contractor after the requirements of HSC Section 11479 have been met. Other than the required samples (specific amounts are contained in HSC Section 11479), chemicals and lab equipment will not be kept as evidence and shall be well documented and photographed.

d. Firearms. All weapons shall be unloaded and made safe prior to transport, being careful not to destroy potential evidence such as fingerprints, blood, or DNA. If the firearm is loaded, the chambered round of ammunition should be carefully removed and placed in a small envelope separate from any other ammunition. Ammunition located in a magazine should remain in the magazine when forensic testing for fingerprints, blood, or DNA of the firearm is needed. Forensic testing shall be completed prior to test firing the firearm to obtain casings for entry into the National Integrated Ballistics Identification Network/Integrated Ballistics Identification System (NIBIN/IBIS) database.

NOTE: Ammunition required for the purpose of obtaining casings for entry into the NIBIN/IBIS database shall be requested from the Academy, Weapons Control Unit (WCU). A memorandum, with the signature of the Area Commander, requesting the amount and type of ammunition required shall be submitted to the WCU. Please contact your Division Property and Evidence Program Coordinator or the OIA, Evidence Unit, for a template of the memorandum.

(1) Issuance of Receipts for Firearms. Pursuant to Section 33800 of the California Penal Code (PC), when the Department takes custody of a firearm, a receipt describing the firearm shall be issued to the person who possessed the firearm. The receipt is the yellow copy of the CHP 36. The receipt shall include the following:

- (a) A description of the firearm that includes, at a minimum, the make and model of the firearm.
- (b) The serial number and other identification or markings on the firearm.

- (c) Where the firearm may be recovered.
- (d) Any applicable time limit for recovery.
- (e) The date after which the owner or possessor may recover the firearm pursuant to PC Section 33850.

NOTE: Serial numbers on firearms manufactured prior to the Gun Control Act of 1968 may be located anywhere on the firearm. Additionally, serial numbers may not exist on shotguns or .22 caliber rifles. Contact the OIA or the Academy, Weapons Control Unit, for additional assistance.

(2) If a pistol is seized at a scene and requires any type of forensic testing and a gun box is not available, the pistol should be placed in a clean manila envelope for transport back to the office for proper packaging. If a rifle is seized and requires any type of forensic testing, every effort should be made to have a rifle box brought to the scene in order to transport the rifle back to the office for proper packaging.

e. Computer Evidence. The vulnerability of electronically stored information requires special precautions be taken to ensure its retrieval at a later time. Therefore, the following procedures for home personal computers or laptop computers should be followed in order to ensure proper preservation. These procedures are for first responders that are not trained as Computer Forensic Examiners/Analysts.

NOTE: For additional assistance during normal business hours, contact the Computer Crimes Investigation Unit (CCIU) at (916) 450-2200, or after hours, call the Emergency Notification Tactical Alert Center (ENTAC) at (916) 843-4199.

- (1) Immediately restrict access to the computer and immediate area surrounding the computer, since forensic evidence can be destroyed with a simple click of a mouse.
- (2) Do not use the computer or attempt to search for evidence.
- (3) Photograph the entire computer scene, information associated with wire configurations, peripheral hardware, and model/serial number tags. Accurately log the time and date any photographs were taken. Diagram the scene, label cords, and any connected devices.
- (4) If the computer is off, leave it off.

(5) If the computer is on and something is displayed on the monitor, photograph the screen. If the computer is on and the screen is blank, move the mouse or press the space bar to display the active image on the screen. Photograph the screen.

(6) Prior to turning off a running computer, if there is a suspicion that the running computer contains important, volatile information, particularly data that could be encrypted, immediate contact with CCIU is advised. Turning off or disconnecting such computers may lead to irreversible loss of critical evidence or trigger encryption mechanisms that render the data inaccessible. The CCIU's guidance is essential to prevent potential data loss and ensure the secure preservation of digital evidence under these sensitive conditions.

(7) Unplug the power cord from the computer. Using the standard Windows shutdown process to turn off the computer may risk deleting or altering potential evidence. Therefore, it is advisable to avoid shutting down the computer through its normal operating system procedures. If the computer is a laptop and does not shutdown when the power cord is removed, locate and remove the battery. If the battery is removed, do not return it to the battery compartment. If the laptop computer battery cannot be removed (Apple MacBooks, etc.), shut down the computer as normal.

(8) In order to minimize the possibility of a person removing data or damaging a computer by remote access, the computer shall be removed from the network by disconnecting the network cable from the back of the computer. The network cable will usually resemble a telephone cord/connection, but will be slightly larger in size.

NOTE: It is important to note that some modern laptop/tablet computers often have internal wireless communication capabilities and could potentially be manipulated by the owner if they have power and the ability to receive a wireless signal. Consider using a Faraday bag or similar device to block communication to the computer.

(9) Package the computer components (e.g., monitor, computer case, and any additional devices), cords, and any software from the scene in nonstatic containers (e.g., paper bags or cardboard boxes). Note the locations where evidence was collected with a detailed map. Look for passwords, user name/accounts, instruction manuals, notes, or any related material in the immediate area. Document all steps involved in the seizure of the computer and components.

(10) To prevent accidental destruction of data while transporting computer evidence, place the packaged material away from the patrol vehicle's radio

system. If possible, place the evidence on the floorboard in the back seat of the patrol unit.

f. Mobile Devices, Cell Phones, Tablets, and Digital Cameras. Mobile devices, cell phones, and digital cameras may store data directly to internal memory or may contain removable media. The following information details the proper seizure and preservation of these devices and associated removable media:

NOTE: For additional assistance during normal business hours, contact CCIU at (916) 450-2200, or after hours, call ENTAC at (916) 843-4199.

- (1) If the device is off, leave it off.
  - (a) Photograph the device, noting any unique identifiers.
  - (b) If possible, remove the battery.
  - (c) Store the device in a Faraday bag or similar RFID-blocking container. Some mobile devices can communicate through low power Bluetooth even when they appear to be off.
- (2) If the device is on, leave it on. Powering down the device could enable a password requirement, thus preventing access to the evidence.
  - (a) Photograph the device and its screen display(s) if possible, noting any unique identifiers or account information.
  - (b) Attempt to place the device in "Airplane" mode.
  - (c) Store the device in a Faraday bag or similar RFID-blocking container to block connectivity to cellular, Wi-Fi, GPS, Bluetooth, or other wireless signals.
  - (d) Keep the device powered on. When possible, utilize a portable power bank packaged within a Faraday bag and contact your local forensic lab or CCIU as soon as possible as the device and power source may become depleted.
- (3) Label and collect all cables, including the power supply, data transfer cables, and any cradles, and transport with the device. Keep the device charged. The analysis of the seized device must be performed by a specialist prior to battery discharge to prevent the possibility of data being lost.

(4) Storage media are used to store data from electronic devices. These items differ in physical size and vary in memory quantity. Traditional digital storage media are often in plain view and include cell phones, digital cameras, CDs/DVDs, Unmanned Aerial Vehicles (also known as drones), and other digital portable storage devices. Other nontraditional storage media devices include printers with smart media or internal memory, digital video recorders, answering machines, global positioning system (GPS) units, digital voice recorders, televisions, and gaming consoles. There are also digital media storage products that are designed to disguise or conceal their true purpose and are easily hidden and/or transported. The items can be concealed or disguised as wristbands, pens, watches, earrings, pocketknives, credit cards, toys, and other common objects.

(5) When seizing storage media as evidence, make sure to collect the instruction manuals and any documentation or notes associated with the storage media being seized. Document the steps involved in the seizure of the storage media and keep them away from magnets, radio transmitters, and other potentially damaging devices.

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