


<p>RABUN COUNTY SHERIFF'S OFFICE</p>  <p>General Order Number: 4.22</p>	<p>Date of Issue</p> <p>2/23/2016</p>	<p>Effective Date</p> <p>2/23/2016</p>	<p>Revision Date</p>
<p>Subject: HANDLING AND PROCESSING EVIDENCE</p>	<p>Amends:</p>	<p>Rescinds:</p>	
<p>Index as: Evidence, General Policies and Procedures, Handling and Processing Evidence</p>	<p>State Certification Standards:</p>		

PURPOSE

The purpose of this General Order is to prescribe the policies and procedures of the Rabun County Sheriff's Office regarding the collecting, handling and processing of Evidence.

STATEMENT OF POLICY

It shall be the policy of the Rabun County Sheriff's Office that the collection, handling, and processing of all evidence shall be done in accordance with accepted forensic procedures to ensure that all effective investigative functions can be performed.

DISCUSSION

Physical evidence is of major importance in criminal cases, particularly in those instances where there are no witnesses. The investigation of crime and the prosecution of offenders require that information be obtained through the application of scientific knowledge and methods. In order to use laboratory support services, physical evidence must be identified, collected, properly preserved, and transported to the laboratory for evaluation.

Note: A more detailed explanation of the Crime Scene Section is found in the Criminal Investigations Division policies and procedures.

DEFINITIONS

CHAIN OF CUSTODY — The continuity of custody of material and items collected as physical evidence. The connotation, under the law is that the item or material introduced into the court must be proven to be the same as that obtained initially and delivered to the laboratory for examination.

CRIME SCENE — The location where the crime occurred or where the indication of the crime exists.

CRIME SCENE PROCESSING — The specific actions taken at a crime or accident scene, consisting of the taking of photographs, preparing the crime or accident sketch, and the collecting and preserving of evidence.

CRIME SCENE PROCESSOR — The person or persons charged with the responsibility for processing the crime scene, but those primary duties are different, such as a traffic officer or detective.

CRIME SCENE SPECIALIST/TECHNICIAN — A person who processes the crime scene, who may have a higher level of training than the crime scene processor and whose primary duty is crime scene processing.

I. GENERAL PROCEDURES

- A. A Crime Scene Unit technician, a Georgia Bureau of Investigations technician (if CSU technician is not available), departmental crime scene technician will be available on a 24 hour basis and may be requested to process the crime scene for physical evidence in the following circumstances:
 1. Homicide, suicide, or other death investigations;
 2. Rape or sexual assaults cases;
 3. Arson;
 4. Robbery;
 5. Burglary;
 6. Recovered stolen vehicles; and/or
 7. Aggravated assaults.
- B. Whenever the following types of physical evidence are collected from a crime scene, a known standard sample must also be collected for comparison by the GBI Crime Laboratory. The location from where the samples are taken is critical for the Crime Laboratory and should be documented as prescribed below. All standards for comparison will be collected in accordance with GBI laboratory procedures:
 1. Blood;
 2. Hair;
 3. Saliva;

4. Semen;
5. Skin and tissue samples;
6. Bones or bone fragments;
7. Fibers and fabrics;
8. Paint;
9. Grass and soil;
10. Wood, glass, and other similar building materials;
11. Metal;
12. Tool marks; and
13. Footwear.

C. Transfer of Custody

1. The initial collecting officer will initiate a chain of custody by preparing the Property and Evidence Form. Each officer handling or processing evidence will properly account for its care, preservation, and safeguarding and will complete the Property and Evidence Form with the following information:
 - a. Date of transfer;
 - b. Receiving person's name and functional responsibility; and
 - c. Reason for transfer.
2. No evidence will be stored in desks; offices, personal lockers, case files, or other unauthorized places. All evidence will be turned over to the Property and Evidence Officer or secured in an evidence locker prior to the end of the officer's shift.

II. FIRST RESPONDERS

First responders should be familiar that DNA evidence is often fragile, can be contaminated and need to take precautions to protect the samples by marking or taping off areas where the evidence is observed. First responders should be aware of the biohazard potential of the biological samples and take the appropriate precautions, i.e. gloves.

Samples of blood, semen, or saliva can be collected using swabs, or if the stains are on fabric, the sample could be a swatch cut from the fabric. Hair samples can be collected using tape lifts or hairs can be collected in small envelopes, paper or lab folds. Skin, tissue or bone fragments can be collected using the best available packaging as long as the samples are packaged in a way not to degrade the sample.

The samples should be logged on a property and evidence sheet and placed in property and evidence. A GBI submission form must be completed and submitted with the DNA evidence to be sent to the GBI Crime Lab or other DNA certified lab(s).

Training in general crime scene processing, including the proper collection techniques for DNA, Scene Evaluation/Preservation, Photographs, Fingerprinting, and Evidence Collection will be conducted by the Rabun County Crime Scene Investigator, supervised by the Training Division and any Crime Scene Technician courses provided by the Georgia Peace Officers Standards and Training Council.

III. REPORT PREPARATION & DOCUMENTATION

1. Officers who process a crime or accident scene will prepare a Supplemental Incident Report that thoroughly documents the facts and circumstances surrounding the collection of all items of evidence. The following information should be recorded in the report:
 - a. Date and time of arrival at the incident scene;
 - b. Location of the crime or accident;
 - c. Identity of the victim(s);
 - d. Name of the suspect(s) if known;
 - e. A description of the specific actions performed at the scene, including: photographs taken; video recordings made; whether measurements were made; the identity of others present or involved in the processing of the crime scene; and
 - f. An itemized inventory of all items of evidence seized.
2. Crime scene sketches are prepared when appropriate, to supplement notes and photographs and to provide accurate measurements of sizes and distances of objects and their relationship to other objects. The sketch should accurately depict the locations and relationships of pertinent evidence, to include any bodies, weapons, tools, or other objects used in the commission of the crime. The following identifying information can be included in but not limited to the crime scene sketch:
 - a. Date and time of preparation;
 - b. Location of the scene by address, floor, and/or room number;
 - c. The identity of the person preparing the sketch;
 - d. The relationship of the crime scene to other buildings or permanent objects;
 - e. The direction of "north;"
 - f. The location of physical evidence recovered; and
 - g. Legends describing items too small or too difficult to duplicate in their exact shape or scale.

IV. CRIME SCENE PROCESSING PROCEDURES

- A. The initial officer will perform a preliminary investigation to include the following activities:

1. Determine the safety of the scene;
 2. Provide aid to the injured and comfort the victim;
 3. Determine if an offense has been committed and, if so, the exact nature of the offense;
 4. Protect the crime scene to ensure that evidence is not lost or contaminated and, as necessary, arrange for the collection of evidence. This includes strictly limiting personnel in the crime scene;
 5. Determine the boundaries of the crime scene, to include all areas that may reasonably be searched for evidence;
 6. Mark the crime scene with "crime scene tape" as soon as possible;
 7. No item should be moved, disturbed, or in any manner contaminated; and
 8. Record any alterations made at the scene due to emergency assistance to victims or by those reporting the crime.
- B. Crime scene access will be restricted to only those who are directly involved in the investigation.
- C. A **Crime Scene Log** will be started in cases such as homicides, airplane crashes, aggravated assaults, rapes, or officer involved shootings, whereby the names of all individuals having access to the crime scene shall be recorded on the log. This includes the names of all emergency response personnel, victims, witnesses, or other law enforcement personnel who enter the crime scene area.
1. Other initial crime scene activities can include:
 2. Observing and recording all conditions, events, and remarks;
 3. Determine the identity of suspect(s) and effect an arrest if it can be accomplished either at the scene or through immediate pursuit;
 4. Furnishing other units with descriptions, methods and direction of flight, and other relevant information concerning wanted persons or vehicle;
 5. Identify and locate all witnesses and, if on the scene, request they remain available to be interviewed;
 6. Canvass immediate area for additional witnesses or others who may have knowledge of the incident;
 7. Interview the complainant, the victim(s) and each witness and determine in detail the exact circumstances of the offense;
 8. Note license tags of vehicles parked in the area; and
 9. Remain on the scene until the arrival of CID personnel and brief CID investigators who may assume the follow-up investigation.

- D. The following progression of tasks should be accomplished during the processing of a crime scene:
1. Photograph and/or video record the entire area;
 2. Locate and protect specific items of evidence;
 3. Preserve any evidence that may be contaminated or that has a potentially limited life span;
 4. Make a rough sketch, if needed;
 5. Process for latent fingerprints;
 6. Mark items to be seized; and
 7. Collect items in accordance with the procedures outlined below.
- E. Blood, urine, semen, and other body fluids will be collected by using procedures established by the GBI Crime Laboratory and will be marked, sealed, and tagged as appropriate to identify and preserve them for analysis.
- F. When necessary to collect blood samples from a living or deceased person, the sample shall be collected by trained personnel and placed in an approved biohazard container suitable for transport.
- G. Fresh or wet blood from a crime scene will be collected using sterile cotton swab, placed in a sterile container, sealed, marked, tagged, and if necessary, refrigerated in the Property and Evidence Section. Care should be taken not to expose blood samples to heat, humidity, and sunlight. A control sample must also be collected.
- H. Whenever bloodstained clothing is collected, it shall be air-dried and placed in a paper bag, and submitted to the Crime Lab.
- I. When the stain is located on another object, the entire object that has the bloodstain on it should be seized and submitted for evaluation. When the stain is located on a wall, floor, or other object that cannot be submitted, one of the following procedures should be used:
1. For stains on fixed objects too bulky to transport, the officer may cut off that portion of the object bearing the stain. If the object cannot be cut, such as concrete floors or metal safes, scraping may be taken and placed into a pillbox or onto a clean piece of paper for placement into a container;
 2. Bloodstain on floors, counters, walls, door facings or other surfaces may be removed by using a cotton ball or swab moistened with saline. Swab the bloodstains with the fibers, concentrating the stain on the fibers as much as possible. The swab should then be air dried and placed in an evidence bag, sealed, marked, and tagged;
 3. Bloodstains appearing on porous objects, such as wood or earth, the portion of the material containing the stain should be placed in a clean container, labeled, and sealed to prevent loss through leakage. Swabbing is the preferred technique and the sample must be placed in a paper container.
- J. Other body fluids, such as saliva, urine, perspiration, pus, human milk, nasal mucous and tears will be handled with the same procedures as blood and semen.

- K. Seminal fluid deposited outside the body on sheets, garments, or furniture, should be collected. Clothing items of the victim and suspect shall first be placed between sheets of paper, cardboard, or similar material, and then placed in separate paper bags and properly tagged and marked. Any evidence that is submitted to the Crime Lab for comparison shall be placed in the appropriate packs provided in the rape evidence kit and must be properly tagged and marked.
- L. Fingerprints may be recovered from a variety of surfaces including smooth surfaces, glass, paper, metal, plastic, desk and counter tops:
 - 1. Where the possibility of latent prints exists, the investigator shall properly dust for the prints;
 - 2. When a print becomes visible after dusting, the officer may, if possible, photograph the print on the original object. After photographing, the print(s) may be lifted by using latent print lifting tape;
 - 3. The lifted print shall be put on a card and the officer shall note on the back of the card the date, time, location of incident and print location, incident/case number and the officer's name; and
 - 4. When requesting a comparison of latent prints with fingerprints of a known suspect, the requesting officer will include inked finger and/or palm prints and/or the fingerprint classification number of the suspect.
- M. Hair samples will be placed in a paper bag or envelope. When obtaining scalp, facial, or pubic samples from an individual, a minimum of 25 randomly pulled hairs is necessary. Medical personnel will obtain such samples. A brush or a comb can be used to obtain some of the hairs for a standard.
- N. Before handling or moving any computer equipment, officers should photograph or videotape the equipment in its original position, including any information displayed on any monitors or output devices. Do not remove any disks from any drives. All software, disks and manuals in the area of the equipment being recovered should also be collected. Leave the equipment on and unplug the power source. Once the power is disconnected, all wires and connections will be labeled so that they can be reconnected later exactly as they were found. All items connected to the computer being recovered, such as mouses, printers, monitors, scanners, etc. should be recovered as well. Computers will only be processed for evidence by a specially trained computer data recovery specialist. Officers will not attempt to recover data themselves unless they have received the proper computer data recovery training. Computers and related items will be placed into evidence in accordance with all other procedures established in this General Order.

V. CRIME SCENE PROCESSING EQUIPMENT AND SUPPLIES

- Personnel who are involved with crime scene processing are provided with the necessary equipment and supplies in order to properly collect and preserve evidence for future judicial proceedings.
- A. Field fingerprints kits are issued for the recovery of latent fingerprints.
 - B. Cameras are issued as appropriate and video recording equipment is available for the documentation of crime scenes and evidentiary material.
 - C. Necessary supplies are provided for the completion of crime scene diagrams and sketches.

- D. Other items to properly preserve evidentiary material are available. These include various size plastic bags; brown paper bags for evidence that requires air; tags for large items; and sexual assault kits.
- E. Accident Investigation personnel are provided with camera recording equipment; supplies for diagramming and marking physical positions of evidentiary items; measuring devices; and other equipment to properly reconstruct traffic crashes when required.

VI. PHOTOGRAPHING AND VIDEO TAPING PROCEDURES

Legal precedents require that the use of photographs and/or video recordings in a court meet certain guidelines:

1. The object photographed must be material, competent, and relevant to the crime scene;
2. The photographs or video recordings must not be planned to excite emotional reactions from the viewer nor should they attempt to prejudice the court or jury;
3. The photographer must be able to testify to the accuracy of the crime scene as depicted in the photograph/video recording;
4. The photograph must show a true and accurate representation of the crime scene;
5. A chain of custody must be established showing a transfer of developed photographs from the officer to the court; and
6. The operator of the equipment should be knowledgeable in the mechanisms of the camera or video recorder used.

The crime scene will be photographed systematically to guarantee a visual image of the entire area and all minute and circumstantial trace evidence:

7. Photographs should be taken at a sufficient distance to include the entire area of the crime scene;
8. Photographs should be taken to ensure that sufficient detail is obtained and to tie the crime scene together in order to tell a visual story to the viewer of the total circumstances surrounding the incident. The scene should reflect the location of the evidence, weapon(s), body, and other pertinent details of the crime;
9. Close-ups will be used to record individual items or small sections of larger items. The item should appear in the full view photograph to show the relationship to other objects;
10. Photographs with and without scale may be taken of latent prints, footwear impressions, tire impressions, blood stains or patterns, tool marks, hair and fiber evidence, and other such items considered trace evidence which would not normally appear in other photographs;
11. Artificial light from floodlights or electric flash may be necessary in dark or poorly lit areas;
12. When appropriate, videotaping may supplement, but will not replace, still photography of a crime scene;

13. The officer who took the photographs at the incident scene will download the photos to two CD's and record the following on the Property and Evidence form as well as the CD:
 - a. Case number;
 - b. Name of investigator or officer; and
 - c. Development instructions, if any.
14. Once the CD's are complete they will be treated as evidence as required and secured in accordance with the procedures in the departmental Property and Evidence General Order.

All videotapes will be safeguarded as other forms of evidence. All tapes are subject to the same security restrictions and chain of custody safeguards as prescribed in the department's Property and Evidence General Order:

15. Each tape will be properly identified;
16. The tape will be turned in to the Evidence and Property Officer with a completed Property and Evidence Form;
17. The original tape will be stored and maintained until it is determined that the tape or any portion on the tape is no longer needed for evidentiary purposes;
18. Recorded information may be duplicated for departmental use and/or temporary release to the following:
 - a. District Attorney's Office;
 - b. Solicitor's Office; or
 - c. Judicial official.

VII. SUBMISSION OF EVIDENCE TO THE CRIME LABORATORY

- A. The investigator or officer who is assigned to a particular case is responsible for requesting laboratory examinations and for identifying what forensic test(s) is to be performed.
- B. The examination request form will be forwarded with the evidence to the GBI Crime Lab by the Property and Evidence Officer or by the responsible detective/officer if the Property and Evidence Officer cannot make the transport.
- C. All evidence will be packaged in accordance with the procedures established by the GBI Crime Lab.
- D. Evidence must be preserved so as to retain its integrity and original condition to the maximum extent possible.
- E. The following documents will accompany evidence brought to the GBI Crime Lab:
 1. Property and Evidence Form to maintain the chain of custody; and

2. GBI Laboratory evidence examination request form.
- F. All evidence brought to the GBI Crime Laboratory for examination will be properly receipted for in accordance with the GBI Crime Lab procedures.
 - G. When evidence is released from the GBI Crime Laboratory, the agency official that obtains custody of the evidence will sign and date the Property and Evidence Form.
 - H. The GBI Crime Laboratory provides a report of examination findings on their official website as standard procedure. A copy of the GBI Crime Laboratory written report will be placed with the case file.



By Order of the Sheriff: **Chad K. Nichols**
Sheriff, Rabun County