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1/INTRODUCTION

1/100 PURPOSE OF THIS GUIDE

The information in this guide is being provided to our submitting agencies as an aid to acquiring forensic services, whether at the Jefferson County Regional Crime Laboratory or through another entity. This information is meant to help with the collection, packaging and submission of evidence, as well as to explain Laboratory procedures regarding evidence analysis. Our goal is to provide useful information that is current and easily accessible. If you have suggestions for additional information to be included in this guide, please contact the Laboratory.

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1/200 LABORATORY MISSION AND RESPONSIBILITY

The mission of the Jefferson County Regional Crime Laboratory is to provide meaningful, timely, unbiased, and accurate forensic services to the community. The Laboratory is committed to an ongoing program to ensure the highest quality and consistency of Laboratory services.

It is the responsibility of the Jefferson County Regional Crime Laboratory to perform all testing and/or calibration activities in a manner to conform to the latest version of the ISO/IEC 17025 criteria, the ANAB Forensic Science Testing and Calibration Laboratories Accreditation Requirements, the laws pertaining to forensic laboratory accreditation mandated by the state of Texas, other Texas laws, and the criteria set by any other regulatory authority or organization providing recognition that is sought by the Laboratory. Links to the Laboratory's accreditation certificates and scope are posted on the home page of the Laboratory website at <https://www.co.jefferson.tx.us/Sheriff/crimelab>.

1/300 STANDARD OF SERVICE

The Jefferson County Regional Crime Laboratory serves the community by analyzing evidence that may be of interest in criminal cases, and by performing the calibration of breath alcohol instrumentation.

The Laboratory is responsible for the analysis of physical evidence submitted by local law enforcement agencies. In addition to federal and state agencies, the Laboratory provides services for law enforcement agencies in Jefferson and Orange Counties, and other agencies as approved by the Jefferson County Sheriff or his/her designee.

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The examinations conducted by the Laboratory are listed below, according to the discipline of the Laboratory that performs the test or calibration.

Seized Drugs

Identification of controlled substances and dangerous drugs

Methods utilized:

- Weight determinations
- Spot (color) tests
- Macro and microscopic evaluations
- Chromatography (TLC, GC-FID)
- Mass spectrometry (GC-MS)
- Infrared spectroscopy (FT-IR)

Firearms

Firearms processing

Firearms comparison and identification

Serial number restoration

NIBIN Eligibility

Methods utilized:

- Caliber determinations
- Length determinations
- Macro and microscopic evaluations
- Function testing
- Chemical or magnetic serial number restoration

Forensic Biology

Screening of evidence items for blood and trace evidence

Bloodstain identification

Methods utilized:

- Blood screening test (blood color test)
- Blood confirmatory test (blood immunological test)
- Physical evidence screening, including ALS
- Trace evidence collection

Toxicology

Alcohol content in blood

Maintenance of Jefferson County's Breath Testing Program – breath alcohol measuring instruments

Methods utilized:

- Chromatography (headspace GC-FID)
- Infrared spectroscopy (IR)

Crime Scene (all disciplines of the Laboratory respond to Crime Scenes)

Performing spot tests, confirmatory tests for blood and evidence collection

Methods utilized:

- Blood screening test (color test)

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- Blood confirmatory test (immunological test)
- Physical screening, including ALS
- Evidence collection

Some evidence that is submitted is evaluated and/or tested, but may need additional analysis beyond the scope of testing employed at the Jefferson County Regional Crime Laboratory (DNA analysis, blood toxicology other than alcohol, GSR, hair & fiber, paint, etc.). Although preliminary or in some cases partial analysis may be performed at this Laboratory for these cases, it is understood by the submitting agency that these additional tests will not be performed at this facility, and that the evidence, case information, and laboratory reports may be forwarded to another laboratory, as necessary, at the discretion of the Forensic Scientist assigned to the case. Evidence is usually forwarded to the Texas Department of Public Safety Laboratory system, unless other arrangements are made with the submitting agency or prosecuting official. Since the Laboratory does not house an IBIS unit, test fires and other firearms evidence will be returned to the submitting agency and may then be forwarded for entry in the IBIS system at the discretion of the agency.

By accepting evidence into the Laboratory, the Laboratory is not agreeing to test all of the items submitted using the entire capabilities of the Laboratory. Policies are in force to expedite the sampling and processing of cases (see 1/400 below), and the Forensic Scientists in the Laboratory will make the final determination of which samples will be tested, and to what extent, as well as which methods will be utilized. If deviations from standard methods occur, they shall be technically justified. All deviations that do not meet the needs of the submitting agency will be communicated. The Laboratory reserves the right to re-test any submitted evidence as part of the Laboratory's quality control program (refer also to section 2/700 of this guide). If a case is re-tested as part of this program, the submitting agency will be notified.

By submitting evidence to the Laboratory for forensic evaluation or analysis, the submitting agency is agreeing to the Laboratory's standard of service and acknowledges the Laboratory will determine the appropriate methods for testing and issue reports in accordance with Laboratory procedure, as appropriate.

1/400 POLICY FOR EXPEDITING CASEWORK

In order to process evidence in a timely manner and expedite forensic casework, certain decisions must be made regarding evidence analysis which may result in some items not being subjected to testing.

Prior to the analysis of evidentiary material, an evaluation of the important elements of the case shall be obtained through communication with the submitting agency and/or prosecuting officials (e.g., submission forms, police reports, medical reports, discussions with investigators). This evaluation shall include an assessment of the evidence and its relevance. Depending on the circumstances of each case, the Scientist will determine which exhibits will be analyzed and which tests will be performed, and shall also have the option to limit screening and/or testing to probative evidence only.

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For suspected controlled substance cases, a sampling plan may be used where only a specific number or weight of sufficiently similar items is analyzed. Generally, once a penalty weight threshold has been reached, the Scientist will not analyze any similar remaining evidence in that case. In general, drug paraphernalia will not be analyzed unless it is the only exhibit submitted in the case.

For cases (such as homicides) where there may be numerous stains of blood, testing may only be performed on a sampling of these stains – especially if it is likely that all of the stains originated from the same source.

Whenever evidence items are not analyzed by the Scientist, the reason for this will be noted in the case record. Exceptions to this policy would be items clearly submitted for an analysis that is not performed at the Laboratory (gunshot residue, trace analysis, etc.), drug paraphernalia, and firearms accessories such as magazines, holsters, etc. Items submitted for DNA analysis that are not normally tested by this Laboratory (fingernail scrapings, buccal swabs, blood cards, etc.) are also exceptions under this policy and do not require an explanation when no testing is performed. The scope of testing performed by the Jefferson County Regional Crime Laboratory is listed in the Standard of Service, which submitting agencies may access by clicking on the “Lab Information” tab on the Laboratory’s website at <https://www.co.jefferson.tx.us/Sheriff/crimelab>.

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2/LABORATORY POLICIES AND GENERAL INFORMATION

2/100 OPERATING HOURS

Crime Laboratory personnel will be available to receive submitted evidence from 8:00 am to 12:00 pm and 1:00 pm to 4:00 pm, Monday through Friday. Any agency wishing to submit evidence should call at least one day in advance to make an appointment. For agencies that submit evidence every week, a standing appointment with the Laboratory can be scheduled.

The Laboratory will be closed for all official Jefferson County holidays. Occasionally, it may be necessary to close the Laboratory or suspend evidence submissions due to training, court appearances, crime scenes, or a shortage of staff. Whenever possible, the Laboratory will attempt to notify submitting agencies in advance of closure events. It is highly recommended that every submitting agency provide an e-mail address to the Laboratory so that they may be notified of Laboratory closures. This e-mail address should be for personnel that are responsible for submitting evidence to the Laboratory. If crime scene assistance is needed after hours, please call the Jefferson County Sheriff's Office dispatch center at (409) 835-8411, and ask them to contact the Forensic Scientist on call for the Crime Lab. For any questions regarding hours of Laboratory operation or closings, please call the Laboratory at (409) 726-2577.

2/200 CUSTOMER FEEDBACK AND COMPLAINTS

The Laboratory will seek feedback, both positive and negative, from its submitting agencies through the use of customer satisfaction surveys, as well as other methods. This feedback will be used to improve customer service, testing and calibration activities, and the Laboratory management system. Once a year the Laboratory will send out customer satisfaction surveys requesting feedback covering a range of laboratory activities. A link to the survey is also available in all Laboratory email correspondence and can be completed at any time.

All complaints should be communicated to the Laboratory Director. The Laboratory Director will immediately investigate the complaint and follow-up on all valid complaints received from customers or other parties. When possible, the Laboratory Director or his/her designee will acknowledge receipt of the complaint and provide the complainant with progress reports and a final notice of the action taken to resolve the matter. The Laboratory will maintain records of formal complaints made and of the investigation and the action taken (if any) on each complaint.

Complaints regarding professional negligence or misconduct should be directed to the Texas Forensic Science Commission via their website at <http://www.txcourts.gov/fsc/case-submission/submit-a-complaint>.

2/300 RECEIPT OF EVIDENCE

All evidence received into the care of the Laboratory must be sealed and properly marked. Exceptions to this policy may occur for vehicles, bicycles, and other large items.

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The Laboratory may refuse evidence items that are dangerous, unsuitable, or that may cause a deviation from the Laboratory's compliance with accreditation criteria. The Laboratory may also refuse to accept evidence items that the Laboratory cannot analyze due to scientific or accreditation limitations. The Laboratory has the right to suspend submissions if an agency refuses to pick up evidence upon completion of analysis.

When submitting additional evidence to the Laboratory for a case in which items have previously been submitted, please note this on the Laboratory submission form and/or let Laboratory personnel know when submitting the evidence.

If a case becomes inactive after submission but prior to analysis, either through refusal to charge, dismissal or plea agreement, it is the responsibility of the primary officer and/or the assigned attorney to notify the Crime Laboratory of that change in status. Analysis will cease and submissions will be returned to the submitting agency, unless the Laboratory is required to complete the analysis under Texas law.

2/400 PACKAGING FORENSIC EVIDENCE

When packaging forensic evidence, the essential goal is to preserve the original integrity of the evidence. All packages, envelopes, bags, boxes, and containers must have a proper seal.

All packages shall be heat sealed or sealed with evidence tape, and the tape used to seal the package or the heat seal shall be signed or initialed and dated to document the person sealing the evidence. Manufactured evidence bags having adhesive seals are also acceptable, provided that the seal is signed or initialed and dated. If the container bearing the seal is a box, then the bottom seam of the box shall also be sealed with evidence tape and signed or initialed and dated.

A package is "properly sealed" only if its contents cannot readily escape and if nothing can be placed in the package after the seal is in place. On a properly sealed package, any attempt to enter the package will result in obvious damage or alteration of the package or seal. All seals whether taped, heat sealed or adhesive shall completely cover any cut or opening made by the laboratory. Any tape must not be torn or have exposed areas that are no longer adhering to the evidence packaging. Staple closures are not acceptable under any conditions as this does not constitute a proper seal and may represent a safety hazard. Evidence which is sealed with strings, twist ties, glued flaps, or other closures, even if appearing secure, is considered open evidence if the contents can readily escape. Each evidence item must be packaged securely to prevent outside or cross contamination.

All packages, envelopes, bags, boxes, and containers must be identified by a submitting agency case number. The agency case number should be written on the item of evidence and packaging, although a securely attached evidence tag is acceptable.

All packages, envelopes, bags, boxes, and containers must be labeled as "biohazard" when blood and/or body fluids may be present. This should also be noted on the submission form.

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Evidence items that are wet or moist must be air-dried before packaging. Always put biological evidence in paper, never plastic. Paper allows moisture to escape, but plastic or anything airtight will trap moisture, creating mold and this will degrade the evidence. Plastic bags may only be used for suspected controlled substances and as secondary containers for sealed liquid samples (i.e. blood tubes from autopsy).

Sharp objects, especially knives and syringes, must be packaged in such a manner that accidental injury will not result from routine evidence handling. The Laboratory requires all syringes or knives to be placed in a commercially manufactured puncture-proof container. Placing sharp items in manila envelopes without a puncture-proof container is insufficient and unacceptable. Plastic should be avoided, if possible, for the reasons stated previously.

Firearms must be unloaded and placed in a manufactured gun box according to size. Live ammunition and any fired components should be noted on the submission form and packaged appropriately.

The Laboratory does not accept the following items:

- paraphernalia of any type (i.e. empty syringes, glass and metal containers, prescription bottles, or smoking devices)
- e-cigarettes with batteries
- liquid in containers that are not leak-proof
- evidence associated with a suspected clandestine laboratory.

2/500 LABORATORY STANDARDIZED PACKAGING REQUIREMENTS

To aid with evidence storage and inventory, all evidence must be submitted in standardized packaging. This requirement applies to the outside container when evidence is submitted to the Laboratory. The submitting agency may use whatever inside container the agency requires; however, multiple layers of packaging (more than 2) are discouraged.

Drugs, swabs, and other small items (other than DPS blood kits):

9" x 12" manila envelope (or larger if needed)

Manila envelopes with a "viewing window" are not considered sealed and are not acceptable for submission to the Laboratory. Please place all agency tags and labeling on the back of the envelope. Since DPS Laboratories require that their bar codes be placed on the front of the envelope, this will keep the Laboratory from re-packaging the evidence, allowing agency packaging to remain intact in the event that the evidence is forwarded to DPS. Whenever possible, place all envelopes, bags, etc. for one drug case together into one larger manila envelope (9 x 12 or larger) for submission to the Laboratory. If all of the evidence items to be submitted will not fit into one envelope, then use multiple envelopes for smaller items or place larger items into paper bags or boxes. This assures security of the evidence and allows the Scientist room to re-package the evidence without breaking the agency seal. Always make sure that the packaging is suitable for the evidence.

Firearms:

Gun boxes

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These boxes can be obtained through gun dealerships, various box companies, or law enforcement evidence handling suppliers such as Sirchie, Forensics Source, or Lynn Peavey. It is not necessary to place evidence tape on all three edges that make the seal of the gun box. Boxes with a “viewing window” are not considered sealed and are not acceptable for submission to the Laboratory.

Toxicology:

Blood kits

DPS approved blood kits will be required for all blood alcohol and toxicology samples. Keep in mind that these kits may be mailed to Austin for toxicology, so please do not write anything on the front of the box that you do not wish to be covered with an evidence label. Do not put these kits in another container.

2/600 SUBMISSION DOCUMENTATION

A current discipline specific submission form is required for each case submitted. A complete and accurate submission form will expedite the evidence submission process and also aid in the speedy analysis of the evidence in your case. Please ensure that handwritten submission forms are legible. These forms are designed to ensure that the Laboratory has all the necessary information about the case and are used to clearly communicate the examinations and comparisons desired. Information provided on the submission form will be included on the Laboratory report. Incorrect, illegible, or incomplete submission forms may delay the processing of evidence. Laboratory submission forms can be found on the Crime Laboratory website under the “Evidence Submission” tab at <https://www.co.jefferson.tx.us/Sheriff/crimelab>. The current versions of these forms must be used and should contain the following information:

- Submitting Agency name, address, phone number
- Submitting Agent’s printed name and signature
- Victim’s name (if any)
- Suspect’s name (if known)
- Submitting agency case number
- Offense date
- Name of the seizing officer (first and last name)
- Itemized list of all submitted evidence and examination(s) requested

A detailed offense report is also required for all cases except suspected controlled substances and firearms submissions.

2/700 NON-CASEWORK USE OF EVIDENCE

The Jefferson County Regional Crime Laboratory will occasionally encounter a need to use evidence for purposes other than the analysis requested for criminal investigations. As part of the Laboratory’s quality control program, random cases may be selected for re-analysis. The re-analysis will be conducted and documented in the same fashion as the original analysis, while preserving enough sample for future testing, if needed. If the sample is judged to be of an insufficient quantity, then the case will not be subjected to re-testing and another case must be selected for re-testing.

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A Laboratory report will be issued to notify the submitting agency of any re-testing conducted as part of the quality control program. If the subsequent analysis is concurrent with the initial analysis, the report will state this. If the results differ, then the report will state the results from the re-testing.

2/800 SIMPLIFIED REPORTING

Each test report shall include at least the following information necessary for the interpretation of test results unless the Laboratory has valid reasons for not doing so:

- the title (e.g. "Report", "Supplemental Report")
- the name and address of the Laboratory, and the location where the tests were carried out, if different from the address of the Laboratory
- the unique Laboratory number on each page, and the total number of pages
- the name of the submitting agency
- the date of receipt of the test item(s)
- the date of issue of the report
- a description and unambiguous identification of the item(s) tested and collected or created
- the testing results with, where appropriate, the units of measurement and estimated uncertainty of measurement
- where relevant, a statement to the effect that the results relate only to the items tested or statistically sampled
- any deviations from procedure
- disposition of item(s) if not returned to the submitting agency
- the name(s), function(s) and signature(s) of the person authorizing the test report

Information that the Laboratory does not deem necessary for the interpretation of results will not be included in the report but will be retained by the Laboratory and readily available upon request. The following will be identified in the case record:

- the address and contact information of the submitting agency
- identification of the test method used and all supporting data
- a description of the condition of the item(s) tested, as appropriate
- the date(s) of performance of testing and other laboratory activities
- reference to the sampling plan and procedures used by the Laboratory where these are relevant to the validity or application of the results.

2/900 ACCESS TO LABORATORY RESULTS AND CASE INFORMATION

Laboratory results and case information shall only be released to the submitting agency, law enforcement agencies designated by the submitting agency (DEA, ATF, etc.), appropriate prosecuting officials, and those required by courts of law to receive the information. When the laboratory is required by law to release information the submitting agency will be notified, as necessary.

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All case reports are relayed to a secure server administered by the Laboratory and Jefferson County MIS Department. This is the primary means by which Laboratory results are transmitted to the submitting agencies, so each agency will be given access to the reporting system.

Once access is granted to the submitting agency, the agency will appoint an Agency Administrator, who is responsible for monitoring users and passwords and safeguarding the security of their own agency's information. If you do not have access to the Laboratory reporting system, please see your Agency Administrator. If you do not know who your Agency Administrator is, please contact the Laboratory.

2/1000 DISPOSITION OF EVIDENCE

All evidence submitted to the Laboratory will be returned to the submitting agency after analysis is complete. Exceptions to this policy are evidence items forwarded to another laboratory for further analysis and items held for possible future analysis. All evidence items forwarded to another laboratory or held for future analysis will be noted on the report.

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3/LABORATORY DISCIPLINES

3/100 SEIZED DRUGS

Seized drugs evidence is composed of several different types of physical evidence – plant substances and extracts, solid substances, powders, liquids, and tablets. The goal of the discipline is to determine the presence or absence of a controlled substance in the physical evidence submitted to the Laboratory. Please use discretion and submit only those items that are in need of analysis. Items that do not need to be tested should not be submitted to the Laboratory.

Evidence Collection and Packaging

Plant material/mushrooms:

- Package freshly dried plant material/mushrooms in paper bags or boxes to allow for continued drying before submission.
- If you know the evidence is not fully dry, please let the Laboratory know upon submission.

Pills and tablets:

- Submit pills/tablets as found – it is not necessary to separate pills/tablets found together. Please note the number of tablets and description (i.e. color, imprint, shape) on the evidence submission form.
- Any pills that are in their original packaging and not opened (blister packs or bottles) can be submitted as they are.
- Empty prescription bottles or containers do not need to be submitted to the Laboratory as no analysis is needed.

Liquids:

- If liquids are in a leak proof container (i.e. prescription bottle with secure cap, tightly-closed soda bottle):
 1. Confirm container will not leak prior to packaging. If spillage is anticipated, double bag the evidence prior to packaging.
 2. Seal container in envelope according to standardized packaging requirements – make sure container is in upright position prior to sealing envelope.
 3. Note on evidence submission form the liquid and container that is being submitted to the Laboratory.
- If liquids are not in a leak proof container (i.e. baby bottle, cup with lid/straw, pill bottle, open container):
 1. Transfer liquid to a Nalgene or other leak proof container. If spillage is anticipated, double bag the evidence prior to packaging.
 2. The original container is not required for analysis and does not need to be submitted with the liquid evidence.
 3. Seal container in envelope according to standardized packaging requirements – make sure container is in upright position prior to sealing envelope.

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- Note on evidence submission form the liquid and container that is being submitted to the Laboratory.

Phencyclidine (PCP):

- If found in a plastic or glass container, keep in the original container and package according to standardized packaging requirements. If spillage is anticipated move evidence to a Nalgene or other leak proof container.
- If a strong odor is present, put evidence in heavy plastic prior to packaging.
- Cigarettes dipped in PCP should be placed in a plastic (Ziploc) bag and packaged according to standardized packaging requirements.

The Laboratory **does not** respond to clandestine laboratories, nor can we analyze or store clandestine laboratory samples. Please contact the Houston DPS Crime Laboratory at (281) 517-1380 or refer to their website at www.dps.texas.gov for advice on collecting, sampling, and packaging evidence from a clandestine laboratory, as well as any restrictions that they may have regarding evidence submission.

Evidence Submission

A completed Seized Drugs Laboratory Submission Form must be submitted with each case. It is necessary to include the proper offense charge (i.e. possession vs. delivery, State vs. Federal) on the Laboratory submission form. If the item is “Found Property”, then it will not be analyzed by the Laboratory. If there are multiple suspects in a case, please designate which evidence items correspond to which suspect. Complete a detailed description of the evidence submitted, including the number of items.

Fingerprinting is not done at the Laboratory – if this is needed, please indicate this on the submission form so that proper precautions to preserve fingerprints are taken. The items will be returned to the submitting agency after analysis to be processed for fingerprints.

Syringes, and paraphernalia should not be submitted with evidence needing analysis unless it is the **only** evidence submitted in the case. For information on packaging syringes, see “Biohazard Evidence” in section 3/300 below. Drug evidence or a container with drug evidence is often confiscated from a body cavity or spit from the mouth. When submitting evidence retrieved from a body cavity, note this on the submission form, in addition to using the universal “biohazard” label on the evidence. For information on biohazard labeling, see “Biohazard Evidence” in section 3/300 below.

3/200 FIREARMS

All firearms are to be unloaded before being submitted to the Laboratory for examination. If for some reason a particular firearm cannot be unloaded, **it is the responsibility of the submitting agency** to notify the Laboratory as to the date and time they will be arriving so that proper personnel will be available to unload the firearm. If the firearm cannot be easily unloaded, it should be secured in a manufactured gun box and clearly labeled “Loaded Weapon” or similar. This must also be noted on the submission form.

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In unusual circumstances where firearms are found under water, in snow, etc., call the Laboratory for advice before attempting to collect and preserve the firearm.

The Laboratory will analyze firearms and/or fired evidence (bullets/projectiles, cartridge cases, shot shells, etc.) involved in criminal cases. The Laboratory does not have access to an Integrated Ballistic Identification System (IBIS). The eligibility status of items that meet the criteria for IBIS entry will be included on the Laboratory report. Test fires and other firearms evidence will be returned to the submitting agency after analysis and may then be forwarded for entry into the IBIS system at the discretion of the submitting agency. Laboratory analysis is not required for firearms seized as found property or for safekeeping and will typically not be accepted. If you feel that you have extenuating circumstances and that firearm analysis may be beneficial in your specific case, please contact the Laboratory prior to any submission of evidence.

Packaging and Submission

A completed Firearms Evidence Laboratory Submission Form must be submitted with each case. It is necessary to designate what examination is needed (functionality, comparison, and/or serial number restoration).

Fingerprinting is not done at the Laboratory – please have this performed prior to submitting firearms evidence to the Laboratory.

All firearms must be submitted to the Laboratory in a manufactured gun box according to size. Please do not submit damaged or overused boxes. Cover any exposed area of the firearm that does not fit inside the box with paper and seal appropriately. Place only the firearm and the items removed from it (magazine, live rounds, etc.) in the gun box.

All other evidence should be placed in separate 9x12 envelopes. Evidence of like kind (i.e. all found in the same place), may be placed in the same 9x12 envelope, but please do not place exhibits found in more than one location in a single 9x12 envelope.

It is not necessary to place anything in the barrel of a firearm to demonstrate that it is safe. This can damage the rifling of the firearm. If it is the policy of the submitting agency to secure the action of a firearm, this can be done by locking the firearm open, or securing a plastic zip tie through the chamber, not the barrel.

If the firearm is considered to be a biohazard, please do not put “clean” packaged evidence in the gun box with it, as this will contaminate the packaging of the additional evidence. All evidence must be labeled as “biohazard” when blood and/or body fluids may be present. This must also be noted on the submission form.

3/300 FORENSIC BIOLOGY

Biological fluids such as blood, semen, and saliva are frequently encountered as physical evidence in many types of criminal investigations such as homicides, sexual assaults,

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assaults, and robberies. Examinations performed will be based on the type of case submitted and the quality and quantity of forensic samples detected.

When a biological substance is left at the scene of a crime, the sample will begin to degrade (break down or be destroyed) if not properly collected, packaged, and preserved. Following proper collection and evidence handling procedures reduces the possibility of evidence contamination and DNA degradation.

General Collection Guidelines

- Treat all biological evidence as potentially infectious.
- Wear protective clothing: gloves, laboratory coat or coveralls, shoe covers, eye protection, etc.
- Guard against cross-contamination and change gloves frequently.

Collection of Blood Stains

- It is always preferable to submit the entire item to the Laboratory. If the whole item cannot be transported to the Laboratory, then cut out the stain if possible (i.e. carpet, mattress, furniture, etc.).
- If the stain cannot be cut out, it can be collected onto sterile swabs. If the stain is still wet, simply absorb it onto the swab and allow to air dry completely before packaging. If the stain has dried, moisten the swab with distilled or sterile water first, and allow to air dry completely. Another alternative is to scrape the stain onto a folded piece of paper. Do not attempt to remove stains from cloth. Do not mix dried stains – place each in separate envelopes.
- Remember that one concentrated swab is better than several weak ones.
- Collect too much (several swabs of large area) rather than too little.
- Collect samples from each area and package separately.
- Control swabs (swabs from unstained areas) are not analyzed, therefore there is no need to collect or submit a control swab to the Laboratory.
- Store the stains or swabs at room temperature until the samples are submitted to the Laboratory.

Collection of hairs or fibers (trace evidence)

- If the hairs or fibers are on a small item, it is better to submit the entire item to the Laboratory (package carefully).
- If the hairs or fibers are on a large item, you can use:
 - gloved hands to pick them off the item
 - lint rollers (available at stores or dry cleaners)
- Store in paper, use as small an envelope as possible and make sure the item does not fall through envelope seams.
- Very small items should first be placed inside a folded piece of paper and then placed into the envelope. Tape sections from lint rollers can be placed in zipper bags and sealed in manila envelopes for submission.

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- If the hair is attached, such as in dry blood, or caught in metal or a crack of glass, do not attempt to remove it but rather leave the hair intact in the object. If the object is small, mark it, wrap it, and seal in an envelope. If the object is large, wrap the area containing the hair in paper to prevent loss of hair during transfer to the Laboratory. If the object is a vehicle, remove hair/fiber before transport to Laboratory or contact the Laboratory for assistance.

Victim or Suspect Blood

Qualified medical personnel must draw the blood. They should label the tube with the date, time, name of donor, their initials, and the case number, if known. *Never accept an unlabeled tube.* Check the expiration date on the tube(s). Protect the tubes from breakage and refrigerate them until submission; DO NOT freeze them. Attach a “biohazard” sticker to all items of evidence that may contain body fluids.

For DNA/Serology:

- In most cases, a buccal swab kit can be used for a DNA reference sample. If blood is collected, use a purple top (EDTA) tube.

For Toxicology (alcohol or drugs):

- Use the DPS approved blood kit if possible.
- Urine is better for certain drugs (GHB, Rohypnol, etc.).
- If you suspect a date rape drug, inhalants/huffing, or synthetic marijuana were used, this must be specifically marked on the evidence submission form. These drugs are not routinely tested for in general toxicology analysis.

Buccal Swabs

If a buccal (cheek) swab is to be collected:

- The subject should not have had anything to eat or drink for 20 minutes prior to collection.
- Use only sterile swabs. Wearing gloves, remove the swabs from the wrapper and rub the inside of the subject’s cheek at least six times. Collect at least 2 swabs.
- Do not touch the cotton end of the swab to anything else.
- Carefully air dry the swabs on a clean surface, then place them in a paper envelope or box. Do not use plastic. Write the subject’s name on the outside of the envelope or box.
- There is no need to refrigerate the swabs, but submit them to the Laboratory as soon as possible.

Biohazard Evidence

The greatest safety hazard is associated with biological fluids and biological materials with syringes, razors, and broken glass. These items pose a threat to law enforcement and Laboratory personnel for the transmission of HIV and/or Hepatitis. HIV (AIDS) has a short life span when exposed to air; however, Hepatitis can live for years in the open air. The Hepatitis

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virus has been shown to be viable in contaminated evidence that has been frozen and thawed years later.

For biohazard cases, please be sure to:

- Mark all layers of packaging and containers with the universal “biohazard” label and note on the Submission form.
- Explain on the Submission form if the evidence contains a syringe(s) or the contents of a syringe, in addition to using the universal “biohazard” label. Syringes must be placed into a puncture resistant container.
- When submitting evidence retrieved from a body cavity, note on the Submission form, in addition to using the universal “biohazard” label.

Evidence Packaging and Storage

Biological evidence should always be packaged in paper – paper envelopes, paper bags, or boxes. Paper allows moisture to escape. The rare exceptions to this rule are: blood in soil, snow, or water, and tissue (such as muscle, organs, etc.). These samples should be placed in an airtight container and frozen. Other than these exceptions, biological evidence should never be packaged in plastic.

Do not package the suspect’s evidence, such as clothing, with the victim’s items. Always keep evidence from different sources (suspect vs. victim) separated. This can be done in separate manila envelopes, paper bags, etc. Be careful not to mix known reference samples with questioned samples. Separate items - do not put clothing and bedding together. One item of evidence per paper bag is ideal to prevent cross contamination.

Thoroughly dry wet or moist items, such as clothing or swabs, before packaging. Evidence packaged wet will grow fungus/bacteria more quickly and lead to degradation of the DNA. If evidence is very wet, you can use a plastic container or bag to transport the item to your facility for drying, but it must immediately be removed and dried upon arrival. Save the plastic for submission to the Laboratory.

When handling clothing or other evidence that is wet with blood or another fluid, take care to preserve stain patterns. Avoid creating additional patterns on the item. Dry clothing and similar articles in a room with adequate ventilation. When air drying articles stained with body fluids, place them on or over a piece of clean paper. Any debris which falls from the material onto the paper during the drying process should be collected and submitted with the article.

Ideally, wet swabs (including buccal swabs, blood swabs, etc.) should be dried before packaging, but may be placed into swab boxes to dry if necessary. Cigarette butts and chewing gum should be treated in the same manner as any other biological evidence. Gloves must be used when handling them, and they must be air dried before packaging.

Refrigerate liquid biological samples or items that are still moist until submission to the Laboratory. If you are submitting an item that you know may still be moist (condom, diaper,

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sanitary napkin, etc.) please **advise the Laboratory upon submission** so that we may take the appropriate measures to preserve the evidence.

If evidence to be DNA tested has come from or has been handled by a victim or other (non-suspect) individual, it will be necessary to obtain a DNA reference sample (buccal swabs) from that individual for elimination purposes. This would include obtaining samples from home/business owners and/or employees in robbery cases, vehicle owners in stolen vehicle cases, and any officers who have handled the evidence without gloves. If the evidence is blood found at the scene and it is clear that the blood did not come from the victim (home owner, etc.), a victim sample may not be necessary, but this needs to be clearly stated in the offense report.

Until submission to the Laboratory, store packaged items in a cool, dry place. Avoid sunlight, heat, and excessive humidity. Refrigerate blood tubes (do not freeze). Mark all packages with "biohazard" labels.

Submission of Evidence

The outer packaging should, at a minimum, have the agency case number and a short description of the evidence contained in it written on one side of the envelope. A detailed offense report and completed Biology Laboratory Submission Form should be submitted with each case.

According to DPS policy, a case cannot be sent for DNA analysis without proper reference samples; therefore, the Laboratory does not accept cases for analysis that do not have proper reference samples. Homicides are exempt from this policy.

Since the DPS Laboratory limits the number of samples submitted for DNA analysis on burglary/property crimes, the Laboratory will also adopt this policy. Submission is limited to two (2) items, plus any reference samples that are needed. These must be swabs of blood from the crime scene or items/swabs of items left at the scene such as: cigarette butts, blood from clothing, gloves, or drink containers. Evidence of "touch" DNA including swabs of: steering wheels, shift knobs, door handles, switches, counters, keys/locks, ammunition/cartridge cases, prints/smudges, etc. will not be accepted for property crimes. More than two items may be accepted if the circumstances (such as multiple perpetrators) dictate the need for additional analysis. Please keep in mind that the agency can **collect** as many samples as needed, but may only submit two at a time for analysis on burglary/property crimes.

3/400 TOXICOLOGY – BLOOD ALCOHOL

During investigations when there is cause to believe that an individual may have been under the influence of alcohol and/or drugs, efforts should be made to obtain blood for toxicological analysis. The Toxicology section of the Laboratory uses procedures, techniques, and instruments for the analysis of blood for suspected alcohol. Samples for which both alcohol and drug analysis are requested should first be analyzed at the Laboratory for alcohol content then be forwarded for drug analysis. Samples with a request for blood alcohol content will

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5. If drug analysis is also needed, the agency is requested to list the specific drug(s) suspected on the submission form.
6. Blood should be submitted to the Laboratory as soon as reasonably possible.

The Laboratory does not have the capabilities for testing urine samples collected for alcohol and drug analysis. Analysis for alcohol and drug content utilizing urine specimens is normally performed by the Texas DPS Crime Laboratory in Austin.

3/500 BREATH TESTING

The Laboratory oversees the Breath Testing Program for Jefferson County. Two instruments are maintained at the Jefferson County jail, where certified breath test operators may perform breath tests on subjects if alcohol use is suspected. Police officers wishing to receive training to become a certified breath test operator should contact the Laboratory.

Normally, the Laboratory will not test blood samples for alcohol if a breath test has been administered. If there is a valid evidentiary breath test, no further analysis is necessary and the blood sample will be returned to the submitting agency.

3/600 CRIME SCENE

The Laboratory has Scientists on call at all times to assist law enforcement agencies with crime scene processing. In addition to performing preliminary and confirmatory tests, the Laboratory can assist with the collection of the following types of evidence:

- Blood and other body fluids
- Touch DNA
- Hair, fiber, and other trace evidence
- Paint scrapings or glass for comparison
- Impression evidence
- Recovery of scattered and buried human remains

If your agency needs crime scene assistance after hours, call the Jefferson County Sheriff's Office Dispatch Center at (409) 835-8411, and ask them to contact the Forensic Scientist on call. Since the Laboratory is not staffed after hours, please allow time for the Scientists to travel from home, gather equipment at the Laboratory, and travel to the scene.

If you are working a scene after hours and have a question about evidence processing or need help with any evidence matter, please do not hesitate to call. Laboratory staff will return your call and attempt to address your issue over the phone, if needed.

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4/PUBLISHED REFERENCES

Best Practices for Collection, Packaging, Storage, Preservation, and Retrieval of Biological Evidence, prepared by the Texas Department of Public Safety.

Blood Alcohol Procedure Manual, prepared by the Jefferson County Regional Crime Laboratory.

Seized Drugs Procedure Manual, prepared by the Jefferson County Regional Crime Laboratory.

Evidence Collection Guidelines, prepared by Crime Scene Investigator Network.

Evidence Handling & Laboratory Capabilities Guide, prepared by the Virginia Department of Forensic Science.

Evidence Handling Procedure Manual, prepared by the Jefferson County Regional Crime Laboratory.

Firearms Procedure Manual, prepared by the Jefferson County Regional Crime Laboratory.

Forensic Biology Procedure Manual, prepared by the Jefferson County Regional Crime Laboratory.

Guide to Laboratory Services, prepared by the Bexar County Criminal Investigation Laboratory (Texas).

Laboratory Customer Handbook, prepared by the Texas Department of Public Safety.

Quality Manual, prepared by the Jefferson County Regional Crime Laboratory.

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