



EVIDENCE HANDLING AND LABORATORY CAPABILITIES GUIDE EVIDENCE RECEIVING SECTION

CONTACT INFORMATION

If you have any questions concerning your evidence submissions or evidence handling procedures, please call the Evidence Receiving Section at the Forensic Laboratory that services your area.

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OVERVIEW – REQUEST FOR LABORATORY EXAMINATION (RFLE)

The Request for Laboratory Examination (RFLE) form serves as the primary means for communicating information to the laboratory, which includes details of the criminal event under investigation, the evidence being submitted, and the examinations being requested. It is designed to permit personnel in the laboratory to serve you in a more efficient and orderly fashion. It is critical that the information documented on this form is as accurate as possible. This includes the specific details of the evidence and the correct spelling of the names of all individuals involved in the criminal event. The information you submit will be entered into the Laboratory Information Management System (LIMS), exactly as it is indicated on the RFLE. Remember to have a clear investigative reason for the submission.

Once this information has been entered into LIMS, a Forensic Science Laboratory Number (FS Lab #) will be assigned to your agency's submission request.

The RFLE also serves as an evidence "receipt" for the submitter, documenting the chain of custody for the evidence submission and the return of the evidence to the submitting agency. The RFLE should be completed by the investigating officer prior to being hand-carried or mailed to the laboratory with the evidence.

When completing the RFLE, print neatly and legibly using a ball point pen, while the form is resting on a hard surface. This will help to ensure the last copies are legible. Corrections should be made on all copies.

When mailing evidence with the completed RFLE to the laboratory, please detach the last copy of the form, which is to be retained for your records. Place the original and remaining three copies into the mailing container (outside of the evidence container).

When evidence is hand-carried to the laboratory for submission the entire RFLE (including all copies) should accompany the evidence. Upon accepting the evidence, the laboratory staff member receiving the evidence will sign the RFLE and return a copy to the submitting officer to serve as a receipt. Please note the FS Lab # and have it available if you call to inquire about your case.

When submitting RFLEs via email or facsimile, be sure to indicate in the email or fax cover sheet who will be submitting the evidence to the laboratory. In these instances, the RFLE needs to describe the evidence containers.

For example: Item #1 a plastic bag containing (describe the item) or Item #2 a paper bag containing (describe the item).

SAMPLE RFLE KEY

A brief explanation of the various sections on the form is presented below. Each explanation is numbered to correspond with the specific section on the accompanying example request form (DFS Document Number 100-F100) on page 6.

1. The first and last name of the investigating officer to whose attention the results of the examination are to be directed.
2. Your agency telephone number, including area code. Also include your cellular number as this makes communication easier.

Note: Correspondence referencing a specific case may be retained and subject to disclosure as part of the case file.
3. An email address where you can be easily reached. This keeps open the lines of communication between laboratory personnel and investigators when their work hours do not coincide.
4. The full name and address of the submitting agency, including zip code.
5. The case number assigned to this specific investigation by your agency. The inclusion of this number will greatly enhance communications between the laboratory and the submitting agency.
6. If the submission is a second or subsequent submission in the same investigation and you know our FS Lab #, please indicate in this space.
7. Full name(s) of the victim(s). If name(s) are unknown it should be listed as "Unknown". Do not use abbreviations or nicknames unless the full name is not available. If the offense is one in which the Incident-Based Reporting (IBR) reporting lists the victim as "Society" or "Commonwealth of Virginia", do not list the victim as such on the RFLE. Simply leave the area blank.
8. List the date of birth (DOB), race, sex, and any other pertinent descriptive information about the victim. This information may be of value in aiding the examiner during the examination of certain evidence or when communicating with various agencies involved with a particular case.
9. Full name(s) of the suspect(s). If name(s) are unknown, it should be listed as "Unknown". Do not use abbreviations or nicknames unless the full name is not available.
10. List the date of birth (DOB), race, sex, and any other pertinent descriptive information about the suspect. This information may be of value in aiding the examiner during the examination of certain evidence or when communicating with various agencies involved with a particular case.

11. The date or approximate date that the offense occurred; the type of offense (e.g., rape, burglary, death investigation, grand larceny). For controlled substances submissions only, the applicable Criminal Code section(s) under which the suspect(s) is charged can be used for the type of offense.

(Please submit only one criminal event per request form).

12. The projected date of trial in which results of examination will be needed for litigation. If the date is not known at the time of submission, notify the laboratory when a trial date has been set. Additionally, indicate the court level (Circuit, Juvenile, District or Federal).

(Do not indicate preliminary hearing or arraignment dates).

13. Give a brief but specific statement of what occurred and how. If additional space is needed to adequately communicate pertinent facts, you may include a separate document with more information such as an investigative summary from your agency, etc.

14. Indicate the jurisdiction where the offense occurred (e.g., Mid-City, VA).

(Do not use FIPS Code or ORI #).

15. Indicate how the evidence is to be returned to you. If it is to be picked up by you or your representative, please arrange to do so as soon as possible after receiving the examination results. Evidence storage space is extremely limited. Personal pick-up should apply to large or fragile evidence.

It is advisable to call the laboratory before traveling to pick up evidence.

16. List (itemize) and describe all evidence being submitted, include descriptive data when available (e.g., item number, name, make, model, color, size, serial number). State the manner of preservation (air dried, refrigerated, etc.).

When submitting RFLEs via email or facsimile, the RFLE needs to describe the evidence containers.

For example: Item #1 a plastic bag containing (describe the item) or Item #2 a paper bag containing (describe the item).

After each item, designate the requested examinations. Do not duplicate item numbers in a single case (e.g., under same case #). This is particularly important when making subsequent submissions.

17. The printed name of the individual submitting evidence to the laboratory.

18. Signature of individual whose name appears in space #17 and the date the evidence is being submitted.

NOTE: All corrections on an RFLE should be lined through, initialed, and dated by the submitting officer.

EVIDENCE MAILING INSTRUCTIONS

Any items of evidence packaged and mailed to the Department of Forensic Science (DFS) should bear the appropriate address of the submitting agency.

Several mailing services can be used for mailing evidence such as UPS, Federal Express, or the U.S. Postal Service. When using the U.S. Postal Service for transmittal of evidence, it is necessary to maintain the proper chain-of-custody. To maintain reasonable control over evidence in this manner, it is suggested that the evidence be mailed by registered mail using the proper return receipt. This method of shipment allows the sender to maintain security of their evidence, the proper chain-of-custody of their evidence and a written record of the various stages of transmittal that is completed by the U.S. Postal Service. Use a street or route number in your return address so that the evidence may be returned to you by courier.

If mailing general correspondence without evidence, law enforcement agencies may use the name of the examiner or section in the address.

Package the item(s) of evidence in a sealed, initialed evidence container(s). Complete the RFLE. Place the evidence container and the RFLE (original plus 3 copies) in a larger envelope or box for mailing. Retain a copy of the RFLE for your records. The RFLE is placed inside the mailing container but outside of the evidence container. This ensures that the evidence security is not compromised during the receiving process. When addressing the mailing container, please indicate "Attention: Evidence Receiving".



SUBMISSION GUIDELINES – MAILED IN EVIDENCE

The following items are prohibited from mailing into the laboratory: firearms and ammunition, explosives, flammable liquids, petroleum distillates, caustics, and wet biological evidence.

Pills (tablets or capsules) must be packaged within (2) separately sealed visible plastic evidence bags and then into a rigid container to prevent the potential of the evidence being crushed in transit.

It is recommended, prior to mailing in evidence to the laboratory (exception DUI/DUID kit for an Implied Consent case), to send a copy of the RFLE by facsimile or email to the appropriate Evidence Receiving Section so that staff can review and provide feedback if necessary.

GENERAL SUBMISSION GUIDELINES

The laboratory recognizes that each case is distinctive. These submission guidelines will address typical situations encountered by the laboratory but does not address all circumstances. With this understanding, the following information provides guidance on the submission of evidence.

Use a different item number for each item of evidence submitted under a FS Lab #. If resubmission of the item of evidence is required, reuse the item number originally assigned to the item of evidence. Do not duplicate item numbers that have already been assigned in a previous submission.

Each item packaged into an evidence container must have an item number which corresponds with the item number written on the RFLE. If not, DFS will assign item numbers.

Only submit the items of evidence that the laboratory will be analyzing.

Evidence containers must be at least 5x7 inches in size to accommodate the DFS bar code label that is attached to the container for tracking purposes and the laboratory staff's initials and date(s) for chain of custody purposes.

Do not mark directly onto an item of evidence with a scribe, pen, or other instrument unless specifically prescribed to do so in discipline specific sections of the Evidence Handling and Laboratory Capabilities Guide.

If a case becomes inactive either by refusal to charge, dismissal or plea agreement, notify the laboratory. This will allow the laboratory to prepare the submission to be returned to the agency.

Have the FS Lab # available when picking up or checking on a case.

CONTROLLED SUBSTANCES

Apply the [Drug Item Reduction Policy \(DIRP\)](#) when submitting narcotics evidence.

If there is more than one suspect and multiple items of drug evidence, identify on the RFLE what item of evidence each suspect is associated with.

TOXICOLOGY

When submitting multiple items of evidence in a case that includes a DUI/DUID kit, it is recommended that the DUI/DUID kit be submitted on a separate RFLE*. Submitting the DUI/DUID kit on a separate RFLE will allow for an efficient process when the evidence is being returned to the agency.

A court will need to be selected on the RFLE when submitting a DUI/DUID kit for an Implied Consent case.

*DUI/DUID kits submitted for Implied Consent cases that are mailed into the laboratory do not require an RFLE for submission purposes, only the [DUI/DUID Submission Information Sheet](#) needs to be completed and submitted.

LATENT PRINTS

Latent print cards must be properly packaged, sealed, and protected.

If there are known suspects, provide a State Identification Number (SID #) or Federal Bureau of Identification Number (FBI #) or obtain a comprehensive set of fingerprints and palm prints with the evidence.

Provide all elimination exemplars for people who are likely to have touched the surfaces being processed for latent prints (i.e., victims, family members, caretakers, store clerks, bank tellers, etc.) with the evidence.

FIREARMS

It is recommended that all firearms and suspected controlled substances be listed on separate RFLEs. A separate RFLE will allow for an efficient transfer process and a timelier return of the evidence.

Have a consultation with the Firearms Section prior to submitting evidence for a distance (proximity) determination examination.

The laboratory does not accept cases for NIBIN examination(s) that were collected more than one calendar year prior to potential submission (see Policy Notice – [New NIBIN Case Acceptance Policy](#)).

FORENSIC BIOLOGY

All evidence should be air dried prior to submission to the laboratory. Indicate on the RFLE if items were air dried.

Known samples and evidentiary swabs should not be packaged together in the same evidence container.

Review the [Trace DNA Submission Policy](#).

Prior to submitting a large multi-item DNA evidence case to the laboratory, first consult with a Forensic Biology Examiner/Supervisor.

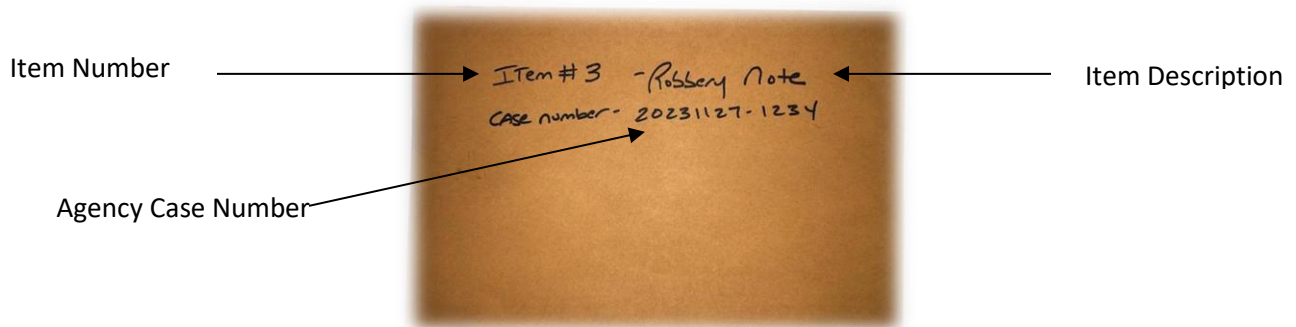
TRACE EVIDENCE

Review the [Trace Evidence Submission Policy](#) for Primer Residue Kits.

Control cans for Fire Debris/Ignitable Liquid Analysis must be sealed with evidence tape, initialed and submitted on a RFLE.

GENERAL PACKAGING GUIDELINES

Each evidence container should include the following MINIMUM information, the assigned agency case number (if available), the item number and a description of the item.



With potential biological evidence, stamp or note on the evidence container "Biohazard" in red or affix a biohazard warning sticker. Include HIV (AIDS) warning, if applicable.

Submit the DFS Victim Perk Kit without additional evidence packaging. Preservation information and the Perk Kit Identification number needs to be visible at the time of submission.

Cartridges (Ammunition) should never be packaged in the same evidence container as the weapon. Package the cartridges into a separate rigid or padded container (see Policy Notice – [New Packaging Requirements for Firearms and Ammunition Submissions](#)).



Ensure that all firearms are unloaded prior to being submitted to the laboratory. Indicate on the outer container the condition of the firearm as “Unloaded or Safe”.



Powdered Drug Evidence must be packaged within (2) separately sealed clear plastic evidence bags (see Policy Notice - [Revised Packaging Requirements for Submissions of Powdered Substances](#)).



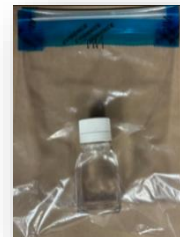
All syringes must be packaged into a plastic safety tube that is designed specifically for the safe transport of syringes and then into a secondary sealed container. Place a “BIOHAZARD” label on the outer evidence container and clearly label this container with the words “CONTAINS A SYRINGE” (see Policy Notice - [Safe Packaging of Syringes to Minimize Risk of Needle Stick Injuries](#)).



Sharps evidence such as razor blades and glass items (i.e., glass smoking devices) must be packaged into a plastic safety tube and then into a secondary sealed container.

LIQUIDS FOR NON-TRACE EVIDENCE/TOXICOLOGY ANALYSES

Liquids must be submitted in a sealed leak-proof container (sharps containers are not acceptable) that has a screw cap to prevent leakage. The sealed leak-proof container then must be placed into a sealed secondary container. For liquid that requires examinations related to [Trace Evidence: Explosives](#), [Trace Evidence: General Chemical](#), [Trace Evidence: Fire Debris](#) or [Toxicology \(blood samples\)](#), refer to those sections in the Evidence Handling & Laboratory Capabilities Guide.



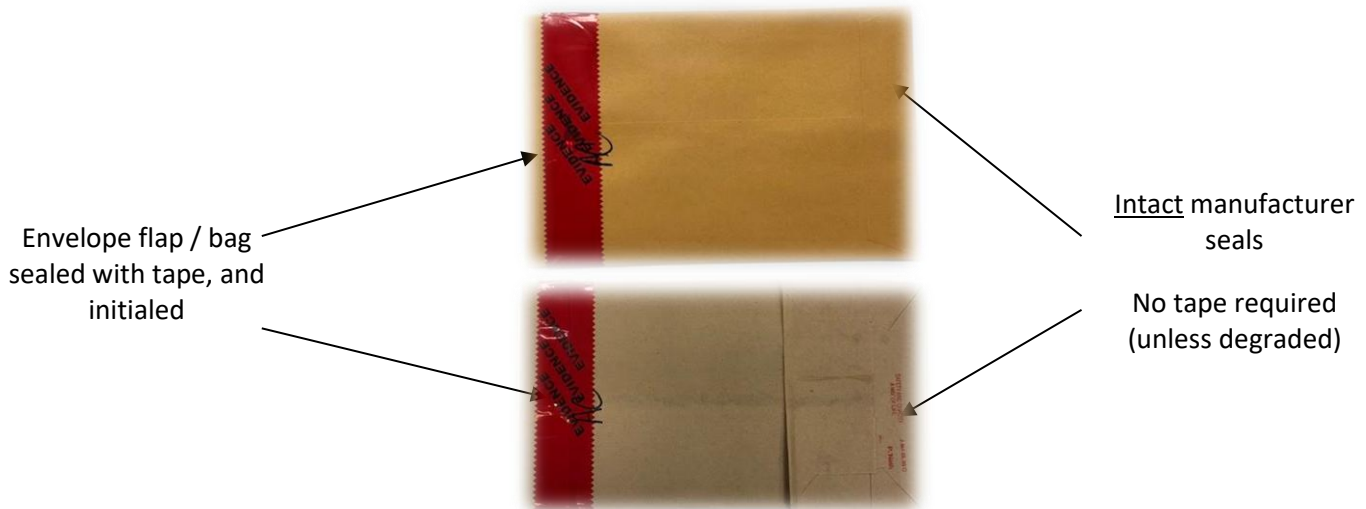
SEALING EVIDENCE CONTAINERS

Evidence Seals: An acceptable seal is one that prevents the ready escape of the evidence and will be clearly damaged or altered if broken to permit entry. Intact manufacturer seals do not need to be re-sealed with additional tape. Personnel sealing evidence must place their initials or mark on, across or under each seal.

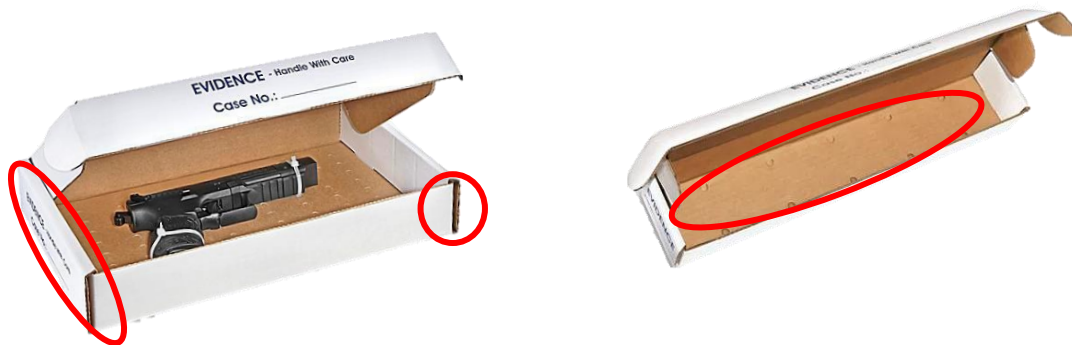


A secure seal is necessary for chain of custody. However, do not tape excessively. This makes evidence handling in the laboratory difficult.

Stapling is not an appropriate method for sealing evidence containers.



When submitting evidence in a cardboard box (e.g., gun boxes or knife boxes) and a Trace Evidence or Forensic Biology examination is being requested, seal all openings where evidence may readily escape.



SAFETY PROCEDURES FOR FIREARM SUBMISSIONS

Removal of Magazine:

All magazines must be removed from firearms.

The magazine should be unloaded if DNA or Latent Fingerprint examinations are NOT being requested on the magazine and/or the cartridges within the magazine.

In order to submit cartridges or shotshells for a comparison examination, do not submit them in the same package as the firearm. Package them in a separate rigid or padded container (see Policy Notice - [New Packaging Requirements for Firearms and Ammunition Submissions](#)). It is not necessary to submit cartridges or shotshells when only NIBIN and/or Function Exams are being requested. It is acceptable to leave cartridges in a magazine, packaged in a separate rigid or padded container from the firearm, especially if DNA or Latent Print examinations are being requested on the cartridges or the magazine itself.

If cartridges are being submitted for DNA or Latent Print exams, package them in a manner which best preserves that type of evidence.

Demonstrate Safe Condition:

It is strongly recommended that a safety appliance (chamber flag, safety block or zip-tie) be placed in or through the action of a firearm prior to laboratory submission.

For pistols, remove the magazine and clear the chamber. With the slide pulled rearward, insert a chamber flag into the barrel through the open ejection port then advance the slide forward to hold the flag in place.





Alternatively, after removal of the magazine and clearing of the chamber, a plastic zip-tie can be run through the empty magazine well and out the ejection port.



For revolvers, after all chambered cartridges have been removed, a plastic zip-tie can be looped through two empty chambers, preventing the cylinder from closing.

Note: Exceptions include submissions when a firearm cannot be unloaded due to rust/damage or firearms that have been sealed in water for submission or some other exceptional condition. In these instances, submitting agencies should have a pre-arranged delivery appointment with the Evidence Receiving and Firearms Section personnel.

PACKAGING OF FIREARMS

It is strongly recommended that each firearm be submitted in a separate container, preferably a window box or other container (for example, a heavy-duty expansion envelope or gun box with viewable window), through which the firearm can be visually determined to be in a “safe” condition.

