

Charleston County Coroner's Office Policy #32

Title: Prescription Medication, Supplements, and Illicit Drugs

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32.2 POLICY

This policy outlines enhanced security procedures for the collection, initial inventory, storage, and destruction of prescription medication and suspected illicit drugs to ensure a proper chain of custody, accurate inventory, enhanced security, and accountability of these items. It is the responsibility of the Deputy Coroners and other employees designated to handle evidence and property, to properly manage, secure, and document all pertinent medication, supplements, and suspected illicit drugs in accordance with the procedures outlined in this directive. All custody and movement of medication, supplements, and suspected illicit drugs will be documented from the time of collection to the item's final disposition. Written or computerized records will be held indefinitely.

32.2 PROCEDURE

1. Collection of Prescription Medication and supplements.

- a) After photographing all pertinent medications or supplements as discovered, the Deputy may take custody of any medication, supplement, or empty containers of the same deemed significant to their investigation. The case Deputy should note if there are any concerns with medications such as

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- inappropriate counts, prescription data, or any other concerns regarding medication, supplements, or suspected illicit drugs.
- b) Uncapped hypodermic needles/syringes must be sealed and labeled in an appropriate sharps container.
 - c) The Deputy will place all collected medication and supplements in a “Temp Locker” at the office and lock the locker or give the evidence technician in person. If placed in a locker, utilize the MDILog “comlog” to communicate accordingly.
 - d) If for any reason a bag of medication is checked out for investigation post inventory, the bag shall be checked out via the Tracker system by the Deputy checking out the bag. Upon return to the evidence room, the Deputy and the Evidence Technician shall re-inventory the pill count and ensure the pill count remains the same. Any discrepancies will be brought to the attention of the Chief Deputy and/or the Coroner. The bag will be re-sealed, dated, and initialed by the Deputy and the Evidence Technician.
 - e) Medications that are in the custody of the Charleston County Coroner’s Office will not be returned to the family.

2. Inventory of Prescription Medication

- a) All medication stored on the ‘Temp Shelf or Lockers’ will be inventoried within seven (7) days after submission.
- b) The evidence technician or their supervisor shall conduct a complete medication count (pills, patches, and/or liquids). Any narcotic or other controlled medication such as amphetamine or barbiturate medication which is listed on the preferred inventory list in Tracker, shall be separately listed. Any empty containers’ prescription information for medications on the list will be noted but with a zero quantity. The results of the inventory will be thoroughly and appropriately documented as necessary in data entry fields within the Tracker system.
- c) In cases where medication has been placed in unusual or mislabeled containers, that observation is noted in medication data entry fields in the

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Tracker system. If a container is noted to have mixed pills, that is likewise noted. Attempt to identify pills that are not properly packaged.

- d) Any non-prescription medication or supplements taken into custody by the Deputy will be inventoried, packaged, stored, and destroyed in the same manner as prescription medication and can be packaged with prescription medication from the same case.
- e) Heat seal the bag and date and initial the seal with a black permanent marker or tamper-evident bags may be used with dating and initialing of the seal.
- f) Submit the bag(s) to the medication storage shelf in the evidence room. For cases involving homicides, the medication will be stored in the 'Homicide' storage area.

3. Procedures for Illicit Drugs

It is the policy of this Office to have law enforcement officers collect any found illicit drugs and/or paraphernalia on or about a decedent/scene. In the rare occasion that a Deputy Coroner finds evidentiary value in having custody of said suspected drugs and/or paraphernalia, or the items are discovered at autopsy, the substance(s) or item(s) will be photographed if possible and collected as described above with the following additional security measures:

- a) The suspected drugs shall be bagged in two layers of plastic, heat sealed, initial, and date the seals or two tamper-evident bags may be used. Date and initial the outer bags' seal.
- b) Paraphernalia will be packaged according to shape and/or characteristics and will be separated from any drugs. Uncapped needles/syringes, glass pipes with broken ends/pieces, or other sharp items will be packaged in a sharps container. All other paraphernalia may be packaged in size-appropriate plastic or paper evidence bags.
- c) The drugs will be weighed in the packaging in its totality prior to submission into the evidence management system. The gross weight will be indicated in the appropriate field in the data system. All weights are used for quality control purposes and not as an exact weight for evidentiary purposes.

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- d) The suspected drugs should be described by their physical characteristics, not their suspected type. For example, the suspected crack should be described as “an off-white rock-like substance”. Suspected marijuana: “green plant material”. Suspected crystal meth: “Crystal-like substance”, etc.
- e) Different suspected drug types i.e. crack, marijuana, powder cocaine, crystal meth, and other forms of street drugs will be packaged and weighed separately.
- f) The evidence technician or designee will enter the item(s) separately into the evidence management computer system, generate and affix a barcode label, and secure the suspected illicit drug(s) in the designated area for drugs in the evidence room.
- g) Drugs collected on scene or at autopsy in the case of a homicide should be transferred to the appropriate police/law enforcement agency when they are present. When those items need to be stored prior to transfer, they will be stored in the ‘Homicide Area’ within the evidence room for safekeeping.
- h) Update the MDI case file with the chain of custody.

32.3 DISPOSAL OF MEDICATION AND ILLICIT DRUGS

1. Prior to a Deputy authorizing the destruction of medication or illicit drugs for a particular case, the case must be administratively closed, the date of collection for the medication or illicit drugs must be older than one year and the deputy should check the disposition of the case with the original law enforcement agency and/or solicitor’s office if applicable.
2. Any medication from homicide cases, and any other evidence for deaths falling under the Preservation of Evidence Act or other special cases as the Coroner may direct, will NOT be authorized for destruction without prior specific, written authorization of the Coroner.
3. Once the final approval for destruction is obtained from the Coroner or the Chief Deputy, the evidence technician and one other person will pull the medication and illicit drugs on the approved list from their current storage location.

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4. After updating the Tracker system to show the medication or supplements as disposed of, the containers shall be opened, and contents scattered in a medical waste container with two-person control. In the case of liquids, the contents shall be poured down a sink drain in the autopsy suite.
5. In the case of illicit drugs, those items shall be transferred to the Sheriff's Office Forensic Services Unit for controlled destruction. Obtain the printed name and signature of the receiving Deputy Sheriff on the transfer receipt. Update MDI accordingly per case.
6. Prior to the destruction or transfer, the Coroner or Chief Deputy Coroner may randomly pull several medication bags from the destruction list and open the bags to verify the original pill count inventory vs. the current content of bags.
7. Paper records of destruction may be converted to electronic copies/scans to be held indefinitely.