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| **Evidence Collection and Packaging and Destruction** | **Union County Coroner Office** |

A systematic and consistent approach will be followed in the process of collecting and preserving evidence during each investigation. The staff of the Union County Coroner Office will adhere to established standards during the collection and retention of evidence to ensure the credibility of evidence in subsequent legal proceedings. Standards for documenting chain of custody will be followed for all evidence, including specimens collected for toxicology.

Definition of Evidence-items will include but not limited to clothing; personal effects, firearms, bullets, bullet fragments, hair, fibers, medications, drugs or drug paraphernalia or any other item the investigator deems necessary for the investigation.

Procedures:

1. Chain of custody must be documented for all collected items of evidence.
2. The Autopsy permit, Personal Effects, Evidence, Toxicology and Laboratory Service Request and/or Chain of Custody forms will be used to document items that have been received, collected, released or held as evidence.
3. Evidence and specimens obtained during postmortem procedures must be tagged and placed in appropriate packaging. Swabs, bloodstained items or other moisture-laden materials should be dried before packaging in paper bags.
   1. Each packaged evidence item will contain the coroner case number, the name of the deceased, retrieval date and who collected the evidence along with location of evidence where collected.
      1. A packaged evidence item will contain a brief description of the evidence on the package exterior.
      2. Labels will be used for labeling the evidence package.
   2. The investigator will verify the contents of each evidence package by placing their initials on the package exterior.
   3. Each evidence bag, container, box, etc. which is used to store any evidence item will be properly secured.
4. Forms
   1. Property Effects Form
      1. Used for documenting items of clothing and description, jewelry, pocket contents and other personal effects of a deceased person.
      2. Unless held for evidentiary purposes, all articles of clothing will be released to the designated funeral home with the body for subsequent release to family members as appropriate.
      3. Personal effects held as evidence will be marked” Evidence Item #” section of the Property Effects form.
      4. In cases where personal effects are retained as evidence, the Chain of Custody section on the Evidence form will also be completed and the item(s) will be sequentially numbered.
   2. Evidence Form
      1. Items of evidentiary value collected at the time of the autopsy, not already documented on the Personal Effects or Toxicology Form, will be documented on the Evidence Form.
         1. The Assigned investigator will ensure completion of the Evidence Form.
         2. Multiple items must be numbered as sequential item numbers and correspond to evidence packaging.
         3. The Chain of Custody section on the evidence form will be used to indicate the release or retention of evidence items. Evidence items may be released to law enforcement officers on the same day of the investigation and the person receiving the evidence will sign the appropriate section of the Evidence Form.
         4. Retained items of evidence will be placed and secured in the evidence room at the Union County Coroner Office. Items held as evidence will be entered in RMS. The RMS label will indicate a brief description of the evidence, name of the decedent, name of the person placing the evidence in the locker, the date and time the evidence was stored in the locker, and the coroner case number.
   3. Chain of Custody Form – General Use
      1. A standard Chain of Custody form will be used to document the receipt of evidence or the transfer of stored/retained evidence that may not be documented on the Evidence form.
      2. Items such as body fluid specimens and/or solid tissue transferred from Union County Coroner Office to laboratories, consultants and other agencies will be documented on the Chain of Custody form.
   4. Toxicology and Laboratory Service Request Form
      1. The Toxicology and Laboratory Service Request Form will be used whenever postmortem specimens are collected and tests are ordered.
      2. The type and source of specimen will be indicated on the form.
      3. Specimens such as solid tissue and gastric will also be documented on the form and the storage location will be indicated.
      4. The Forensic Pathologist assigned to the case will ensure the proper tests are ordered and sign the Toxicology and Laboratory Service Request Form.
      5. The release of specimens from the Union County Coroner Office to a courier will be documented in the chain of custody section at the bottom of the Toxicology and Laboratory Service Request Form. The courier will indicate receipt of the specimens on the form.
      6. Additional information regarding toxicology specimens is contained in “Policy – Toxicology Specimens”

# Evidence Disposition

* 1. Items of clothing and personal effects that can be released to the designated funeral director, only upon authorization from the Union County Coroner Office.
  2. Items of clothing and personal effects of evidentiary value to law enforcement may be released to law enforcement when indicated by the assigned investigator of the Union County Coroner Office.
  3. Evidence held relevant to a homicide investigation will ultimately be released to the investigating law enforcement agency for final disposition.
  4. Temporary Storage Lockers
     1. The Union County Sheriff’s Office maintains the key for the temporary storage lockers and the main storage area for evidence.
     2. The Union County Sheriff’s Office is responsible for removing evidence from the temporary storage lockers, ensuring proper documentation procedures have been followed and placing the evidence into the main evidence storage area. Access to the main evidence cabinet is limited to the administrator or designee.
     3. Evidence will be maintained until it is needed for legal proceedings, until it is released to law enforcement or until it can be appropriately disposed of when the case is signed out.
     4. Evidence will be retained for a period of up to 90 days past the date of the final autopsy report.
     5. Bullets and fragments of ammunition will be destroyed only after providing written notice to the law enforcement agency of jurisdiction. The law enforcement agency will be provided an opportunity to receive the evidence or object to the destruction.
     6. Medications may be destroyed before the case is closed if the prosecuting attorney or law enforcement does not object to the destruction.
     7. Retained items of evidence will be held longer than the standard 90-day period past the final date of the autopsy report, if written notice has been received from a family member, insurance company or another legal representative.
        1. The written notice must indicate the need for the retention and/or analysis of the evidence item(s).
        2. The assigned investigator will notify the prosecuting attorney or law enforcement when a request has been received to retain evidence.
  5. If no written notice has been received to retain items of evidence past the 90-day retention period as described above, the investigator will facilitate the final disposition of the evidence by one of the following methods:
     1. Disposal in bio-medical waste
     2. Sharps containers
     3. Trash bin
     4. Release to appropriate law enforcement agency
     5. Live ammunition will be released to law enforcement. The destruction/final disposition of evidence items will be witnessed by an investigator of the Union County Coroner Office or law enforcement personal. Final disposition will be indicated on the Evidence form or a separate Evidence Disposition form.
     6. Judges authorization.