

Chain of Custody

Policy:

Every item obtained from the scene, whether it is property or evidence will be documented in MDI log under *property/evidence*. Property and evidence will be sealed in an integrity bag, and the investigator/autopsy technician who collected the items will then initial and date the sealed bag.

- All property and evidence will be placed into a designated storage locker in the autopsy suite until released to the designated agency or representative.
- When released, the designated agency or representative will sign for the Property or Evidence in MDI log to document the chain of custody.

Specimens and Toxicology

Specimens collected at the scene or during postmortem examination, will be placed into appropriate containers and labeled with the case number, decedent's name, and date of collection. For toxicology testing, the investigator will refer to the most current policy and procedure provided by the Washington State Patrol (WSP) Toxicology Laboratory.

DNA

After collection of blood specimen, the investigator will place several drops of blood on a filter paper for DNA sample. The filter paper and the paper envelope for the sample will be labeled with the decedents name and case number. These DNA samples will be kept indefinitely and will be made available for future additional testing.

Histology

If requested by the Forensic Pathologist, the investigator will prepare cassettes labeled with the case number and identifying letter (i.e. MDI case #_A and MDI case #_B). A formalin container labeled with the case number, decedents name, and date of collection will be prepared for the pathologist. During autopsy, the pathologist will collect specimens for histological purposes when needed. After specimen collection, the cassettes will be placed in the clean formalin container. A requisition form will be completed by Coroner staff and the histology courier will be notified for pick up (Avero Diagnostics). This must be done the day of specimen collection. Scan in the original copy of the requisition form prior to placing both the original and yellow copies in the specimen bag's outer pouch. The pink copy will be retained in the file for records. Do not scan the pink copy, it is too faint. Histology blocks and slides will be retained indefinitely.

Stock Tissue

A formalin container labeled with the case number, decedents name, and date of collection will be prepared for the pathologist. During autopsy, the pathologist will collect tissue samples and place them in the container. This tissue will be stored for three years and one day. If case is certified as a homicide or undetermined death the tissue will be kept indefinitely.

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Evidence

All evidence will be collected by the Forensic Pathologist and/or coroner staff assisting with the autopsy. Evidence will be placed in “properly labeled” paper envelopes or paper bags provided by law enforcement present or supplied by the Coroner’s Office.

To document chain of custody, all evidence collected by the Forensic Pathologist/coroner staff will be released with a form bearing signatures of the Coroner’s Office and receiving law enforcement representative specifying the date and time of release. This *evidence release form* will be automatically generated in MDI log as a document. A copy of the form will need to be retained in the paper case file.

Evidence items retained after the examination shall be transferred to evidence storage lockers by the coroner staff attending the examination. A note will be entered in the *communications log* in MDI log as well as the *Pathology/autopsy* section stating that there is evidence being held and what the steps are to release that evidence.

Body Release

Coroner staff will enter body release date and time, recipient receiving body, and name of the coroner staff member releasing body. The coroner staff member will have the representative receiving the body electronically sign the body release form. This form will be autogenerated in MDI log under documents. A copy of this form will be printed out and placed in the case file to document the release of the body.