



SPRINGFIELD TOWNSHIP POLICE DEPARTMENT
Wyndmoor, Pennsylvania

Policy 4-12

Policy Title: Evidence Collection and Preservation

Date of Issue: December 1, 2022

Rescinds: None

By Authority of:

Chief of Police

I. Purpose

The purpose of this policy is to establish procedural guidelines for the Springfield Township Police Department regarding the documentation, collection, and preservation of physical evidence at accident and crime scenes.

II. Policy

All personnel of the Springfield Township Police Department shall comply with the provisions of this policy.

III. Guidelines and Procedures

A. Protection of the crime scene by first responding officers

1. The first arriving officers to any crime scene should first and foremost be concerned with their own personal protection. Officers entering a potential crime scene should check the location to ensure that the perpetrator is not at the scene creating a danger and then should ensure that the scene is stabilized and safe. They should then move to the rendering of first aid to all injured persons and then focus on the protection of the physical scene for crime scene documentation and physical evidence collection.
2. Officers should be aware that a crime scene consists of a mass amount of valuable evidence that can be used to document the crime and subsequently identify the perpetrator(s). The crime scene shall be properly protected and handled by first responding officers in order to ensure that the subsequent collection and preservation of the scene and evidence is not accidentally or intentionally contaminated or destroyed by others at the scene.

3. The first responding officers at a scene where evidence collection will be required shall at a minimum:
 - i. Enter with caution, ensure that the perpetrator is not present, and stabilize the scene.
 - ii. Broadcast all suspect information, if applicable, to all responding units.
 - iii. Render emergency first aid to injured persons or arrange for such treatment.
 - iv. Protect the scene from accidental or intentional contamination of evidence by limiting entry to only required or authorized personnel.
 - v. Document any changes to the scene that occurred during the search of the scene for the perpetrator, such as opening doors or turning on lights, as well as any changes during lifesaving efforts.
 - vi. Begin a crime scene entry log documenting all persons entering or leaving the scene and their reason for entry and exit.
 - vii. Copy down names and address of potential witnesses and registration numbers of vehicles in the area.
 - viii. Brief the shift supervisor (if working) and investigators upon their arrival and assist as requested.
 - ix. Refer all questions from neighbors, interested parties, or the media to the appropriate department person.

B. Scene documentation and evidence collection

1. Officers assigned to the collection and documentation of physical evidence shall at a minimum:
 - i. Provide for the safe parking of any vehicles involved in the evidence collection process.
 - ii. Provide for adequate security and protection of all collection equipment at the scene.
 - iii. Meet with the scene supervisor, detectives assigned to the case, and the first responding officer for a briefing.
 - iv. Conduct a walk-through of the scene.
 - v. Formulate a plan of action for the documentation and processing of the scene.

- vi. Determine whether any further assistance is needed.
2. The following rules shall apply to all crime scenes and should progress in the order outlined unless not feasible:
 - i. Documentation of the scene through overall, midrange, and close-up photographs with and without scales.
 - ii. Documentation of the scene through diagrams (sketches) when applicable.
 - iii. Collection of all physical evidence noting location, date and time collected, name of person collecting the item, and the assignment of an item number. All packaging shall be done as per department policy.
 - iv. Secure, protect, and document the field transfer of physical custody of all collected evidence at a central location at a crime scene to ensure proper chain-of-custody pending transport to the police station.
 - v. Process the scene for possible fingerprints, palmprints, and footprints.
 - vi. Complete a final walk-through of the scene to ensure that nothing was missed or forgotten.
- C. In all cases of evidence collection, particularly when major crimes are involved, officers should consider consulting with the District Attorney's office or obtaining search warrants prior to beginning the collection process.

IV. Photographs and Video Recording of Scenes

- A. Crime scenes that involve major cases, or serious injury or death to others, shall be photographed. It is preferred that this be done by a crime scene technician, however, this may not always be possible. The following procedures shall apply to all scenes:
 1. Photographs shall be taken of crime scenes by first taking overall views of the scene. As evidence is identified, it shall be photographed at a midpoint and prior to collection at a close up. The close-up photo will be taken both with and without measurement scales.
 2. All evidence photographs shall be taken with Springfield Township Police Department-owned camera equipment.
- B. Crime scenes that do not involve major cases or the services of an evidence officer may be photographed by other officers in accordance with above. All officers photographing the scene should have a basic knowledge of the operation of the camera and department policies.

- C. Video recording of crime scenes may also be used. This procedure shall be used in concert with photographing of the scene. All video recordings shall contain a placard at the beginning and end, which shall contain the date, agency name, location, case number, and the name of the photographer. The video media shall be appropriately marked as evidence in accordance with department policies.
- D. The department maintains two digital cameras used for the collection of photographic evidence. One camera is assigned to patrol, stored in the shift supervisor's vehicle, and available to be used by any patrol officer on an active tour of duty. The second camera is assigned to detectives. Any officer that uses any camera shall ensure that the photographs taken are uploaded into the department records management system prior to the end of their shift. Photos may also be placed onto a thumb drive and submitted into evidence, in accordance with department policy.

V. Latent and Inked Fingerprints

- A. All latent prints developed at a crime scene shall be lifted consistent with current latent processing procedures and placed on a latent lift card. The card will detail all information needed to identify the crime scene location, location of the lift, methods used to develop the latent, person making the lift and their initials, the date and time of the lift, and a number designation. Photographs prior to the lift may also be taken.
- B. All latent prints lifted at a crime scene shall be submitted as evidence in accordance with department policies.
- C. All elimination prints taken from persons at crime scenes shall be submitted along with the latent prints for examination and possible submission to the Pennsylvania State Police / AFIS for analysis.

VI. Personnel

- A. All evidence officers should maintain a basic knowledge of the recovery of latent prints, crime scene photography, and crime scene sketching.
- B. All sworn members of the Springfield Township Police Department shall receive additional training as needed in the collection and preservation of physical evidence.

VII. Seizure of Computer Equipment

- A. A search warrant or a consent search is required before the seizure and examination of computer evidence.
- B. If a search warrant is used, it should include wording to allow the seizure of all computer equipment, including the main computing unit, monitor, keyboard, and mouse. Peripherals

should also be included, such as printers, scanners, cameras, storage media, etc. Language to seize any notes in the area should also be included, as well as language to seize computer books. The District Attorney's Office shall be consulted for exact wording and approval of the search warrant.

- C. When entry is made and the scene is secured, all persons should be moved from the area, including police officers. All officers should be briefed prior to the execution of the warrant that they should not touch the computer unless the lead investigator instructs them to.
- D. If the computer is running and is performing a process, let it continue unless you see that it is deleting. If deleting is observed, power off the computer immediately by pulling the plug.
 - 1. Photograph the screen.
 - 2. Photograph the entire area, to include the front and rear of the computer and the wiring.
 - 3. When you are ready to turn the machine off, unplug the machine from the rear of the computer. Then mark the wires and the sockets as you take it apart.
- E. Realizing that latent prints may be present on computer equipment or computer related materials, caution should be exercised not to contaminate any evidence by wearing gloves.
- F. When transporting the equipment, use care that it does not get damaged in the handling or transport. Keep away from police radios and any magnetic items.
- G. Do not photocopy any computer media such as CDs, CDRs, CDRWs, floppy disks, or any other magnetic storage media.

VIII. Examination of Computer Hardware

- A. Officers encountering computer hardware in criminal investigations shall notify a detective for assignment of forensic resources prior to touching, moving, or otherwise attempting to manipulate any information or seize any hardware or other electronic equipment covered under this order.
- B. The examination of computer evidence will be completed by resources specially trained in this task.

IX. Securing and Seizing Cellphones, Smartphones, Tablets, Electronic Paging Devices, Facsimile Machines, and Other Similar Electronic Devices

- A. Cellphones, smartphones, tablets, electronic paging devices, etc. may be seized without a search warrant or consent, when one of the following conditions apply:

1. Probable cause to seize exists.
2. Safekeeping until ownership can be proven.
- B. A search warrant or a consent search is required before the examination of cellphones, smartphones, tablets, and / or electronic paging devices, etc.
- C. These electronic devices can contain valuable evidence associated with criminal activity. Unless an emergency exists, the device should not be accessed. Should it be necessary to access the device, all actions associated with the manipulation of the device should be noted in order to document the chain of custody and ensure admission in court.
- D. In order to protect potential evidence stored within a cellphone, smartphone, tablet, or electronic paging device, the officer seizing the item should:
 1. Leave the device turned on.
 2. Place the device in airplane mode, or if unable to, place into a Faraday bag.
- E. Facsimile Machines
 1. If the FAX machine is found "on," powering down may cause loss of last number dialed and / or stored faxes.

X. DNA Evidence Collection

- A. First responder responsibilities and precautions
 1. Every officer shall maintain an awareness of the importance of the identification, collection, transportation, and storage of DNA evidence.
 2. Because extremely small samples of DNA can be used as evidence, greater attention to contamination issues is necessary. Evidence can be contaminated when DNA from another source gets mixed with DNA relevant to the case. This can happen when someone sneezes or coughs over the evidence or touches their mouth, nose or other part of the face and then touches the area of the evidence containing the DNA.
 3. All first responders and investigators at a crime scene shall take the necessary steps to locate, and the necessary precautions to protect, items and / or locations that may contain DNA evidence for collection and preservation.
 4. To avoid contamination of evidence that may contain DNA, always take the following precautions;
 - i. Wear gloves. Change them before and after obtaining a sample.

- ii. Use disposable instruments or clean them thoroughly before and after handling each sample.
- iii. Avoid touching the area of the evidence where you believe DNA may exist.
- iv. Avoid talking, sneezing, scratching, and coughing over evidence.
- v. Avoid touching your face, nose and mouth when collecting and packaging evidence.
- vi. Air-dry evidence thoroughly before packaging (not in direct sunlight).
- vii. Put evidence into new paper bags or paper envelopes; do not use plastic bags, or staples.

B. Procedures for collection, storage and transportation of DNA evidence

1. The procedures established in the "Pennsylvania State Police Crime Laboratory" evidence collection publication shall be used for the collection, storage, and transportation of DNA evidence.
2. When transporting and storing DNA evidence, keep the evidence dry and at room temperature. Once the evidence has been secured in paper bags or paper envelopes, it must be sealed, labeled and transported in a way that ensures proper identification of where it was found and proper chain of custody.
3. Never place DNA evidence in plastic bags because the moisture retained in the bags can be damaging to the DNA. Direct sunlight and hot conditions also may be harmful to DNA. Avoid keeping evidence in places that may get hot, such as a room or police vehicle without air conditioning.
4. As with fingerprints, the effective use of DNA may require the collection and analysis of "elimination samples." These samples are necessary to determine whether the evidence came from the suspect or from someone else.

C. Any officer tasked with collecting DNA shall be trained in the collection of DNA evidence. This training should meet the national standards on DNA collection. At a minimum, the training will meet the basic collecting and packaging of DNA for submission to an accredited laboratory.

D. DNA evidence should be submitted only to agencies that have been accredited for processing DNA samples following the established procedures of the laboratory to which the evidence is submitted.

E. One investigative tool available to law enforcement is CODIS (Combined DNA Index System). CODIS, an electronic database of DNA profiles that can identify suspects, is similar to the AFIS database. All states have implemented a DNA index of individuals convicted of certain

crimes. Therefore, law enforcement officers have the ability to identify possible suspects when no prior suspect existed. The CODIS system is available through the FBI Laboratory, via the Pennsylvania State Police Crime Laboratory.

XI. Sexual Assault Kit Collection

- A. The department shall comply with the Sexual Assault Testing and Collection Act 35§101721.1 through 10172.4, known as Act 29 of 2019.
- B. The department shall take possession of a sexual assault kit within 72 hours of being notified of its existence. Upon receipt of the kit, existing evidence protocols shall be followed to ensure the integrity of the evidence.
- C. Testing by an approved laboratory
 - 1. If the victim has provided written consent to the forensic testing of the sexual assault kit, the department shall submit said evidence to the Pennsylvania State Police laboratory within 15 days.
 - 2. If the victim does not provide written consent to testing, the evidence shall be preserved and stored for a period not less than the statute of limitations, unless written consent is obtained within the two-year period.
- D. The sexual assault kits shall be stored in compliance with department policy pursuant to Act 29 of 2019.
- E. The evidence custodian shall ensure compliance with the bi-annual reporting requirements to the Pennsylvania Department of Health and / or the Pennsylvania State Police as required by Act 29 of 2019.

XII. Reports

- A. Any person processing a crime scene or crash scene shall document their activities on a department incident report. The report shall include all standard information required in a department report. The report shall also include whether or not photographs or video was taken.
- B. Evidence recovered at the scene shall be indicated in the written report listing the location of the recovery, the person who recovered it, and any other pertinent information for the chain of custody.
- C. The reporting required here shall be in addition to any other documentation required by department policies, or any other documentation required at the scene of the processing.