



# VIRGINIA DEPARTMENT OF FORENSIC SCIENCE

## EVIDENCE HANDLING & LABORATORY CAPABILITIES GUIDE

### EVIDENCE RECEIVING SECTION

#### Contact Information

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

<u>Laboratory</u>	<u>Section Contact</u>	<u>Phone Number</u>
Central	Ellen Spain	(804) 588-4027
Northern	Consandra Hicks	(703) 334-9758
Eastern	Eugene Price	(757) 355-5971
Western	Steven Kokkinakos	(540) 283-5907

# **GENERAL SUBMISSION OF EVIDENCE**

## **REQUEST FOR LABORATORY EXAMINATION**

The Request for Laboratory Examination (RFLE) form is designed to permit personnel in the laboratory to serve you in a more efficient and orderly fashion.

This form provides an evidence “receipt” for the submitter. The chain of custody for the evidence submission by, and return to, the submitting agency is documented on the RFLE. The form should be completed by the investigating officer prior to being hand-carried or mailed to the laboratory with the evidence. With this procedure the person receiving the evidence will be able to process the request much more rapidly.

When executing this form, print neatly using a ball point pen. The form should be resting on a hard surface. This will permit the last copies to be legible. **PLEASE PRINT LEGIBLY.** Corrections should be made on all copies. All corrections on a RFLE should be lined through, initialed and dated by the submitting officer.

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 a more timely return of other evidence submitted in the agency’s case.

When mailing evidence and the completed request form to the laboratory please detach the last copy of the form, which is to be retained by you for your records, and mail the **original** and remaining three copies.

In those instances where the officer is hand carrying the evidence to the laboratory, the entire request form (including all copies) should accompany the evidence. Upon accepting the evidence, the examiner or evidence receiving officer will sign the request form and return a copy to the submitting officer to serve as a receipt. Please note the FS number and have it available if you call to inquire about your case.

The request form is a communication device and should be used to clearly communicate the examinations and/or comparisons desired. **Remember to have a clear investigative reason for the submission.**

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

Do not mail WET biological evidence.

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 Guide.

Stapling is not an appropriate method for sealing evidence containers and should NEVER be used with document evidence.

## **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 5.

1. The full 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. If available, also include your cellular #. This makes communication easier.
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 file number, 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 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 the particular case.
9. Full name(s) of the suspect(s). If name(s) are unknown, it should be listed as "Unknown".
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 the particular case.
11. The date or approximate date that the offense occurred; the type of offense(e.g., rape, burglary, death investigation, illegal whiskey).  
  
(Please submit only one incident per request form).
12. The projected date of trial in which results of examination will be needed for litigation. Also please indicate the court level (Circuit, Juvenile or District).
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 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 as well as packaging information when applicable. 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.

## **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 matter, 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 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 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.

**REMINDER: Prohibited items include: firearms and ammunition, explosives, flammable liquids, petroleum distillates and caustics.**



## **SUBMISSION REMINDERS**

Please specify your agency's name and your agency's/precinct's address where you want the report sent.

When mailing evidence, please place the RFLE inside the mailing container but outside of the evidence container (see previous page for instructions). This assures that the evidence security is not compromised during the receiving process. When addressing the mailing container, please indicate "Attention: Evidence Receiving" rather than the name of the forensic scientist assigned to the case.

Place an agency phone number rather than a home phone number on the submission form. This will allow the analyst to contact you if there is a question. An agency phone number assures that someone is available to at least take a message and contact you. If available, include the e-mail address and a cellular # for the primary investigator assigned to the case to ensure quick communication.

Type or print legibly with a ballpoint pen on your request form. This form is used to relay information which is rendered useless if the analyst can't read it.

PLEASE USE JURISDICTION NAME to indicate jurisdiction of offense. DO NOT USE FIPS CODE or ORI #.

Indicate the court date and the type of court (i.e., District, Circuit, etc.). Do not indicate preliminary or arraignment dates.

Clearly describe the type of evidence container and the item(s) being submitted.

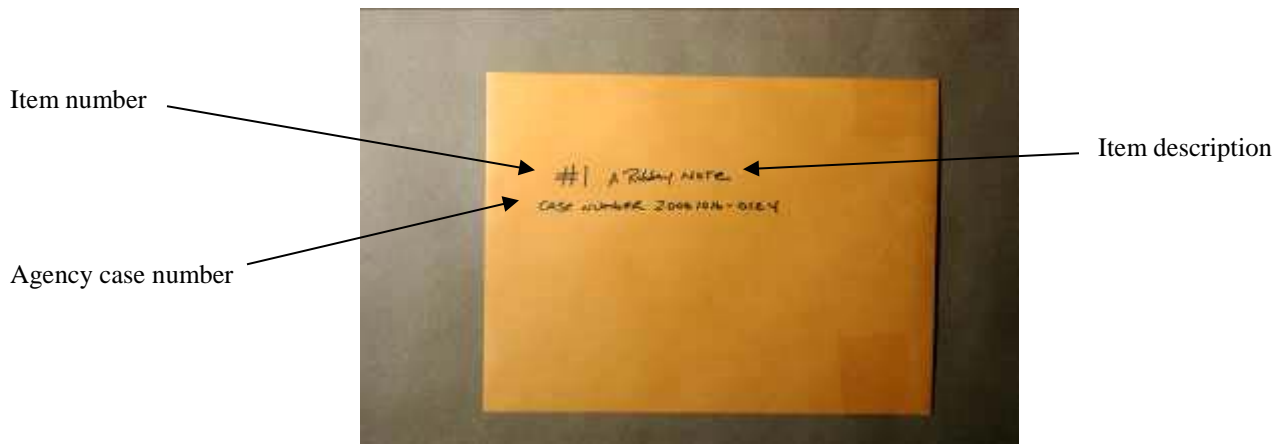
Use a different item number for each item of evidence submitted under a FS Lab number. If resubmission of the item of evidence is required, reuse the item number originally assigned to the item of evidence. Do not duplicate item numbers that have already been assigned in a previous submission.

Each item listed as being in the evidence container must have an item number which corresponds with item numbers written on the RFLE. If not, DFS will assign item numbers.

Latent print cards, which are often carried in by hand, must be properly packaged, sealed and protected.

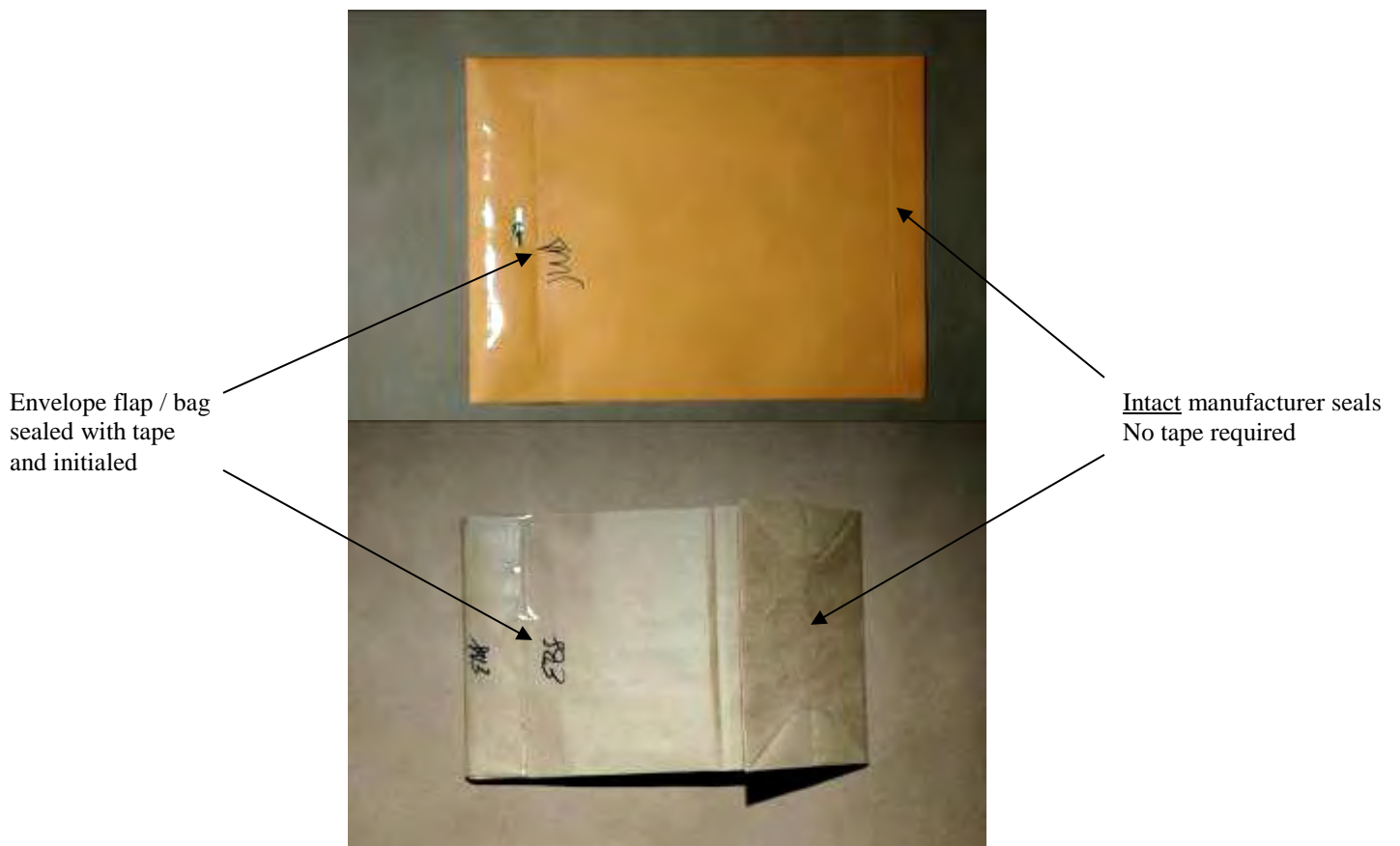
Evidence containers must be at least 5x7 inches in size to accommodate the DFS bar code label that is attached to the container for tracking purposes.

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

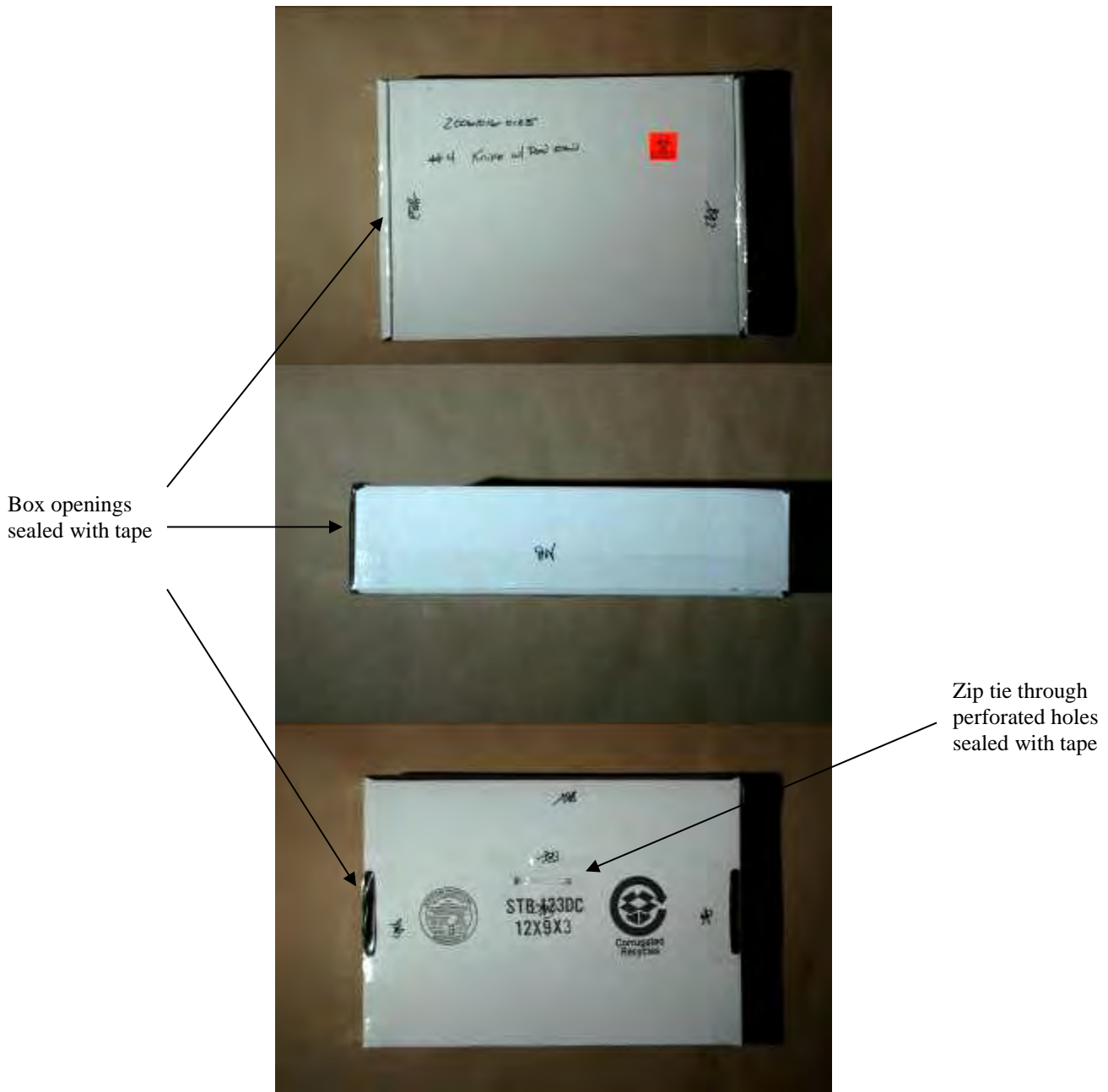


A secure seal is necessary for chain of custody. However, do not tape excessively. This makes evidence handling in the laboratory difficult.

**Evidence Seals:** An acceptable seal is one that prevents 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 the seal.



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



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

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

Additional packaging guidance can be found under [Paper Evidence Fold](#) and [Clothing in Paper Baffles](#).



## **RECOMMENDED SAFETY PROCEDURES FOR FIREARM SUBMISSION**

### **Removal of Magazine:**

It is strongly recommended that magazines be removed from firearms.

The magazine should be unloaded if DNA or Latent Fingerprint examinations are NOT being requested.

Cartridges that are removed should be placed into a separate container, such as a plastic evidence envelope.

Loaded or unloaded magazines should be placed into a plastic evidence envelope or other container or secured into the gun box with a plastic slip tie.

### **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.



Kleen Bore<sup>®</sup> Chamber Flag

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.



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.



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, firearms that have been sealed in water for submission or some other exceptional condition; in this instance submitting agencies should have a pre-arranged delivery appointment with the Evidence Receiving and Firearms Section personnel.*

## Packaging

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.

