PROVIDENCE POLICE DEPARTMENT

HEADQUARTERS

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CHIEF OF POLICE

TYPE OF ORDER	NUMBER/SERIES	ISSUE DATE	EFFECTIVE DATE
General Order	360.03	7/22/2026	7/22/2026
SUBJECT TITLE		**PREVIOUSLY ISSUED DATES**	
Collection & Preservation of Evidence		11/4/2024; 11/15/2021; 5/6/2018; 2/6/2017; 7/12/2013; Supersedes G.O #16, Series 2001	
REFERENCE		**RE-EVALUATION DATE**	
CALEA 12.1.2c; 42.2.1; 54.1.3; 83.1.1; 83.2.1; 83.2.4; 83.2.6; 83.3.2; 84.1.1d		5/6/2028	
SUBJECT AREA		**DISTRIBUTION**	
Law Enforcement Operations		All Sworn Personnel	

PURPOSE

The purpose of this policy is to establish procedures for the collection and preservation of evidence.

POLICY

Efficiency in the identification, collection, and preservation of physical evidence is essential to the criminal process. To safeguard its evidentiary value, all evidence must be carefully collected, correctly identified, properly packaged and secured, and accurately described in all Department entries, journals, logs, forms, and reports.

DISCUSSION

In order to ensure that the integrity of the evidence cannot be challenged, every person who has entered a crime or critical incident scene and/or has handled, examined, transported, or stored the evidence must be accounted for. The chain of custody begins at the moment the evidence is discovered and continues through its presentation in court.

Officers should always keep in mind that the evidence may either implicate or exonerate a person only if it is reliable and valid. Every effort should be made to leave the handling of evidence to members of the Bureau of Criminal Identification (BCI) and Property and Evidence Bureau.

PROCEDURE

I. FIRST RESPONDERS

A. The first officer(s) on the scene of a crime or critical incident may have the following responsibilities:

1. Cognizance of suspects that may be in flight.

2. Protecting life, requesting medical assistance, and arranging for transportation, if necessary.

3. Arresting perpetrators, if at the scene. A decision to leave the crime scene to pursue the perpetrator will be based on the circumstances that are presented to the officer.

4. Identifying and separating witnesses, securing their identities, and requesting that they remain at the scene to arrange an interview.

5. Notifying superiors of the Patrol Bureau, Detective Bureau, Youth Services Bureau (in cases involving youthful offenders), and the Bureau of Criminal Identification (BCI).

   a. Department resources should be requested as needed, whether or not a call-back is necessary.

      i. BCI shall be available to process crime scenes on a 24 hour / 7 day per week basis.

      ii. The Traffic Bureau Supervisor and accident investigators shall be available to investigate major traffic accident scenes and traffic-related fatalities on a 24 hour / 7 day per week basis.

6. Securing the scene using barricade tape to prevent unauthorized personnel from entering.

7. Excluding unauthorized person(s) from entering the established scene. This of course includes police officers not directly involved in the crime scene investigation.

8. For crime scenes, one officer shall be designated to maintain a "Crime Scene Sign-In Sheet" until members of the Investigative Division take control of the scene.

   a. The assigned officer shall stay on scene until properly relieved by a supervisor, or when the scene has been completely processed and secured by BCI.

   b. The Crime Scene Entry Sheet shall be turned over to BCI and shall become part of the BCI package.

9. Accurately reporting the incident in an incident report and/or witness statement.

B. First Responders at a crime or critical incident scene should not move or touch anything whenever practicable.

C. All activity performed and any scene alteration should be noted and later documented.

a. Briefly note and record any evidence that may relate to the scene.

b. The date, time of arrival, and weather conditions should be documented.

D. It is imperative that all evidence be protected from contamination, alteration, destruction, and/or damage. Any member who is unfamiliar with the procedures relating to the collection and preservation of evidence should obtain assistance from a patrol or unit supervisor, or member of BCI.

II. BUREAU OF CRIMINAL IDENTIFICATION

A. BCI shall be responsible for processing all major crime scenes and any other crime scene that the OIC of the Patrol Bureau (OIC) deems necessary. These responsibilities may include, but not be limited to:

1. Implementing crime scene control procedures.

2. Determining the scope of the general crime scene.

a. Update and expand crime scene protection as necessary along with determining if multiple scenes exist.

3. Establishing a single path of entry and exit to the crime scene to prevent contamination of evidence.

4. Securing all evidence found at the crime scene.

a. All personnel are prohibited from touching, moving, or collecting evidence without the permission of the OIC of the Bureau of criminal identification unless for safety reasons and/or to prevent the destruction of physical evidence.

b. All personnel are prohibited from using telephones, restrooms, smoking, turning water on, or turning lights on/off, without the permission of BCI.

5. Documenting all alterations to the crime scene made by:

a. First responding officers or rescue personnel.

b. Perpetrators.

c. Atmospheric conditions.

d. Other conditions including, but not limited to lights turned on/off, items moved, doors opened/ closed, appliances turned on/off, car engines turned on/off.

6. Implementing procedures to safeguard all evidence found at the scene, as applicable.

a. Ensuring that the Crime Scene Entry Sheet is maintained.

b. If the autopsy is being conducted while the investigators are still at the scene, any autopsy findings can be immediately communicated to the investigators at the scene to help them in their investigation and in the questioning of witnesses.

c. Suspect in Custody.

i. Document injuries.

ii. Safeguard all evidence found on the suspect, including clothing, blood, weapons, debris, soil, proceeds of the crime, etc.

iii. Ensure suspect does not wash his or her hands.

iv. Record any spontaneous statements made by the suspect.

v. Do not permit any conversation between the suspect and any parties present.

C. Reports filed by BCI personnel who process a crime scene shall include:

1. Date and time of arrival at the scene.

2. Location of the crime.

3. Name(s) of the victim(s), if known.

4. Name(s) of the suspect(s), if known.

5. Action taken at the scene, including:

a. Number of photographs taken.

b. Measurements taken, if any.

c. Listing of all physical evidence recovered.

6. Case reference number.

7. If photographs are not taken or physical evidence is not recovered, the investigating member's report shall document the appropriate reasons.

D. All Department members who handle evidence shall ensure that a proper recording of the chain of custody of physical evidence is documented and maintained. This record shall include:

1. Date and time of transfer.

2. Receiving person's name and functional responsibility.

3. Reason for the transfer.

4. Name and location of the laboratory.

E. The supervisor-in-charge of the BCI, or designee, shall be responsible for requesting crime laboratory examinations for physical evidence.

F. Members assigned to BCI shall receive specialized training and periodic refresher training in crime scene processing techniques. Such training shall include, but not be limited to, the following courses:

1. Recovery of latent fingerprints and palm prints.

2. Recovery of foot, tool, and tire impressions.

3. Photographing crime or accident scenes.

4. Preparing crime or accident scene sketches.

5. Collecting, preserving, and transmitting physical evidence, including biological materials.

a. When an investigation requires the collection of bodily substances, Division members will adhere to the RI Department of Health's *Rules and Regulations Related to the Collection of Bodily Substances for Criminal Identification Purposes*.

G. DNA evidence collection is extremely important regardless of an officer's assignment, rank, or expertise, so ALL sworn Department members should be aware of important issues involved in the identification, collection, transportation, and storage of DNA evidence. Department members should take precautions against possible contamination, because DNA can be extracted from seemingly minute samples of blood/bodily fluid. Evidence contamination can occur when DNA from a foreign source gets exposed to or mixed with DNA that is relevant to the case.

1. When transporting or storing DNA evidence, keep the evidence dry and at room temperature. Once the evidence has been secured in paper bags or envelopes, it must be sealed, labeled and transported in a way that ensures proper identification of where it was seized from and a proper chain of custody. Never place DNA in plastic bags. Direct sunlight and hot conditions can be harmful to DNA.

2. To avoid contamination of evidence that may contain DNA, always take the following precautions:

   a. Wear gloves.

   b. Use "disposable instruments" whenever possible; or at least ensure that non-disposable instruments are cleaned thoroughly before and after use.

   c. Avoid touching an area of evidence where you believe DNA exist.

   d. Avoid talking, sneezing, scratching and coughing over evidence.

   e. Avoid touching your face, nose, mouth when collecting or packaging DNA evidence.

   f. Air-dry evidence thoroughly before packaging.

   g. Put evidence into new paper bags or paper envelopes; never use plastic bags.

3. As with fingerprints, the effective use of DNA may require the collection and analysis of "known samples." These samples are necessary to determine whether the evidence came from the suspect or from someone else.

4. One investigative tool available to law enforcement is CODIS (Combined DNA Index System). CODIS is an electronic database of DNA profiles that can identify suspects. All states have

implemented a DNA index of individuals convicted of certain crimes. Therefore, law enforcement officers have the means to identify possible suspects for cases in which a culprit's identity was previously unknown.

5. All members of the BCI are trained in the collection of DNA evidence. At a minimum the training will meet basic standards for collecting and packaging DNA evidence samples for submission to an accredited laboratory.

III. INITIAL BCI CRIME SCENE PROCESSING

A. Initiate a preliminary survey.

1. Perform a cautious walk-through of the scene.

2. Photographically record the scene.

3. Identify physical evidence to be collected, such as:

a. Bloodstains.

b. Weapons.

c. Shell casings.

d. Hairs.

e. Fibers.

f. Trace evidence.

g. Other possible evidence.

4. Determine size of search area.

5. Determine necessary personnel and material resources.

6. Take notes.

B. Decedent/ victim at scene:

1. Document complete description of body.

a. Physical description.

b. Clothing description.

2. Position of the body.

3. Condition of the body.

a. Decomposition.

b. Blood wet or dry.

c. Insect activity.

d. Injuries.

e. Other conditions of note.

3. Preliminary medical examination at the scene:

a. Record the time of arrival of the medical examiner.

b. Obtain preliminary estimate on the time of death.

c. Release of the body to the medical examiner.

IV. SEARCHING FOR, COLLECTING, MARKING, AND CONTAINING EVIDENCE

A. Searching For Evidence

1. Establish the perimeters of the crime scene and document this location by crime scene photographs and sketches.

2. The case detective(s) or investigating member shall be responsible for preparing a search warrant, if necessary.

3. Establish the search method, which may vary, (i.e., strip, area, sector, concentric, spiral, grid, other, etc.).

a. Members should make a rough sketch with the approximate dimensions and distances noted.

b. Members should examine each item very carefully, thoroughly, and completely.

4. Members should give special attention to fragile evidence that may be destroyed or contaminated, if not collected upon discovery. All strange odors should be noted.

5. Members should treat as evidence all other items that are foreign to the area in which they are found, such as hair, fiber, and earth particles.

6. The search is completed when the area has been thoroughly examined, a rough sketch drawn, pertinent photographs taken, and necessary notes completed.

B. Collecting Evidence

1. After the search has been completed, sketches drawn, and photographs taken, the evidence may be collected.

2. The supervisor-in-charge of the BCI, or designee, should select one member as the lead evidence collector. This selection will allow the orderly and professional gathering of items to ensure the security, safe handling and proper chain of evidence. For all items of evidence collected, a list containing the following information should be prepared:

   a. Description of the item(s), including make, model, and serial number, if any.

   b. Source (from whom or where the item(s) was obtained).

   c. Name of person collecting the item(s).

3. Members should only handle evidence, when necessary. The use of rubber gloves is highly encouraged, as it will prevent the contamination of evidence and the potential transfer of communicable diseases to the member.

4. If the fingerprints of a member are placed on any item, it should be noted in the field notes and final reports.

5. If needed, an article may be cut out, taken away, or removed from its original environment, (i.e., parts of a carpet, upholstery, wall, door, ceiling, etc.).

6. Special types of evidence necessitate special handling procedures:

   a. Liquid blood samples should be placed in properly sealed containers and stored promptly in the BCI refrigerator.

   b. Wet or bloody clothing should be air-dried and packaged in paper bags.

   c. Physiological fluids should be refrigerated in BCI until transferred to the RI Department of Health.

   d. Items possibly supporting latent fingerprints should be protected from any movement or action that might destroy or contaminate the prints.

7. When searching for weapons, the following issues should be considered:

   a. If a firearm is located, BCI or a member of the Weapon's Bureau shall render it safe on scene.

   b. Notify the Officer-In-Charge of BCI.

   c. Record where weapon is located.

   d. Safeguard the weapon for forensic examination.

   e. If weapon is a firearm, consider an examination of the suspect's hands for residue analysis.

   f. Determine if weapon from premises.

C. Containing Evidence

1. The main purpose in using proper containers is to prevent a change in the physical evidence through:

   a. Loss by leakage.

   b. Evaporation or seepage.

   c. Contamination.
   d. Mixture or mingling.

   e. Alteration.

   f Pilferage.

2. The investigating member and the Department's Property and Evidence Custodian (PEC) are directly responsible for the preservation and security of the evidence.

3. All evidence containers should be sealed in such a way that a container cannot be opened, unless a seal is broken. All seals should have the member's name and other particulars written upon it.

4. Evidence should not be bent or forced into a container. Padding may be added to prevent the object from moving, sliding, or rolling within a container.

5. To ensure the preservation of evidence and the prevention of contamination, all items should be properly packaged, as follows:

a. Glass canning jars with screw-on-lids and metal paint cans for volatile substances.

b. Clean plastic bags for small items, such as: bullets, shell casings, glass fragments, metal fragments, paint chips, hair, fibers, dried blood, powder, etc.

c. Gun boxes for firearms.

d. Self-sealing plastic bags (polyester/polyethylene) for arson related objects.

e. Self-sealing plastic bags for narcotics and other dangerous drugs, jewelry, paper, and other small items.

f. Paper bags for stained materials, such as bloodied articles or those containing seminal fluid. (Do not package when moist. Articles should be allowed to thoroughly dry and should then be placed in their own separate container).

g. Cardboard boxes for large bulky items or numerous small articles from the same location.

h. Clear, see-through test tubes with screw-on-caps for hypodermic needles and syringes.

6. Evidence will be appropriately stored and secured according to Department directives.

V. CRIME SCENE PHOTOGRAPHS / VIDEOTAPES

A. The crime scene should be photographed and/or videotaped under the supervision of the lead investigator, supervisor-in-charge of the BCI, or designee, before any search is begun.

B. No one should be working within the scene during this time, nor should any police equipment be included in the photographs.

C. Objects may not be moved or examined until they have been photographed or videotaped from all relevant angles and examined for prints.

1. When practical, each item of evidence shall be photographed in its original location prior to being seized.

2. If necessary, items should be photographed with and without scale.

D. Crime scene photographs and/or videotapes should include:

1. The approaches to the scene (i.e. “Overall”).

2. The surrounding area (i.e. “Intermediate”).

3. Any “Close ups”.

4. The general scenario.

5. The area underneath the body, after its removal, if applicable.

6. Any fingerprints, bloodstains, tool marks, bite marks, damaged areas, skid marks, tire tracks, glass impressions, etc., if applicable.

E. At the time the photographs are taken, a record should be made of the date, time, and location of the photographs, as well as the photographer and case number of the incident.

F. Each item of evidence should be photographed, so as to depict its location in the scene of sketches and notes.

G. If a suspect is in custody and if applicable, photographs of the suspect should include:

1. Injuries.

2. Clothing and shoe wear.

3. Other evidence obtained from the suspect.

H. If a decedent/victim is involved, photographs should be taken:

1. Without chalk marks or other measurements.

2. From several different viewpoints.

3. Of any injuries.

I. Photographs should also be taken of various items, places, etc. to corroborate statements.

J. Photography to be conducted by BCI personnel may include, but not be limited to:

1. Digital photographs.

2. Digital video recordings.

K. Digital photographs are to be stored in a secure drive that can only be accessed by BCI personnel.

VI. SKETCHING

A. The investigating member and/or a member of the BCI shall create a sketch of the crime scene for every homicide. Sketches of non-homicide crime scenes may be made at the investigators' discretions. Sketches shall include, but not be limited to, the following:

1. Dimensions of the crime scene.

2. Relation of the crime scene to other buildings.

3. Address, floor, or room number, as appropriate.

4. Location of the significant features of the crime scene, including the victim.

5. Date and time of preparation.

6. Names of the persons preparing the sketch.

7. Direction of north.

8. Locations of physical evidence recovered.

VII. FINGERPRINTS

A. A crime scene search will include a detailed examination for visible, plastic and latent fingerprints when appropriate. Members performing this function will preserve all developed fingerprints.

B. All surface areas in and around the crime scene that have the potential of retaining finger and/or palm prints will be searched and processed using an appropriate method determined by the crime scene technician. These techniques may include:

1. Use of fingerprint dusting powders.

2. Use of chemical agents.

3. Use of alternative light source.

C. Elimination fingerprints will be obtained from all persons who may have had access to the crime scene, when deemed necessary. Elimination prints will be used to exclude prints of persons who had legal access to a crime scene. This includes the deceased victim(s).

D. Fingerprint found at a crime scene will be immediately recorded by photography before any attempt is made to lift the prints. A photograph of the print will be taken with a scale present in the photograph and another photograph will be taken without the scale present.

E. The fingerprint will be placed on a lift card which will contain the following information:

1. Case number.

2. Date and time of lift.

3. Name of member making the lift.

4. Exact place print was lifted from.

5. Type of object print lifted from

6. A sketch of the print location, if necessary.

F. Elimination fingerprints from known individuals will contain the following information:

1. Person's name and date of birth.

2. Person's address

3. Date the prints were taken.

4. Signature of the person.

5. Signature of the members taking the prints.

6. Prints should be labeled, "For Elimination Purposes."

G. Fingerprints from known individuals, latent fingerprints, and all other fingerprint evidence will be stored in such a manner as to preserve evidentiary value through proper identification, packaging, security and chain of custody.

VIII SUBMISSION OF EVIDENCE TO FORENSIC LABORATORIES

A. It shall be the responsibility of the supervisor-in-charge of the BCI, or designee to request Crime/Forensic Laboratory examinations. Such requests shall require that the written results of a laboratory analysis be available to the investigating members.

B. Depending upon the circumstances surrounding a particular investigation and/or the type of evidence in question, the Department shall utilize any of the following Crime/Forensic Laboratories:

1. The Rhode Island Crime Laboratory at the University of Rhode Island in Kingston, Rhode Island. Evidence shall be submitted, in accordance with Evidence Submission Guidelines, along with an Evidence Examination Request Form.

2. The Rhode Island Department of Health (HEALTH) Laboratory in Providence, Rhode Island. Evidence shall be submitted, along with a State Toxicologist Report, in a manner consistent with HEALTH guidelines.

3. Other approved laboratories (i.e. the FBI Laboratory in Washington, D.C.), when appropriate.

    a. Evidence submission guidelines for all of the aforementioned crime/forensic laboratories referenced above shall be accessible on a 24/7 basis to all agency personnel who are authorized to submit evidence on behalf of the Department.

C. Regardless of which laboratory is utilized, Department members shall ensure that the following information is recorded of receipts obtained, upon submission of the evidence:

1. Name of the member last having custody of the item.

2. Date and time of the submission or mailing and the method used for transmission.

3. Date and time of receipt in the laboratory.

4. Name and signature of the person in the laboratory receiving the evidence.

D. All seized evidence subject to laboratory examination shall be submitted to the appropriate laboratory, as soon as practicable. In situations where perishable evidence such as fresh blood, blood-stained objects, physiological stains and tissue, and biological materials cannot be submitted in a timely fashion, such perishable evidence shall be stored in the Department's Biohazard Storage Refrigerator. As with all evidence, members are to ensure that the proper chain of evidence is recorded when handling perishable evidence.

E. Items of physical evidence submitted for examination will be prepared in a uniform manner. Items of evidence will be packaged and transmitted consistent with the requirements of the receiving laboratory.

IX. BCI CRIME SCENE VAN

A. The Department Crime Scene Van is designed and equipped to respond to all major crimes scenes that will require extensive and complex investigative activities. It shall be the responsibility of the Officer-in-Charge of BCI, or his/her designee, to authorize the use of the Crime Scene Van at a major crime scene.

B. All members of BCI. that have received specialized training in crime scene technology are authorized to operate the van and use the equipment maintained within the van. In the event the Crime Scene Van is needed at a major crime, the Officer-in-Charge of BCI shall assign a crime scene investigator to transport the van to the scene in a safe manner. The Crime Scene Van will not be utilized as a regular patrol-type vehicle.

C. It is the responsibility of the Officer-in-Charge of BCI to ensure that the Crime Scene Van is maintained in good repair and is ready for service on a 24 hour / 7 day per week basis. The van shall be stocked with the necessary equipment to perform at least the following functions:

1. Recovery of latent fingerprint evidence.

2. Photography a videography.

3. Crime scene sketching and recording.

4. Collection, labeling, and preservation of physical evidence.

XI. SEIZURE OF COMPUTER EQUIPMENT

A. If the seizure of computer equipment is necessary in the performance of an investigation and if all legal requirements have been fulfilled, members should follow the listed procedures to limit the loss of electronic evidence:

1. Preserve computer area for potential fingerprints.

2. Immediately restrict access to computer.

3. Isolate computer to restrict remote access by disconnecting phone lines, network cables, and disabling wireless networks.

4. If the computer is “OFF,” do not turn “ON.”

5. If the computer is “ON,”

a. Stand-alone computer (non-networked).

i. Consult with a computer specialist (see Section B below).

ii. If computer specialist not available:
- Photograph screen, then disconnect all power sources; unplug from wall AND the back of the computer.
- Place evidence tape over each drive slot.
- Photograph/diagram and label back of computer components with existing connections.
- Label all connectors/cable ends to allow reassembly as needed.
- If transport is required, package components and transport/store components as fragile cargo.
- Keep away from magnets, radio transmitters and otherwise hostile environments.

b. Networked or business computers.

i. Consult with a computer specialist for further assistance (See section B below).

ii. Do not attempt to disconnect any part of the computer system as this may severely damage the system or disrupt legitimate business and/or create member and Department liability.

B. Additional information and computer specialists may be accessed through Department personnel, the U.S. Secret Service, the Federal Bureau of Investigation and/or other law enforcement agencies.

APPROVED:



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