

Policies and Procedures for Managing Physical Evidence

A. Forensic Tape Analysis, Inc. (FTAI) manages all physical evidence so as to guarantee the integrity of that evidence. This is accomplished by procedures intended to 1; insure the chain of custody, 2; properly identify all evidence, 3; maintain the security and confidentiality of all evidence, and 4; carefully document all technical and non-technical actions taken with evidence. FTAI strives to manage physical evidence according to the most rigorous law-enforcement procedures. FTAI also adheres to the Rules of Evidence that apply in whatever jurisdiction is pertinent to particular civil or criminal matters referred to FTAI for investigation.

B. Submitting Evidence to FTAI. The following nine-step procedure should be followed when submitting physical evidence to FTAI for examination.

1. The only person to handle evidence chain of custody will be the designated "Evidence Custodian" The contributor should be the same as that which originally obtained or seized the evidence. Complete notes should be maintained about the seizure, history of custody and submission of the evidence in order to establish the chain of custody in court proceedings.
2. Evidence must be properly marked, for identification by the technician having custody for analysis purposes.
 - a. Marking should include the date (DD-MM-YY), whether the specimen is known (K) or questioned (Q), the file number assigned by the Evidence Custodian, and to initials designating the contributor and the technician assigned to the case.
 - b. Markings should be written or printed with indelible ink.
 - c. Markings should be made on a permanent portion of the specimen.
 - d. If more than one specimen is provided, each must be marked with an item number or letter to clearly distinguish the specimen from all other specimens.
3. Evidence must be properly packaged for submission to FTAI. The purpose of packaging is to protect the evidence, to avoid possible contamination or confusion among different specimens, and to guard against loss during shipment and delivery a company with a tracing system should be utilized.
 - a. Magnetic recordings (audiotape, videotape, or computer disks to be examined for authentication, enhancement, voice identification, etc.) must be properly protected against re-recording or over-recording.

Analog audiotape cassettes are provided with two plastic tabs, which allow recordings to be made. Tabs are located on the rear edge of the cassette. These tabs must be removed (broken) prior to packaging. If this is not completed before the specimen is received it will be done in FTAI's laboratory. Digital audiotape cassettes may have similar tabs, or they may have moveable tabs. These must be set to the "write – protect" position. Some videotape cassettes have breakable "write-enable" tabs; others have movable "write-protect" tabs. These must be set to the "write-protect" position. Contact FTAI if additional information is required.

- b. Magnetic recordings should be placed in plastic containers (cassette-type tapes) or boxes (reel-type tape) to be properly protected from mechanical damage and the effects of stray magnetic fields. Preferably, these containers should be wrapped with at least three inches of good quality packing material between the specimen and the outside of the shipping carton. An acceptable alternative is to wrap the plastic container or box in aluminum foil and place it in a heavily padded shipping envelope. Evidence containers must be properly sealed to keep chain of custody intact. Envelopes can be sealed in the normal fashion with the flap initialed. This includes questioned documents for handwriting comparisons.
4. Management by FTAI. The following procedures are followed by FTAI to insure the integrity of evidence submitted for examination.
 - a. Upon receipt of evidence it is immediately recorded in evidence log book by our Evidence Custodian by assigning a file number.
 - b. Copies are made of all evidence received, and recorded in the evidence log.
5. Evidence is placed in a case file jacket or other container, which a copy of evidence log information (above) shall be attached, together with additional contributor information (address, telephone number, etc.).
6. The case is assigned to an FTAI Technician, and unsealed and removed from packing material.
7. If restricted handling procedures are involved (i.e. protective orders, restrictive access to original tape evidence, etc.) the director of FTAI is responsible for implementing of said procedures. No copies of the evidence will be made unless specifically authorized by the director of FTAI. Tape copies will be handled / preserved in the same manner and care as original tape recording.

8. Upon completion of casework, including payment of any outstanding fees, the evidence and a copy of the case report (if required) will be returned to the contributor following the procedures outlined above for protection, packaging, and delivery.
9. Case files and work notes remain the property of FTAI and will not be sent to evidence contributors or others unless a written request is received. Case files and work notes are retained for (7) seven years after completion of examination, whereupon they are destroyed.

Steve Cain

President/Director, Forensic Tape Analysis Inc.

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