

EVIDENCE ROOMS

Failure of a police department to maintain control over confiscated weapons, drugs, money, and other items relevant to criminal cases increases the risk that these items will be stolen, lost, or disposed of improperly. Items such as guns and drugs could be easily converted to cash. The following are some suggestions for proper controls for an evidence room:

- Adopt formal policies and procedures for recording, maintaining, inventorying, and disposing of confiscated items.
- Limit access to the evidence room to authorized personnel only.
- Maintain a log that provides the name, date, time, and reason for entering the evidence room.
- Install a motion security camera in the evidence room that is impervious to power outages.
- Install two locks on the evidence room door which requires two individuals with two separate keys to enter.
- Store evidence by category. For example, have areas of the evidence room allotted for guns, knives, drugs, money, rape kits, and other items as deemed appropriate. This setup will make it easier to take a physical inventory of the evidence room.
- Maintain current inventory records that include the date confiscated, tag number, description of the item, name of the individual from whom confiscated, reference to the arrest report, and final disposition. Consider using a bar code inventory system (computerized system for tracking and accessing evidence). If manual inventory records are maintained, store the records in a fireproof/locked filing cabinet with access limited to only authorized personnel.
- Conduct a physical inventory of the evidence room periodically (certain types of inventory should be inventoried more frequently than others, e.g., money).
- Perform unannounced inspections of the evidence room and inventory records by police officers independent (have no responsibilities for evidence or the evidence room) of the evidence room.
- Use translucent tear-resistant plastic bags instead of manila evidence envelopes so that evidence can be seen.
- Maintain documentation of the final disposition of evidence. If evidence is released, a completed property release form should be maintained. If evidence is destroyed, the documentation should, at a minimum, include (1) a destruction order appropriately signed by the magistrate/district attorney and (2) a document from the law enforcement agency that destroyed the evidence to include the date, location, items destroyed, and signature of the persons destroying and witnessing the destruction (the municipality's police officers should be prohibited from destroying evidence).