

Lab Support Overview

The Laboratory Support section is the starting and ending point for all evidence submitted to the GBI Crime Lab. Over 130,000 evidence items are received annually by the personnel within Lab Support functions at the seven GBI Crime Lab facilities for entry into the laboratory information management system (LIMS). Evidence Receiving Technicians remove evidence from the lockboxes; enter information in the LIMS/JusticeTrax operating system. All evidence is bar coded and imaged. This begins the Chain of Custody within the laboratory for that evidence. All documents submitted with the evidence are scanned into the system. The evidence is then transferred to a Lab Technician/Scientist for processing or to the evidence vault for storage. Upon completion of the analysis of the evidence by the scientific staff, the evidence is returned to Lab Support where it is, with few exceptions, stored until it is returned to the submitting agency by Laboratory Support staff.

Personnel from Lab Support are also responsible for assigning visitor badges at the Headquarters annex and in the regional labs.

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Evidence Submissions

All submissions of exhibits must be connected to criminal or coroner cases investigations. **No evidence will be analyzed for private individuals or corporations.** Drug and/or blood alcohol testing of samples from individuals on probation will be performed by the GBI Crime Lab **ONLY** when there is a pending criminal charge that will be confirmed or refuted by the analysis **AND** the requesting department is pursuing probation revocation.

Several methods may be used to submit evidence to the laboratory. The method selected will depend upon the type and size of the item, the urgency, and the complexity of the case. Whatever method is used, the officer submitting the evidence must take care to ensure that the evidence will not be lost, damaged, or contaminated and that the chain of custody will be as short as possible.

All evidence must be properly packaged and sealed. Some items of evidence (e.g. vehicles, large bulky items, etc.) may be submitted as is but with the area needing analysis protected. The laboratory must receive at least one completed DOFS Submission Form **every** time evidence is submitted to the laboratory. Proper packaging of evidence and complete, clear information of the Submission Form is the critical first step to timely and accurate analysis of the evidence by the GBI Crime Lab.

Improperly sealed or packaged evidence or evidence submitted without a completed submission form is subject to return without analysis.

The following describes in greater detail the general requirements for submitting evidence to the laboratory. Other special instructions for specific evidence will be given in each service area. Please refer to these instructions before submitting any evidence.

Case Documentation

Submission Forms and Incident Reports

The DOFS Evidence Submission Form requests the absolutely necessary information required **each time** that evidence is submitted to the laboratory. A copy of the form is located on the DOFS web site <http://dofs.gbi.georgia.gov>, under the 'Downloads' link. The following evidence kits/types and agency forms below do not need an additional DOFS Submission Form when submitted to the lab:

- BA/Tox and Urine Only Kits – a unique form is included in kit
- DNA Database Sample – a unique form is included in kit
- Fulton County ME Form
- Other forms approved in advance by DOFS management

The box printed on the top left-hand corner of the DOFS Submission Form is the space for the submitting officer to record the date and time they submitted evidence to the lab using the auto-date stamp at each lab site. The submitting agency should take a copy of the Submission Form for their records.

A copy of the officer's incident report **must** be provided on all Biology and Trace cases. DOFS recommends that an incident report is submitted for all cases. To ensure the best laboratory service for each case type, it is important to supply information as to the significance of the evidence in relation to the crime. A lengthy narrative is not necessary, but it must be informative because this is a source used by the scientist(s) to help make decisions regarding case priority and type or extent of testing. A duplicate investigative summary (or incident report) is not necessary for subsequent submissions unless additional investigative information is available.

The Evidence Submission Form, an incident report, and any other information must be attached to the outside of the sealed evidence package so that it may be referenced without breaking the seal on the evidence package. This also allows the analyst to receive the evidence in a sealed condition. Place an indication as to which laboratory section the evidence needs to be delivered (e.g. Attention: DI {for drugs}, etc.). For cases in which more than one section of the laboratory will be examining evidence, package the evidence separately for each section whenever possible. Specific packaging requirements are given later for individual services.

Service Requests

All evidence submitted for scientific analysis must have a service requested in writing on the DOFS Evidence Submission Form. Some evidence requires only one

service (e.g. drug identification); however, other evidence may require more than one type of scientific investigation. It is important that **all** services required for a complete analysis be requested by the submitting agency to ensure that the evidence is submitted for the appropriate analyses. Coordination of these service requests by the laboratory is necessary to prevent damage or loss of evidentiary value. For example, it is important to carefully evaluate any stain with an apparent pattern, particularly a bloody fingerprint. In this instance the information derived from the latent print service could have more significance than the potential serology result.

Labeling, Packaging, and Sealing Evidence for Delivery

Adequate labeling is essential not only for DOFS laboratory applications, but also vital for usage in court. All items of evidence must have both the first and last name of the victim/subject and the agency case number or other unique identifying information on each outside package.

All paperwork attached to evidence should contain the following information:

- Name (subject and/or victim)
- Brief description of contents of packaging
- Location where collected
- Date and time of collection
- Investigator's name, agency and agency case number
- Doctor, medical examiner, or technician (when applicable)

The individual items enclosed in packages should bear the initials of the officer for adequate identification and chain of custody according to their departmental policy. Packages should be maintained in a cool, dry location prior to submission to the DOFS laboratory. Any special storage requirements are described in the specific service areas.

In many instances it is necessary to place each item in a separate container to prevent cross-contamination. Containers should be appropriately selected for each evidence type, adequately labeled, securely closed, and sealed. Outside blood alcohol/toxicology packaging is discarded after opening in the laboratory.

Sealing of the outer containers, along with the initials of the sealing officer, is mandatory. The seal **must** be tamper evident. Tamper evident tape or heat sealing are acceptable methods to seal a container. Self sealing evidence bags are also acceptable containers. The sealing officer must initial across the tape, heat seal, or self seal onto the package. In those instances where there is a designated area on the seal for the initials, it is acceptable to use that area.

Safety Considerations in Packaging

Biohazards:

All biohazards must be in a leak-proof container that will contain all contents and prevent leakage during handling, storage, and transport. All blood alcohol and

toxicology cases must be submitted in an approved BA/TOX Kit. Biohazards that are mailed must be in leak-proof packaging with absorbent material. The primary container must be placed in an outer shipping container with secondary leak-proof materials. The biohazard warning symbol and label must be applied to the outside of the container. The packaging and marking requirements for biohazard evidence are based upon the OSHA Bloodborne Pathogen Standard, CFR Title 29, 1910.1030 and on Postal Regulations, Domestic Mail Manual 124.383.

Warning Labels:

Warning labels are required. Note any warning on the package. For example:

- Warning: Biohazard
- Warning: Hepatitis or HIV Positive
- Warning: Glass
Warning: Sharp – objects such as knives must be packaged in boxes or other suitable containers which prevents loss or damage to the evidence as well as minimizes potential safety hazards to employees.

Firearms:

All firearms must be unloaded prior to mailing or submission to the lab. If the case warrants leaving the cartridges in the weapon, it must be hand delivered. The laboratory must be informed that a weapon is loaded. Under no circumstances will a loaded weapon be deposited into a DOFS lockbox. In addition, a sign must be affixed to the firearm packaging indicating "Loaded Weapon" prior to hand-delivery.

Hazardous Chemicals:

Flammable and other hazardous chemical materials **must** be delivered in person.

Syringes:

Syringes may contain valuable evidence in some cases. Therefore, on a case by case basis, in life-threatening situations, and with prior DOFS approval, syringe contents may be accepted by the laboratory for analysis.

In Person Delivery

Evidence may be delivered in person between the hours of 8:00 AM and 4:30 PM, Monday through Friday. Lockboxes at each lab site are to be used for submission of evidence and lab staff is available at each lab to answer questions concerning evidence submission. Prior arrangements must be made with the laboratory for evidence delivered at other times.

Lockboxes

There are evidence depository boxes called Lockboxes in each of the DOFS Laboratories. These are secure evidence containers designed for the submission of evidence during business hours. To reduce delays in submission of evidence and delays in processing, please use the Lockboxes per directions at each laboratory location.

Mailing/Common Carrier

When mailing evidence, it is best to use certified or registered mail and return receipt. Evidence, with some exceptions, may be sent by common carrier to each laboratory. Commercial carriers have additional regulations and must be consulted regarding their individual requirements.

Note: The U. S. Post Office will not transport human remains or body parts.

Return of Evidence

Evidence will be only temporarily stored in the laboratory system until all services have been completed. By prior arrangement with each agency, evidence will either be returned by common carrier to the agencies evidence custodian or picked-up by an agency representative.

To expedite picking up evidence, please call ahead.