

Evidence Packaging: A How-To Guide

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Goals of Evidence Packaging

- Protects personnel from possible hazards associated with evidence:
 - Accidental firearm discharge
 - Biohazards
 - Sharp objects
 - Health hazards associated with exposure to mold
 - Wet plant material

Goals of Evidence Packaging

- Protects evidence against:
 - Loss
 - Contamination
 - Cross-transfer
 - Suspect to victim
 - Victim to suspect
 - Scene to scene
 - Item to item
 - Deterioration

Goals of Evidence Packaging

- Correctly identifies evidence with respect to:
 - Evidence description: What is it?
 - Evidence source
 - Origin – where was evidence when it was collected
 - Custodial Agency
 - Chain of custody
 - Provides a unique identifier so it cannot be confused with any other evidence item
 - Laboratory case and item number

Packaging

- Can indicate
 - What processing is needed
 - For example: "Fingerprint processing required"
 - Health hazards (e.g. sharp knife)
 - Required or preferred storage conditions
 - "Store at room temperature"
 - "Store frozen"

Elements of packaging evidence

- Does evidence need to be prepared for packaging?
 - Certain types of evidence may need to be dried before it can be packaged:
 - Wet biological samples
 - Fresh plant material

What Can Happen When Biological Evidence is Packaged Wet?



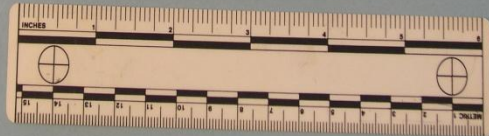
■ Evidence “leaks”
through to the
exterior of the
container

Elements of packaging evidence

- What type of packaging is optimal?
 - Plastic: What type of plastic?
 - Envelope
 - Bag
 - Paper
 - Envelopes
 - Bag
 - Boxes

Sometimes **Plastic** Containers are Optimal: Controlled Substances

LSD on blotter paper



- Kapak packaging can prevent exposure to potent drugs

Sometimes **Paper** Containers are Optimal: Biological Samples



- Allows a sample that is not completely dry to finish drying and May prevent the deterioration of a biological sample if it is not completely dry when packaged

What Happens When Biological Evidence is Wet?



■ Evidence “leaks” through to the exterior of the container, resulting in:

- Sample deterioration
- Sample loss
- Contamination issues
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Elements of Packaging Evidence

- What type of packaging is optimal?
 - **Size** of container is important
 - Too small and the packaging is likely to fail over time
 - Too big and evidence can be dispersed throughout container and difficult to recover (e.g. powder, trace evidence)

Elements of Packaging Evidence



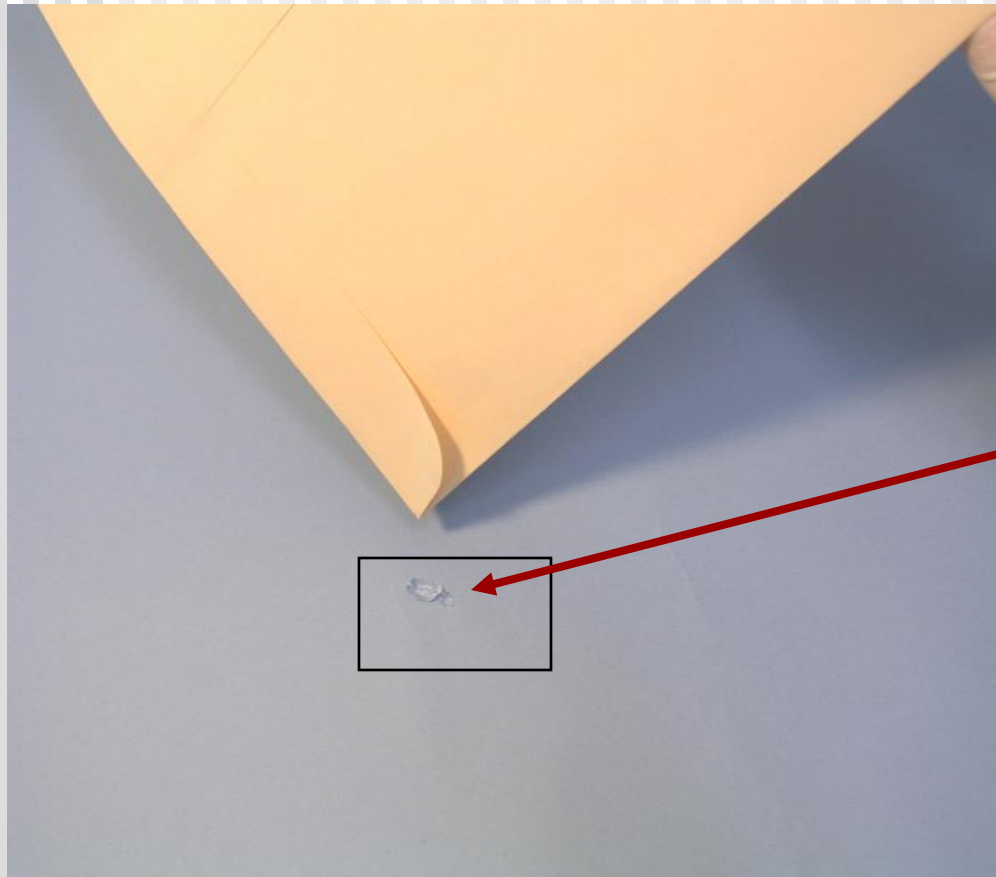
- This envelope is **too small** for the evidence it is holding



Elements of Packaging Evidence

- Does evidence require internal packaging?
 - Bindle
 - Box
 - Coin envelope
 - Hold down device
 - **Syringe tube/"sharps" container**

Glass Fragments Deposited into Large Envelope



- Small glass fragments can be lost from poorly sealed envelopes. Ideally, these fragments would be packaged into a bindle first.

Sealing Evidence

- Sealing evidence properly is a requirement of most crime labs
 - Issues:
 - Type of seal
 - Need for identifying mark
 - Where seal(s) is to be placed

Sealing Evidence

- Ways evidence can be sealed
 - Heat seal
 - Tape seal
 - Lock seal
- All seals must be initialed to document the person sealing the evidence and dated to indicate when the evidence was sealed



How **Not** to Seal Evidence



- Seal should **completely** seal envelope flap

How **Not** to Seal Evidence



- Seal should **completely** seal bag flap

How **Not** to Seal Evidence



- Staples are not an appropriate evidence "seal"

How to **Correctly** Seal Evidence



- Tape seal across entire flap of envelope Seal is initialed and dated

How to **Correctly** Seal Evidence

- Tape seal across entire “flap” of bag
Seal is initialed and dated



Biological Evidence

Packaging Biological Evidence

- Insure the sample is **dry**
 - **Do not** dry in a **heated** air stream
- Use paper containers
- Immobilize evidence when necessary
 - “sharps”: knives, broken glass
 - when stain could be dislodged

Recommendations for Collection of Biological Evidence

- Collect and package stains separately--do not allow separate stains to come into contact with one another
 - Sheets of paper can be used to minimize contact of stains on a bloodstained garment
 - Consider packaging all biological samples separately
 - A bloodstain swab and its control can be separately packed into two coin envelopes and then both envelopes can be placed into the same larger envelope

Recommendations for Collection of Biological Evidence

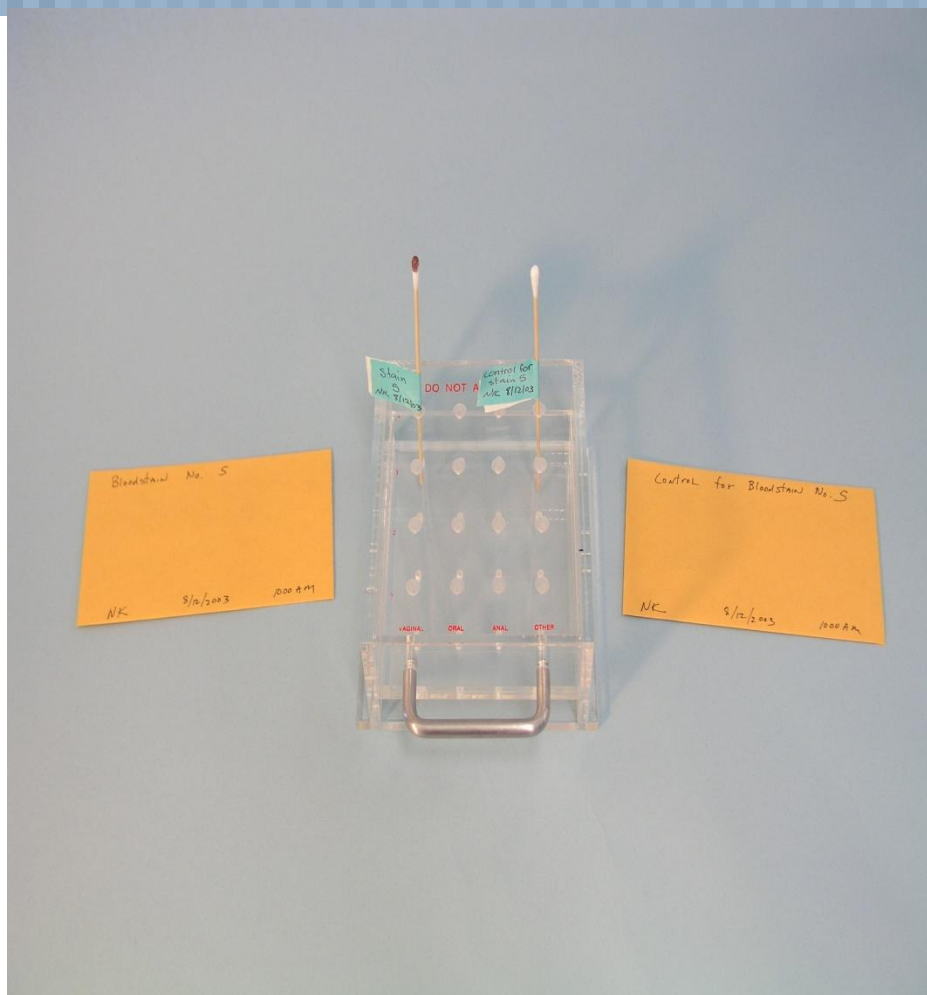


- To minimize the chance of cross transfer of adhering evidence; different clothing items should NOT be packaged in the same container

Recommendations for Handling Biological Evidence

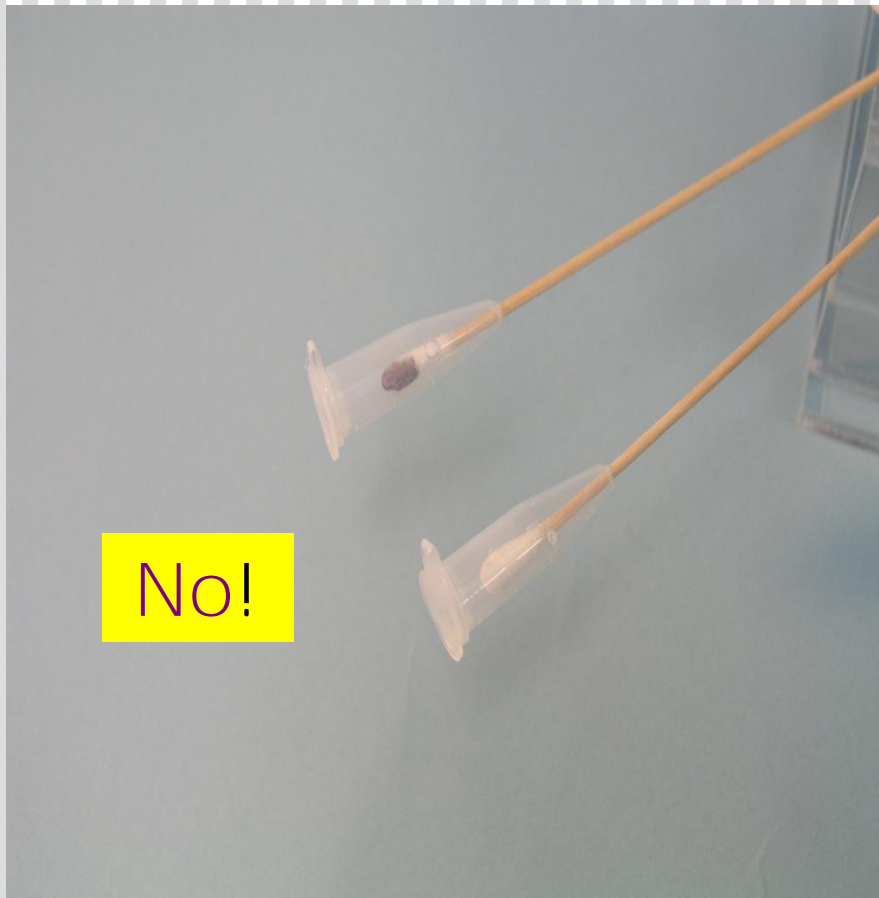
- Attempt to insure that *anything* that contacts biological samples during collection is free of anything that might contain human DNA
 - Work on clean surfaces
 - Wear gloves and change when necessary
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Packaging a Wet Bloodstain on a Swab



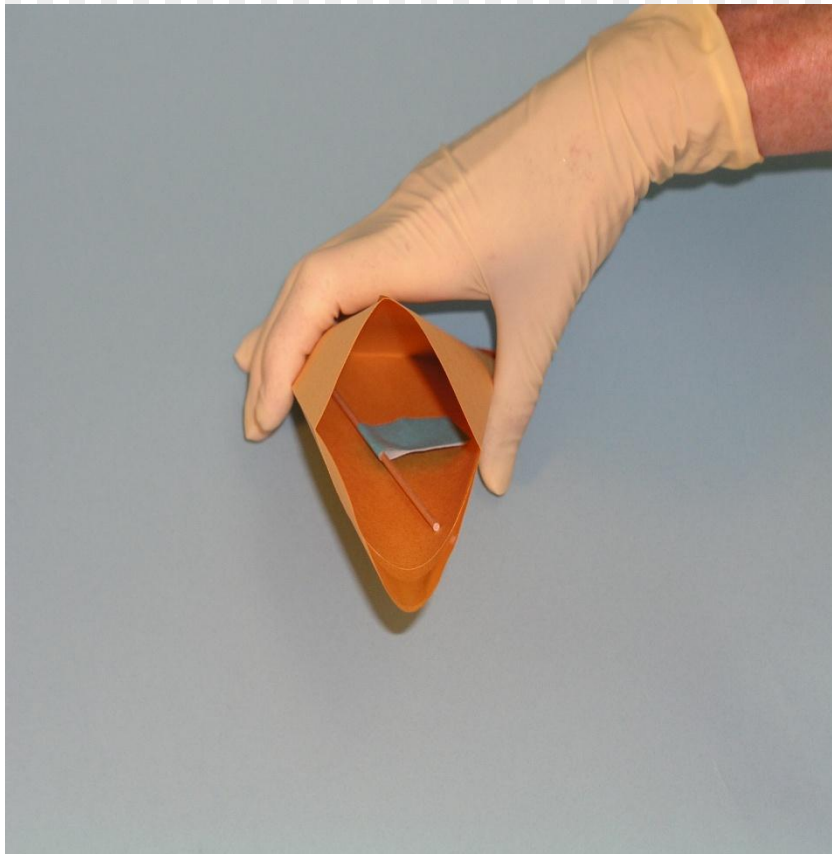
- After samples are **dried**, package the bloodstain sample and the control into separate coin envelopes

How **NOT** to Package a Wet Bloodstain



- Do **not** use any packaging device that limits air exchange
 - Biological samples will deteriorate if it takes too long for them to dry

Packaging a Dry Bloodstain



- Once the sample is dried it can be safely placed into a paper envelope and sealed

Packaging Bloody Clothing



- Attempt to allow bloodstains to dry as much as possible Place clothing onto a piece of clean paper

Packaging Bloody Clothing



Place paper between stained areas so as to prevent stain transfer



Packaging Bloody Clothing



Place paper between stained areas so as to prevent stain transfer



Packaging Bloody Clothing



- Seal and date paper package with bloody shirt
Insert paper package into larger paper bag

This is NOT the proper way to package a bloody knife



- Although paper is good packaging for bloodstained evidence

This knife needs to be immobilized **because...**

-
-

This is NOT the proper way to package a bloody knife



- It can easily pierce the paper envelope and endanger anyone who handles this evidence
 - In addition, blood from the blade can be easily lost



How to **Properly** Package a Bloody Knife



- Use a cardboard box (not airtight) Immobilize knife to protect both personnel & the blood sample on blade

Packaging Trace Evidence

- Trace evidence is small evidence and can be easily lost
- Examples of trace evidence:
 - Hairs
 - Glass fragments
 - Paint flakes
 - Fibers
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Packaging Trace Evidence

- If it is necessary to remove and package trace evidence, its nature and location must be documented before the evidence is altered

Packaging Trace Evidence

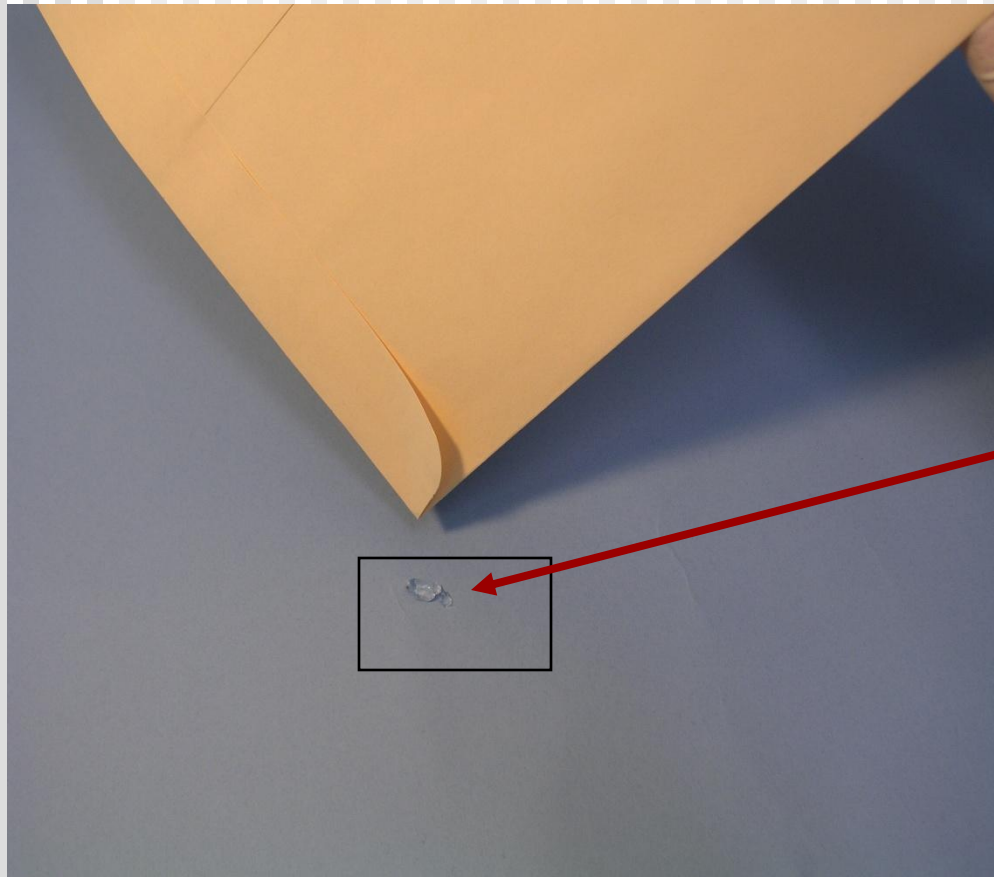
- Items must be visually examined and trace evidence identified
 - Trace evidence can be removed with tweezers and placed into appropriate packaging
 - Trace evidence can also be removed with tape lifts
- Packaging must be appropriately sized & designed so that this small evidence cannot fall out of the container

Glass Fragments



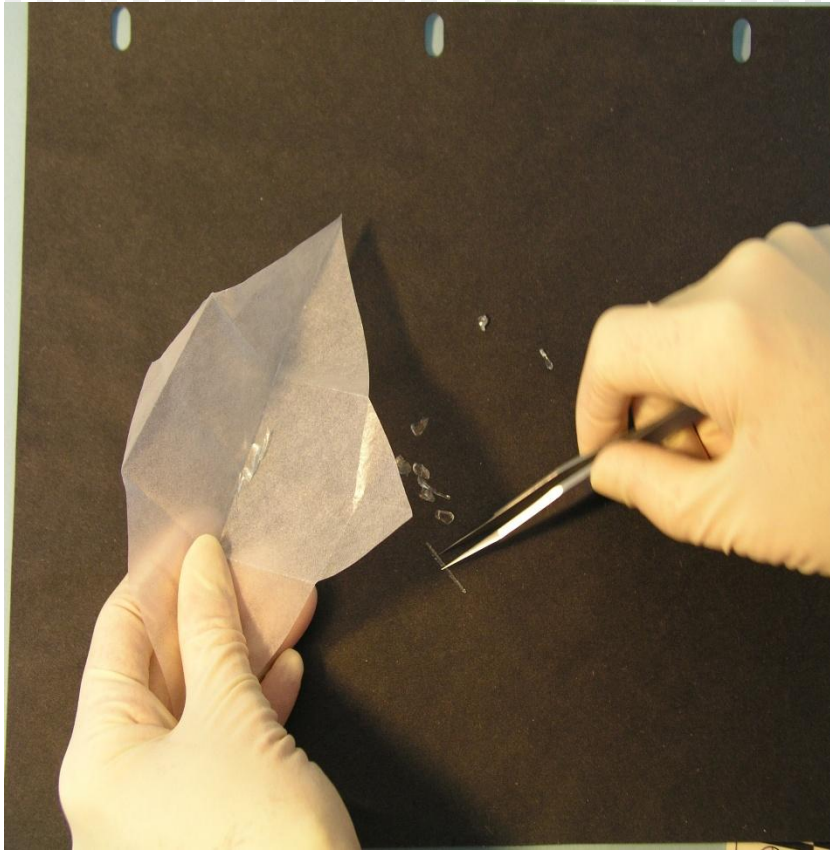
- Glass fragments are small and can be lost from poorly sealed envelopes

Glass Fragments Deposited into Large Envelope



- Small glass fragments can be lost from poorly sealed envelopes
- These fragments need to be packaged into a bindle before being placed into envelope

First Step: Placing Glass Evidence into a Bindle



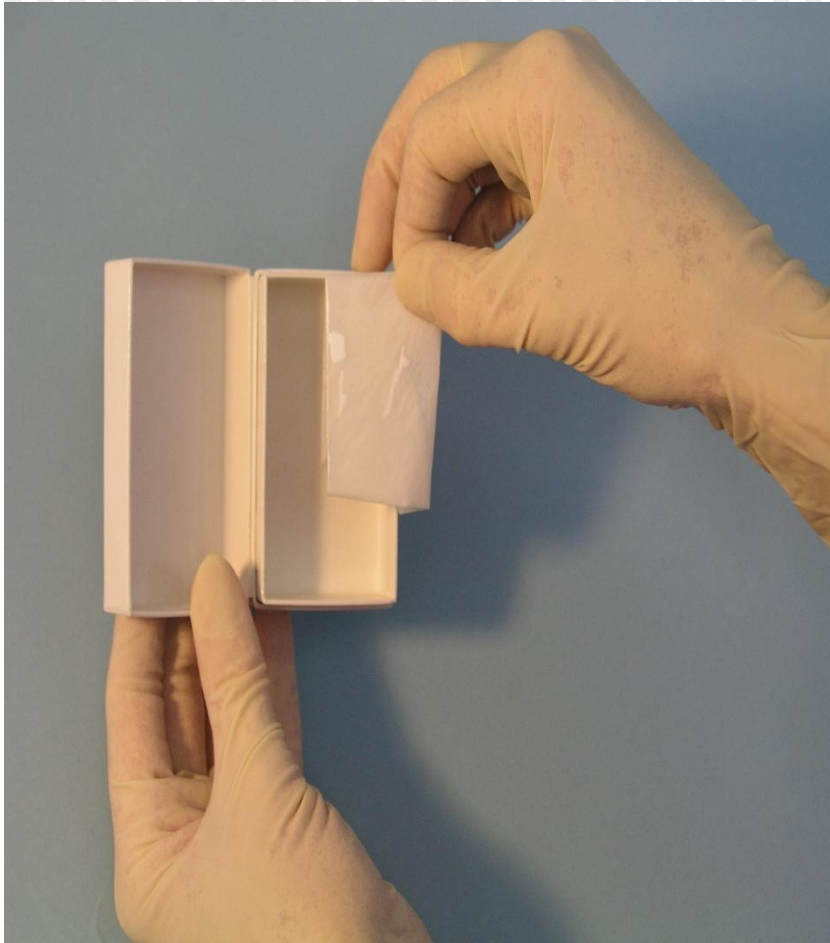
- The glass is collected and placed into a paper bindle. The bindle is then sealed before it is inserted into an envelope.

Packaging Paint Fragments



- Bindles can also be used to package paint fragments

Packaging Paint Fragments



- Rigid boxes can then be used to hold paper bindle with fragile paint fragments Box is then placed into paper evidence envelope

Firearms Evidence

Packaging Firearms Evidence

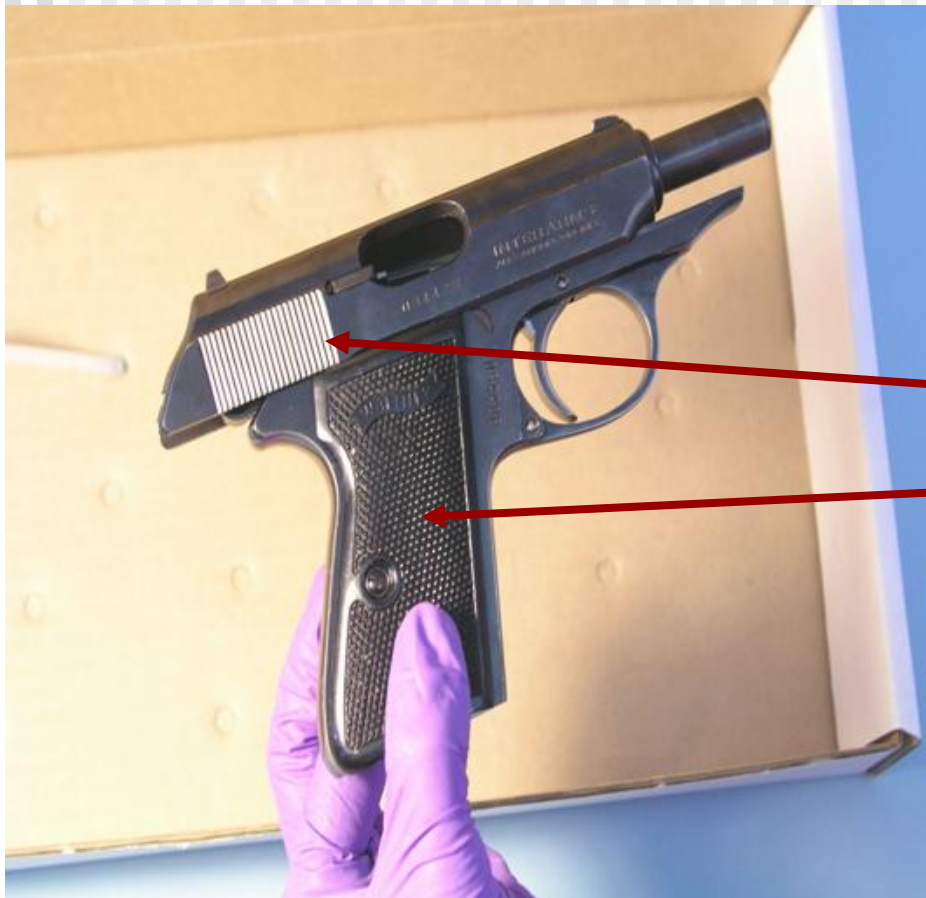
- Record all necessary information about condition of firearm:
 - Position of hammer, safety, & other controls
 - Number and location of fired and unfired cartridges
 - **Presence of powder residue “halos” on revolver cylinder face**
 - Blood or trace evidence visible on gun exterior

Handling Firearms Evidence



- This weapon is loaded and ready to fire
- NEVER PACKAGE A LOADED WEAPON
 - Remove the magazine & make sure chamber is empty

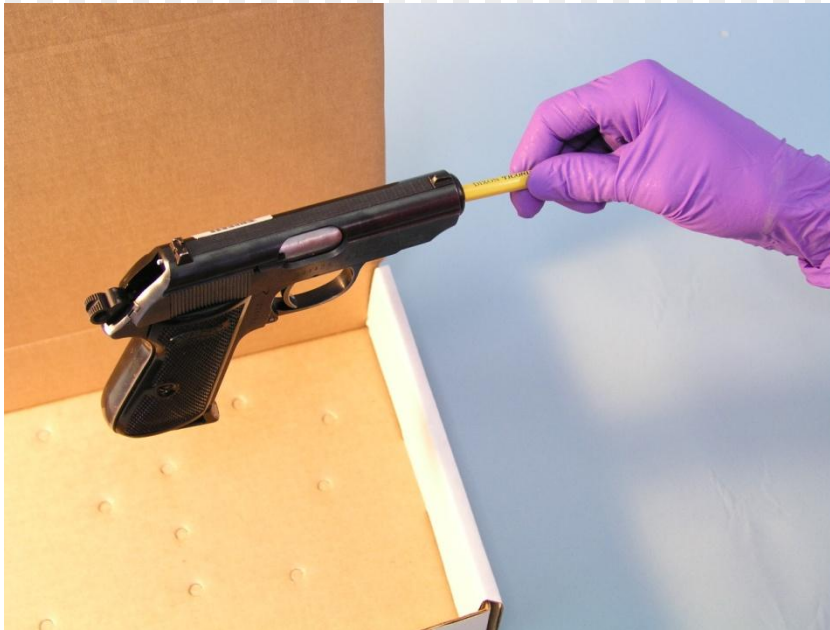
Handling Firearms Evidence



Firearms **can** be handled by any surface which does not take fingerprints

- Serrations on slide
- Checkered stocks

How NOT to Handle Firearms Evidence



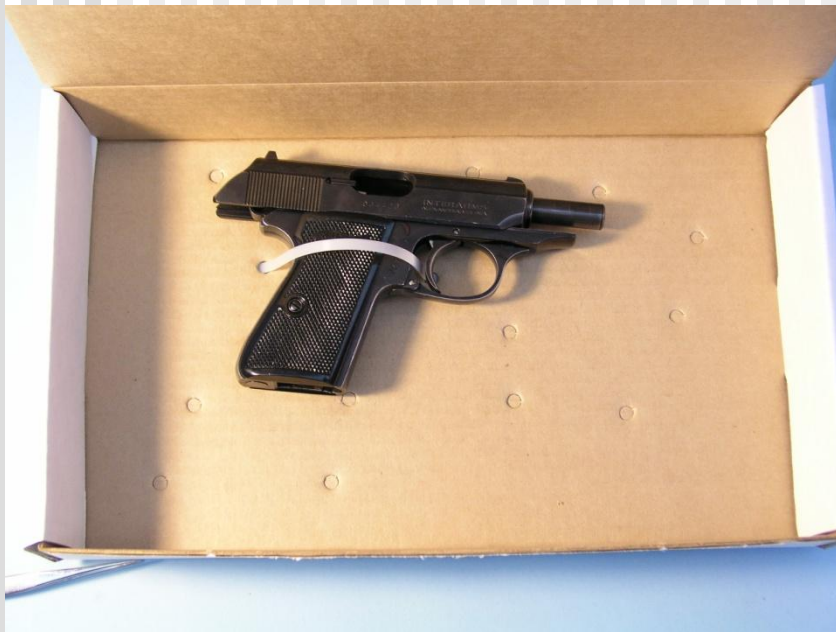
- Do NOT insert anything into the barrel
 - **EXTREMELY UNSAFE!**
 - Could alter the firearm
 - Could remove blood or trace evidence

Handling Firearms Evidence



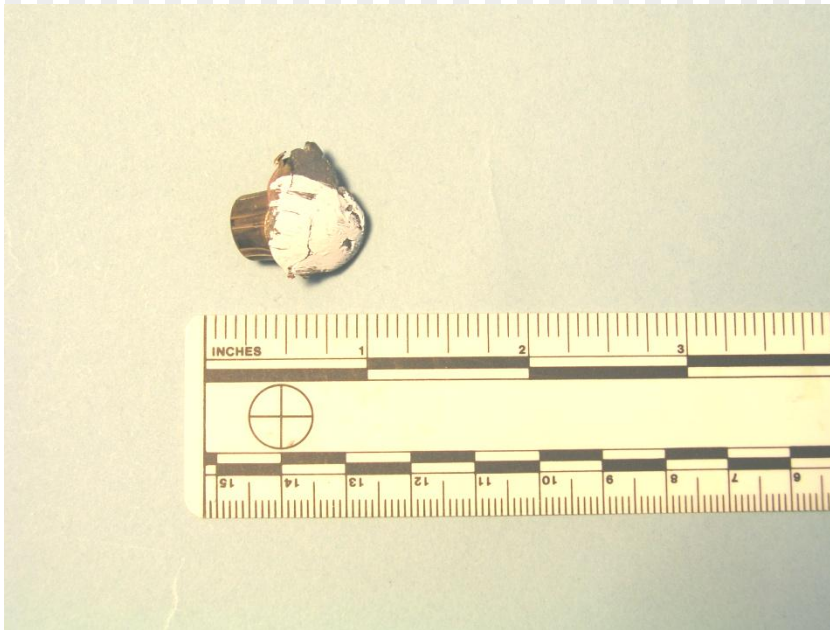
- Once the firearm has been rendered safe, it can be placed into a cardboard box and
- Immobilized with a plastic tie
 - Make sure the tie goes BEHIND the trigger

Handling Firearms Evidence



- This packaging will permit fingerprint, blood and trace evidence to be recovered
- The evidence now needs to be appropriately labeled and sealed
- **Write “Unloaded”** notification on outside of container

Handling Firearms Evidence



- Fired bullets need to be carefully handled to protect critical markings on the bullet surface and any adhering trace evidence
 - Do NOT mark bullet



Handling Firearms Evidence



- This type of evidence requires some internal packaging
 - Paper bindles or soft tissue can be used
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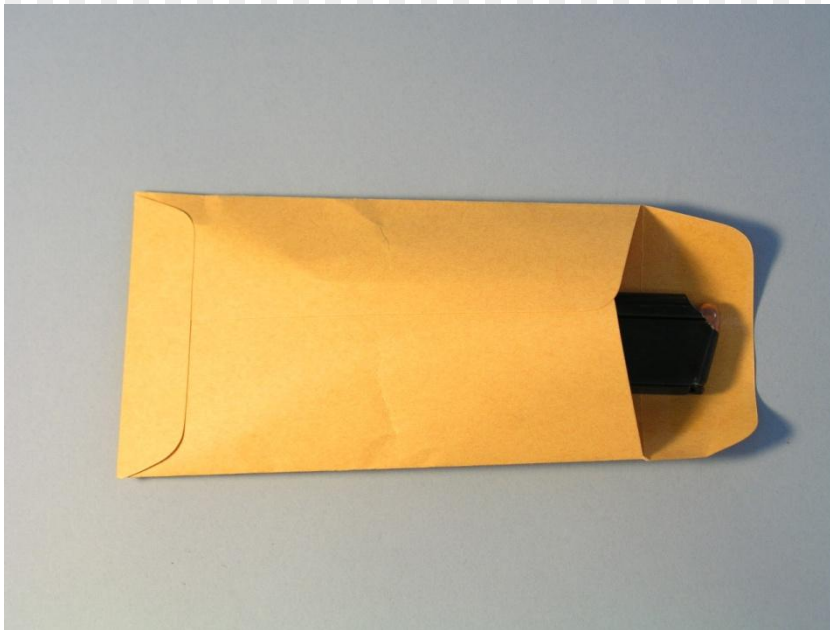
Handling Firearms Evidence



- The wrapped bullet can now be placed into an appropriate size container
 - This container must be labeled and then
 - Placed into a large evidence container

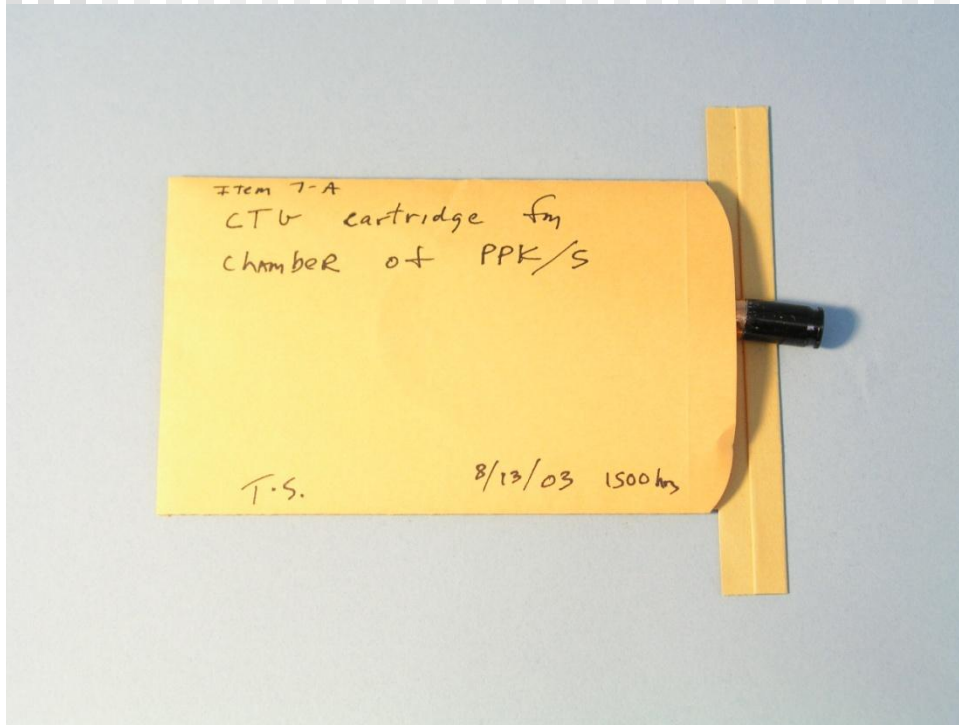


Handling Firearms Evidence



- No need to remove cartridges from the magazine at scene
- The magazine with cartridges can be placed into an appropriate sized paper envelope
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Handling Firearms Evidence



- Package loose cartridges in paper envelopes

Drug Evidence

Packaging Drug Evidence

- Drug Evidence Packaging needs to accommodate:
 - Health hazards associated with certain drug items
 - Syringes
 - Evidence carried in body cavities

Packaging Drug Evidence

- Drug Evidence Packaging needs to accommodate:
 - Variable characteristics of drug evidence:
 - Different drugs have different possible health hazards to personnel handling exhibits
 - Some drugs are very potent in small amounts
 - Liquid samples
 - Sharps
 - Multiple forms
 - Powders, sticky tar, residues, plant material
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Appropriate Packaging Materials for Some Drug Evidence



- Kapak pouches
 - Safely contain most drug evidence & protect personnel against unnecessary exposure
 - Need to be heat sealed
- Airtight
 - Not good for fresh plant material

Appropriate Packaging Materials for Some Drug Evidence



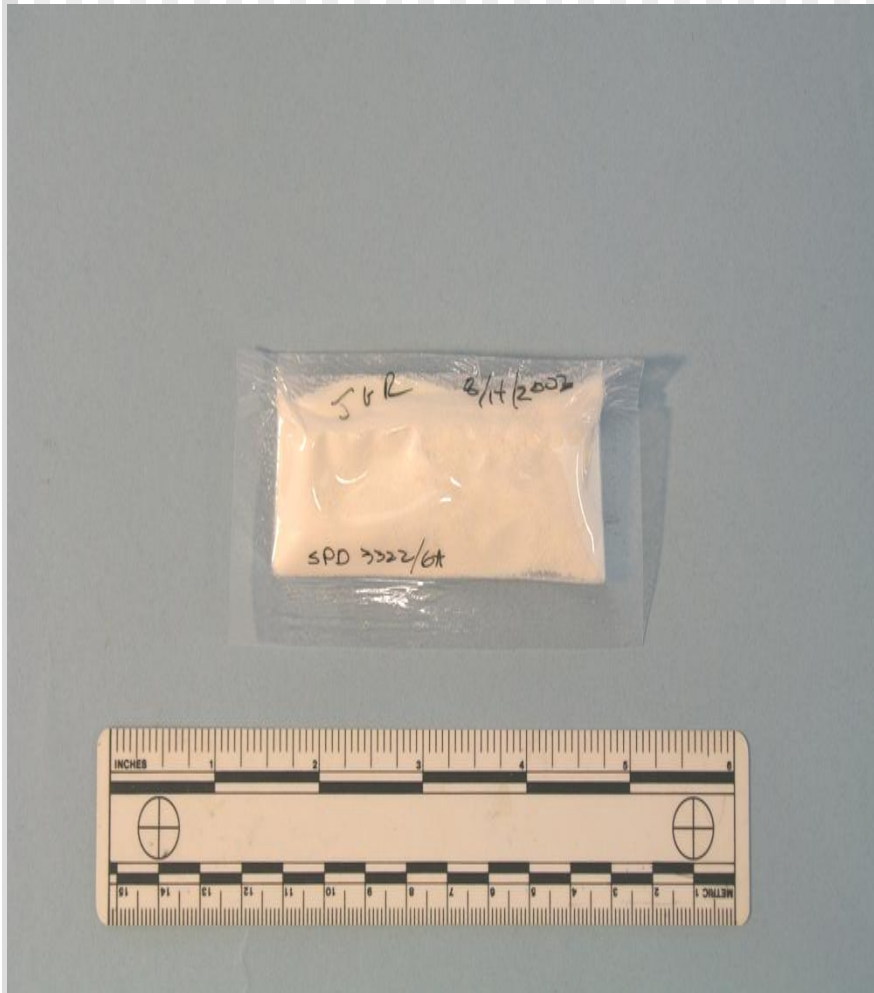
- Sealed Kapak pouches can safely contain potent drug evidence & protect personnel against unnecessary exposure

Sealing Kapak pouches

- Heat sealers
 - Obtain one large enough to accommodate opening of Kapak pouches being used



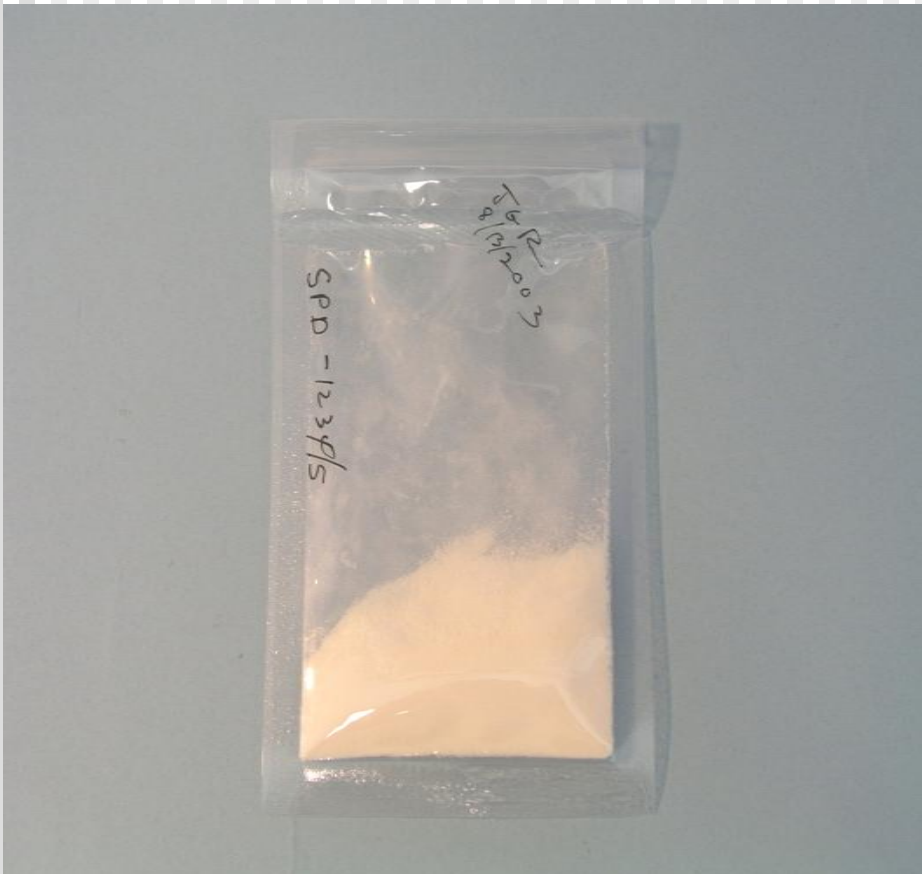
Poorly Sealed Drug Evidence



- Seals placed too close to evidence make it difficult for the analyst to re-seal evidence after analysis

Properly Sealed Drug Evidence

- Seals are placed far enough away from evidence to allow re-sealing this item after analysis



Appropriate Packaging Materials



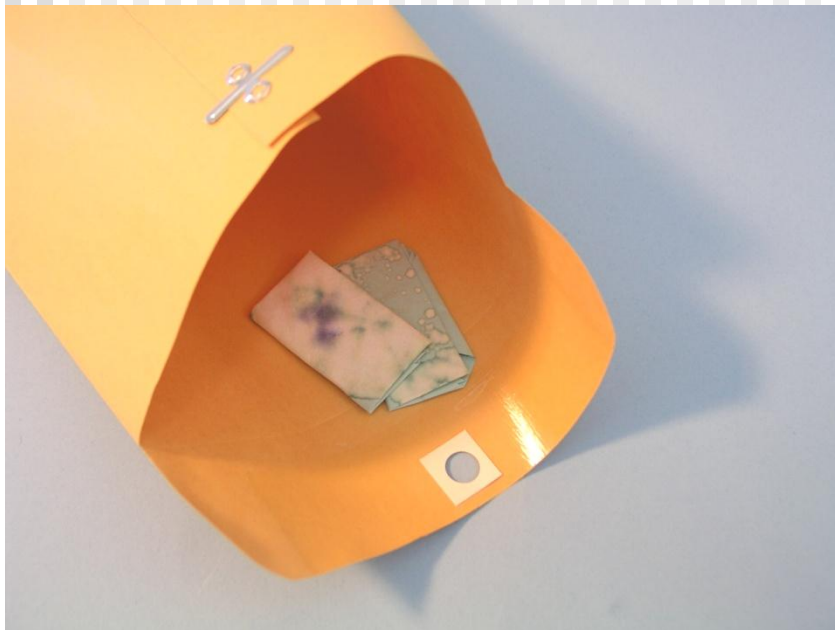
- Suitable plastic bag purchased with label and seal
Plastic containers should be impervious to chemical solvents (e.g. Kapak pouches)

Choose an Appropriate Sized Container



- Do **not** place a small amount of powder in container that is too big
 - Powder is difficult to recover because electrostatic charge causes it to disperse and cling to plastic surfaces

Inappropriate Packaging for Drug Evidence



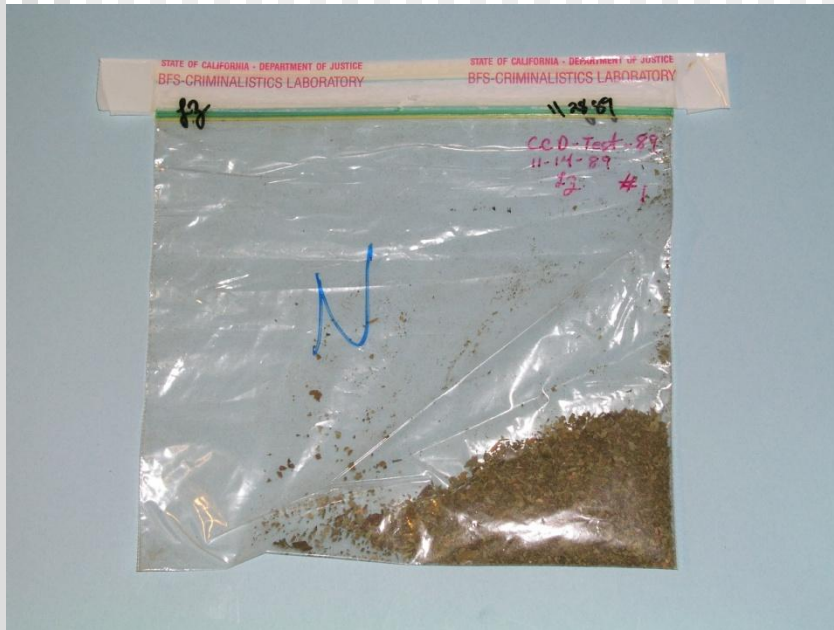
- A paper envelope & paper bindles are **not by themselves** sufficient packaging for bindles containing drug evidence

Inappropriate Packaging Materials



- **Do not use sealed plastic containers** to package fresh or wet plant material - Evidence can get moldy **Use paper envelopes or bags** - They allow fresh plant material to dry

Appropriate Packaging Materials



- Plastic containers **can** be used if plant material is completely dry

Minimize Items Submitted



- Package the pink bindle and wooden box separately
Submit only the bindle to the laboratory for drug analysis Avoid submitting paraphernalia

Packaging Drug Evidence



- The bindle can be sealed in a Kapak pouch and then placed into large paper envelope

Syringes May Not Always be Accepted into Crime Labs



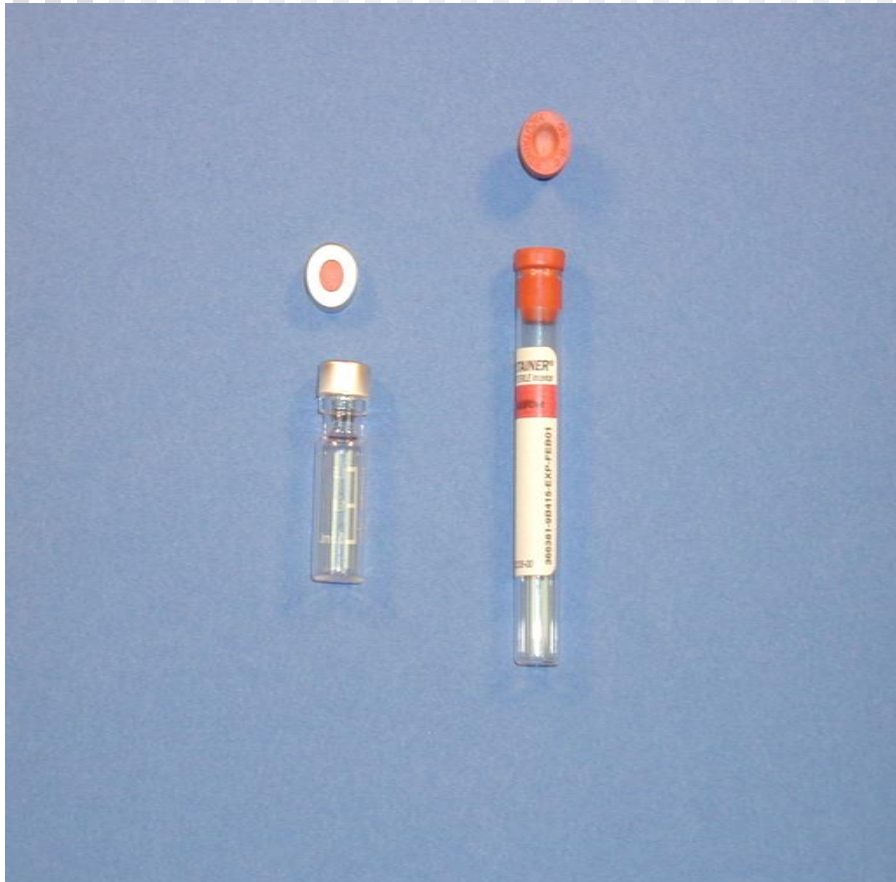
- Consult your laboratory as to their acceptance criteria and specific packaging requirements

Syringes



- Syringes can be a significant biohazard and need to be handled and packaged very carefully
 - Use a “one handed” technique when handling syringes

Instead of Submitting Syringe:



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- When possible, transfer liquid contents of syringe to a suitable container and submit this container only

Packaging Syringes



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- If it is necessary to submit a syringe, package it in a puncture-proof container designed for packing syringes