

Police Property & Evidence Audit

October 23, 2020

Project Team:

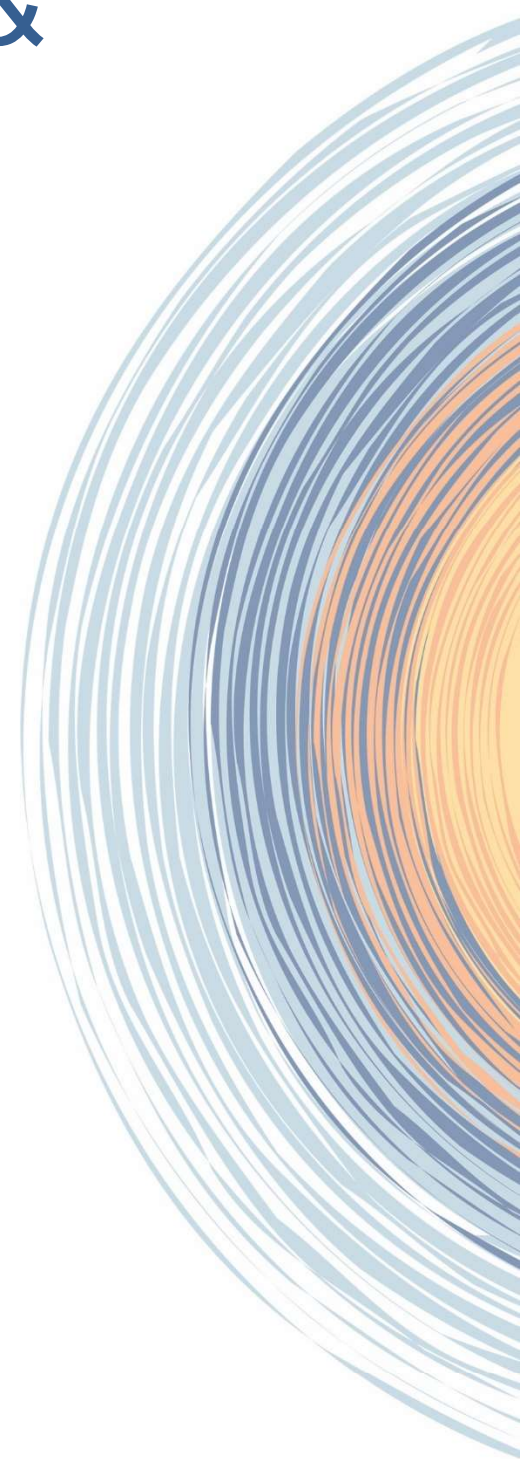
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Mission Statement

To enhance and protect organizational value by providing high-quality, objective, risk-based audit and consulting services to assist the City in accomplishing strategic priorities, goals, and objectives.



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Executive Summary

Purpose

We audited the City of Tempe Police Department (TPD) Property and Evidence Section to:

- Evaluate controls that ensure evidence and property are adequately protected, properly documented and readily available when required;
- Determine if property and evidence policies are aligned with recommended practice and staff follow applicable department policies;
- Identify potential improvements to existing processes.

Background

The TPD Property and Evidence Section (Property & Evidence) receives evidence into custody from law enforcement officers and ensures the integrity of items needed as evidence for the judicial process. Property & Evidence also reunites owners with property that is rightfully theirs. Items are stored in a secure location, with additional security around high value items such as firearms, illegal substances, cash and jewelry. At the time of our audit, over 362,000 items were stored in the property warehouse and vehicle storage lot. About 588,000 items were impounded by Property and Evidence from February 2011 through March 2020.

Professional Standards published by the International Association for Property and Evidence (IAPE), Inc. are widely recognized as the recommended standard for proper evidence handling procedures and protocols. Adhering to the IAPE standards helps ensure that reasonable policies and procedures have been developed to create a secure and efficient property and evidence management system.

Results in Brief

Overall, effective policies and controls are in place to ensure Police evidence and property are adequately protected, properly documented and readily available when required. We noted some areas where improvements would further strengthen controls.

Our review of policies and controls focused on: evidence intake, property purge, active evidence and release, drugs/narcotics, firearms, currency, biological evidence, audits and inspections, missing property and internal tracking. Overall audit results demonstrated a well-organized property facility governed by appropriate policies and managed by well-trained staff. Some functions such as take-back drug security, handling of currency release and count discrepancies, property purge, and missing property require additional policy development focused on strengthening controls.

With a few exceptions, Property & Evidence policies align with recommended practice and staff followed applicable department policies for the functions reviewed. There are several opportunities to better align procedures with IAPE Standards and improve efficiency.

Most Property & Evidence procedures we reviewed were consistent with IAPE Standards and audit tests demonstrated staff adherence to established policies. However, additional policy development is needed to create a consistent property purge process based on IAPE recommendations. According to the IAPE, agencies should have a systematic, annual review process to evaluate each item of property and evidence for possible purging. This procedure is important to help keep the Property Facility inventory at a manageable level. In addition, although the TPD has written policies requiring periodic property inventories, audits, and inspections, these functions are not currently being conducted. Property & Evidence staff cited a lack of staff resources due to elimination of the TPD Audit and Compliance Unit.

We identified some potential efficiencies that could be gained to support property tracking, consolidation, and disposal processes. Additional research is needed to determine if additional property scanning equipment, RMS training, or system reporting enhancements would improve staff efficiency.

Recommendations

The attached detailed report contains recommendations to develop policies, improve controls, and research potential opportunities to improve efficiency.

Department Responses to Recommendations

<p>Rec. 1.1: Property Staff contact Versadex or appropriate Information Technology support personnel to determine reporting capabilities of the RMS. A reporting process should be developed to accurately identify and track items assigned outside of the Property Facility. In addition, a policy should be developed and implemented establishing procedures to conduct periodic checks of these items and document status updates within the RMS.</p>	
<p>Response: Will address the changes / updates to RMS with the Data and Technology Bureau Manager who is responsible for RMS.</p>	<p><u>Target Date:</u> March 31, 2021</p>
<p>Explanation, Target Date > 90 Days: Changes may require vendor involvement and programming changes as well as staff availability to make and test the changes.</p>	
<p>Rec. 1.2: Implement compensating controls to reduce the risks associated with the ability for the Property Supervisor to edit and delete property information after it has been entered into the RMS.</p>	
<p>Response: Will address the changes / updates to RMS with the Data and Technology Bureau Manager who is responsible for RMS.</p>	<p><u>Target Date:</u> March 31, 2021</p>
<p>Explanation, Target Date > 90 Days: Changes may require vendor involvement and programming changes as well as staff availability to make and test the changes.</p>	
<p>Rec. 1.3: Property Staff research the feasibility of purchasing and implementing scanners or equipment that would electronically track items from initial impound at intake through the disposal process. The research findings should be documented in a memorandum through the chain of command for review and if needed, approval to purchase by the appropriate department executives.</p>	
<p>Response: RMS was upgraded in September 2020 which resolved the bulk disposal issue.</p>	<p><u>Target Date:</u> Complete</p>
<p>Explanation, Target Date > 90 Days: N/A</p>	
<p>Rec. 2.1: Property staff develop and implement a process to enhance security of take-back drugs. The “rule of two” principle should be utilized for these items. A “rule of two” may be implemented by using two different locks on the storage container. Each person (i.e. Property Technician and designated external entity such as IA Staff personnel) would possess one set of keys each, requiring both to be present to access the storage container until completely filled with take-back items and permanently secured for removal and destruction.</p>	

<p>Response: The current storage bin is designed to be locked only once and cannot be re-opened. Property Supervisor will research different storage options (i.e. purchasing color/number coded zip ties that will be unique to the take back drug container or smaller bins). Once a decision is made, policy and procedures will be updated to reflect the change.</p>	<p><u>Target Date:</u> December 30, 2020</p>
<p>Explanation, Target Date > 90 Days: N/A</p>	
<p>Rec. 4.1: TPD review the forfeiture currency intake and storage process to ensure proper internal controls and alignment with recommended standards.</p>	
<p>Response: Audit recommendations were forwarded to the Investigations Commander and Lieutenant over the forfeiture program. Any changes to the current forfeiture currency process will be initiated by the Investigations Bureau.</p> <p>Property Supervisor will work with the Data and Technology Bureau Manager to see if additional codes can be added to RMS to reflect forfeiture seizures that are housed and disposed of outside of Property (i.e. bulk currency and vehicles, handled by City Fleet Maintenance).</p>	<p><u>Target Date:</u> December 30, 2020</p>
<p>Explanation, Target Date > 90 Days: N/A</p>	
<p>Rec. 4.2: Property staff develop and implement a process to enhance security of processing currency available for release to the City. The “rule of two” principle should be followed for these items. A “rule of two” may be implemented by using two separate entities (i.e. Property Technician and a designated external entity such as IA personnel) to ensure the integrity of the process.</p>	
<p>Response: Property Supervisor will update the current procedures to include and identify the second person who will assist in processing the currency.</p>	<p><u>Target Date:</u> December 30, 2020</p>
<p>Explanation, Target Date > 90 Days: N/A</p>	
<p>Rec. 4.3: Property Staff review all currency items available for release and initiate proper disposal procedures to reduce the number of items currently being stored.</p>	
<p>Response: The backlog noted in the audit was due to staffing shortages leading up to the audit. Backlog has been processed. Policy will be updated to include ‘rule of 2’ and schedule reviews on a regular basis to ensure backlog doesn’t occur in the future.</p>	<p><u>Target Date:</u> December 30, 2020</p>
<p>Explanation, Target Date > 90 Days: N/A</p>	

Rec. 4.4: Property Staff develop and implement a policy that enhances documentation of discrepancies when total funds impounded do not match what is listed on the disposal list. Consideration should be given to establish procedures based on discrepancy thresholds (i.e. discrepancies under an identified dollar amount can be reviewed by the Property Supervisor, while discrepancies that exceed the threshold must be reviewed by Internal Affairs personnel).

Response: Property will review and develop a new policy to address this issue.

Target Date:
January 30,
2021

Explanation, Target Date > 90 Days: N/A

Rec. 6.1: Investigations supervisors ensure that assigned detectives develop an action plan for reviewing past cases to determine if they have been adjudicated or surpassed statute of limitations requirements. Property associated with these cases should be released whenever possible. This action plan should be documented, identify specific time periods for case reviews, and submitted through the chain of command for approval and implementation.

Response: Audit recommendations were forwarded to the Investigations Commander and the Executive Team. This recommendation is outside the span of control of the Property Unit. Administration Bureau Manager will continue the discussion with the Executive Team. With staffing shortages, this will be an ongoing discussion.

Target Date:
Ongoing

Explanation, Target Date > 90 Days: N/A

Rec. 6.2: Property Supervisor and staff develop and implement an action plan that designates specific time periods and procedures to conduct purging activities to ensure consistency with IAPE standards.

Response: Property will review and update purging policies as needed.

Target Date:
January 30,
2021

Explanation, Target Date > 90 Days: N/A

Rec. 6.3: Property staff contact the RMS vendor to determine if the system has the capability to enter and track an owner notification and disposal date for found, safekeeping, and items identified for disposal. These dates would electronically prompt the Property staff to appropriately handle the notification and disposal of items in a timely manner.

Response: Will address the changes / updates to RMS with the Data and Technology Bureau Manager who is responsible for RMS.

Target Date:
March 30, 2021

Explanation, Target Date > 90 Days: Changes may require vendor involvement and programming changes as well as staff availability to make and test the changes.

Rec. 7.1: Conduct periodic Property & Evidence inventories, audits and inspections in accordance with existing TPD Operations Orders. If resource constraints prevent execution of these activities as currently dictated by policy, evaluate other available options to meet objectives. All review processes initiated and completed should be appropriately documented (reports, memos, etc) and forwarded through the chain of command.

Response: Property Supervisor and the Administration Bureau Manager will identify audits and inspections outlined in the TPD orders and will coordinate the necessary reviews.

Target Date:
January 30,
2021

Explanation, Target Date > 90 Days: N/A

Rec. 7.2: Develop and add written "Missing Property" procedures to the *Property & Evidence Section Manual*. At a minimum, these procedures should include:

- A process to formally document missing item/s in a memorandum through the chain of command;
- The retention period and location for the memorandum to be retained;
- Review of the item status (active evidence, active evidence - case adjudicated, found, safekeeping, etc) active evidence items may require notification to the appropriate prosecuting agency.

Response: Will research and incorporate best practices into the policy.

Target Date:
January 30,
2021

Explanation, Target Date > 90 Days: N/A

Rec. 7.3: Property Supervisor prepare a report addressing all the items currently flagged as "Lost" within the RMS. The report should document the current status and provide an appropriate resolution for each item. The report should be forwarded through the chain of command for review and final approval.

Response: Property Supervisor develop a report and updated policy.

Target Date:
December 30,
2020

Explanation, Target Date > 90 Days: N/A

1 – Property Intake, Tracking & Consolidation

Background

The Tempe Police Department (TPD) Property and Evidence Facility is located in a stand-alone building. The Property Facility is staffed with one full-time Property Supervisor and five full-time Property Technicians. Protocols governing all aspects of property management (e.g. impound, storage, tracking, release, etc.) are detailed in the Tempe Police Department (TPD) *Property & Evidence Section Manual* and various Police Operation Orders.

Approach

The audit team conducted the following tests to determine if Property & Evidence staff were knowledgeable about property management responsibilities and evidence intake, tracking and consolidation practices were aligned with recommended practices:

- Observed and interviewed the Property Supervisor and four of the Property Technicians. Interviews focused on training, performance evaluations, policies, and access to applicable Property & Evidence policies and procedures;
- Identified and reviewed written policies to determine if they were consistent with International Association for Property and Evidence (IAPE) standards;
- On two separate occasions, conducted site visits to the Property Facility and observed the property intake process to determine if impounded items were appropriately handled by officers and Property Technicians in compliance with established policies and procedures.

Results

Interviews demonstrated that property management staff were qualified, trained and aware of applicable policies and procedures governing property impounding, storage and tracking.

We noted the following during our interviews:

Training

Property Staff personnel receive training opportunities from bulletins, email, and information from the Property Supervisor. The Property Supervisor has a significant amount of Property & Evidence experience and training. She has attended department training and several external Property & Evidence training classes throughout her career.

Property Technicians stated they have attended some department training and only one indicated she attended an external training regarding Property & Evidence. Most stated they learned through on-the-job training from a peer or the supervisor. All stated that the department would support attending external training to enhance knowledge, skills, and

stay updated with generally accepted practices related to Property & Evidence procedures.

Performance Evaluations

All employees stated they had a performance evaluation completed during the last year, performance objectives are applicable to assigned functions, and they were given the opportunity to provide input regarding the establishment of job goals and objectives.

Policy

Property Technicians were all aware of existing policies and most have been directly involved in the development and implementation of current policies and procedures.

Existing property intake and tracking processes are aligned with International Association for Property and Evidence (IAPE) standards. Additionally, during physical observations of evidence intake and impound areas, we noted lockers were secure and resources necessary for officers to impound property were readily available. Officers and Property Technicians we observed handled property and evidence appropriately and in compliance with policies and procedures.

Evidence Intake / Tracking

The Property Facility is a secured stand-alone building accessible by all police personnel required to impound property and evidence as part of their duties and functions. All obtained property and evidence items are stored and maintained at the Property Facility. Items can be impounded at the Property Facility, Hardy Substation, and Police Headquarters. At the time of the audit, a fourth impound location was being constructed within the Bike Detail area.

Each of these locations contains various size metal lockers inside which items are placed and secured by impounding personnel. The Property Facility Intake area is separated from the property permanent storage section. Located inside the Intake Area are pass-through lockers, a small cold storage unit, and a drying room used to temporarily impound and secure biological evidence. All impound locations contain a work area with needed materials to properly impound items. New employees who are required to impound property participate in an orientation tour at the Property Facility. The tour provides detailed information regarding property procedures and ensures employees are informed that an electronic version of the *Property & Evidence Section Manual* and various relevant Police Operation Orders are available.

Impounding personnel enter all property items into TPD's Versadex Records Management System (RMS). TPD has used this RMS system to track property items since 2011. Impounding personnel enter items in the Property Tracking system and assign one of the following designations: Found, Safekeeping, Recovered, Stolen, Evidence, Burned, or Counterfeit. Items are documented by a General Offense (GO)

Police Report Number which is generated from the call for service. Impounding personnel obtain a separate Tempe Report (TE) Number entry for each item impounded under the GO Number. The chain of custody of impounded items is tracked in the Evidence Continuity Module of the RMS which documents:

- Date / Time of Impound
- Purpose – original submittal
- From Location
- Custodian of Property Item
- To Location (PW – transit)
- Recipient of transport

According to procedures, impounding personnel are required to seal all packages, print and affix barcode labels, and document a signature on each package. If a label does not print, then impounding personnel place the TE Number and signature on the package and a Property Technician prints and attaches a barcode during their intake process.

Each workday (Monday through Friday), Property Technicians remove items from temporary impound and transport them from off-site locations to the Property Facility in City of Tempe vehicles. At each impound location, Property Technicians remove items from temporary storage lockers and update the status to “PW” to document the item is in transit. Once at the Property Facility, Property Technicians review an Intake Audit Module in RMS to identify any items that have been entered but not yet received. The status of items in RMS are:

- In Transit
- Temporary Impound Locker
- Assigned to Investigation (at another department work unit e.g. IT Forensics or NIBIN for test fires)
- Court
- Lab

The Intake Module documents:

- Date / Time
- Case File (GO) and Tag (TE) Numbers
- Item Synopsis
- Current Location

Once the item is received at the Property Facility, a permanent storage location is identified, and the item properly stored. Property Technicians periodically review the Intake module to ensure all items have the correct status and proper impound location. The Storage Control Module of the RMS tracks the current location of each item. The Property Supervisor periodically reviews the Intake Module to monitor the current status of items assigned outside the Property Facility.

If an item is improperly impounded, the Property Technician emails the employee and requests the issue be resolved. The item is placed in a secured “trouble bin” located at the Property Facility until corrected. The Property Supervisor stated that employees typically respond and resolve issues in a timely manner.

The audit team conducted site visits to the Property Facility and Hardy substation to observe the intake process. We noted the following during physical observations:

- Impounded items were appropriately handled by impounding officers and Property Technicians.
- The impound areas were secured with badge access.
- Drying room areas/cabinets were available for prepping biological evidence.
- RMS terminals were available for the entry of property and evidence items (as was a printer for barcodes).
- Video cameras were located in the impound areas.
- Supplies necessary for the impounding of property (e.g. envelopes, boxes) were located in the intake area.
- Impound lockers were located at the site and were functional.

Compensating controls should be considered to address the segregation of duty conflict created by the ability for the Property Supervisor to edit and delete property information after it has been entered into the RMS.

Through interviews and observations, the audit team noted that the Property Supervisor’s RMS user profile gives her the ability to edit and delete property information/records within the RMS after evidence been entered, barcoded and impounded by the officer/detective. The Property Supervisor indicated it is sometimes necessary to delete records that were inadvertently duplicated by the impounding officer. No secondary review or authorization of these transactions is required by policy. It is unclear whether the RMS records these deletions in an audit log, or anyone reviews these changes.

The ability to generate RMS report queries on released property would support more efficient use of staff time.

During interviews, property personnel indicated that there is a lack of a functional reporting method within the RMS to query and develop a report regarding items that have been “Released to Court” (i.e. Assigned to Investigation). As a result, staff must review, check, and followed-up on each item individually to ensure the timely return of property which is not an efficient use of time and resources. It is unclear whether this is an RMS system limitation or an indication that additional RMS training is needed.

Property Consolidation processes comply with IAPE standards. However, there is an opportunity to increase efficiency and reduce chain of custody risk through the purchase and implementation of additional property scanning equipment.

Property Staff utilizes the Versadex RMS to enter and track all property and evidence items, some of the system functions are:

- Add / edit / search property items
- Create reports regarding property location and storage
- Quick search for property items
- Document chain of custody

In addition, Property Technicians also use the system to:

- Search incidents and police reports
- Search for people
- Review case management
- Review property impounds

Property staff consolidates items in all sections of the Property Facility when needed to create additional space for future impounds. However, items that are consolidated can only have the location updated in the RMS one at a time. This inefficiency increases the possibility that an item may not be properly updated by staff in the RMS during consolidation and undermines existing chain of custody controls.

Recommendations

- 1.1 Property Staff contact Versadex or appropriate Information Technology support personnel to determine reporting capabilities of the RMS. A reporting process should be developed to accurately identify and track items assigned outside of the Property Facility. In addition, a policy should be developed and implemented establishing procedures to conduct periodic checks of these items and document status updates within the RMS.
- 1.2 Implement compensating controls to reduce the risks associated with the ability for the Property Supervisor to edit and delete property information after it has been entered into the RMS.
- 1.3 Property Staff research the feasibility of purchasing and implementing scanners or equipment that would electronically track items from initial impound at intake through the disposal process. The research findings should be documented in a memorandum through the chain of command for review and if needed, approval to purchase by the appropriate department executives.

2 – Active Evidence and Release Procedures – Drug/Narcotics

Background

At the time of our audit, there were over 26,000 drug/narcotic evidence items held at the property facility. Protocols related to drugs/narcotics evidence management are detailed in the following written TPD policies and IAPE standards:

- *TPD Property & Evidence Section Manual*
- *TPD Packaging Manual*
- *IAPE Section 9 - Drugs*

Approach

The audit team conducted the following tests to determine if Property & Evidence drug/narcotic active evidence and release procedures were aligned with recommended practices, items were properly stored and recorded in RMS and could be located in the Property Facility:

- Observed and interviewed Property & Evidence staff;
- Identified and reviewed Property & Evidence policies to determine if they were aligned with IAPE standards;
- Physically inspected the Drug/Narcotics storage area at the Property Facility;
- Conducted an inventory of a sample of impounded drug/narcotic items to verify they were accurately stored, recorded in RMS and packaged in accordance with written policies.

Results

Policies and procedures for the Drug/Narcotics Room are aligned with IAPE standards.

Drug items are received into the Property Facility by sworn personnel initiating an impound and designated as “found” or “evidence.” Drug items are obtained by Property Technicians at designated police locations including the Intake area at the Property Facility. All items are inspected to ensure they are barcoded, properly sealed, and initialed by the impounding officer. Items that are not properly impounded are placed in a correction bin and a notification by email is sent to the officer to correct the impound before the item is entered into storage within the Property Facility.

Drug items are segregated from other property types, and a dedicated Drug Room is used for storage of all drugs and drug paraphernalia. The Drug Room is secured using a swipe card system with the Property Supervisor and the five assigned Property Technicians having access. The system tracks entries and an electronic access log is maintained for one year. Inside the Drug Room, there are cameras that record activity within the area and video is maintained for four months.

The Drug Room is divided into two floors (levels) and was found to have sufficient storage, adequate shelving units, and was well organized. The lower level contains smaller quantity impounds, “take-back” drugs, and items to be transported to the Arizona Department of Public Safety Crime Lab (Crime Lab). The original impound package is placed inside manila envelopes with the report number handwritten on the outside. The envelopes are then maintained on metal shelves by year in chronological order by report number. This process was developed to easily access and consolidate items. Drug items that are designated for scientific analysis are transported to the Crime Lab by Property Technicians weekly. These items are stored in a separate location from active evidence until returned from the lab. Once returned, they are entered into active evidence. Each time an item is moved, the status is updated in the RMS to ensure proper chain of custody. Drug items impounded in bulk are maintained on the second level. A freight elevator is used to transport large items between both levels.

The Property Supervisor periodically generates a list of items designated for disposal and directs Property Technicians to remove the items from active evidence. These items are placed in a secured disposal cage within the Drug Room until a destruction process is scheduled. Just prior to the scheduled destruction process, TPD Internal Affairs personnel review each item to ensure they correlate with disposal lists. The drugs are then prepared for transport and destruction. Tactical personnel are utilized to provide security during transport to an off-site destruction location. The status of each item is then updated in the RMS system once the destruction process is completed.

Additional procedures are needed to enhance physical security of take-back drugs maintained in the Drug/Narcotic Room.

Drug Take-Back containers are located at two police locations. Prescription drugs from the Take-Back program are periodically removed from the secured containers by an officer and a Property Technician. These items are transported to the Property Facility and placed in large cylinder containers. These containers are not secured until they are filled. A contract company is contacted to remove the containers and transports the items to a destruction facility. Prescription take-back drugs are not impounded; however, they are segregated from other property. There are no additional security measures in place to limit access to these items until the container is sealed (once completely filled).

All drug/narcotic items selected for verification were found to be properly documented in RMS, packaged in accordance with policies and stored in the correct location without exception.

The assessment team requested an inventory list of items impounded in the Drug Room to measure compliance with established policies and generally accepted drug handling procedures. A random sample of 40 drug items was selected for testing from active and disposal locations. There were 20 items selected for a sheet to floor and 20 items for a floor to sheet review. Each item was tested for the following and no exceptions were noted:

- Located and stored as documented in the RMS

- Properly sealed
- Barcode label attached
- Package contained initials, ID#, Date

Recommendations

- 2.1 Property staff develop and implement a process to enhance security of take-back drugs. The “rule of two” principle should be utilized for these items. A “rule of two” may be implemented by using two different locks on the storage container. Each person (i.e. Property Technician and designated external entity such as IA Staff personnel) would possess one set of keys each, requiring both to be present to access the storage container until completely filled with take-back items and permanently secured for removal and destruction.

3 – Active Evidence and Release Procedures – Firearms

Background

At the time of our audit, there were over 2,700 firearm evidence items held at the property facility. Protocols related to firearms property management are detailed in the following written TPD policies and IAPE standards:

- TPD *Property & Evidence Section Manual*
- TPD *Packaging Manual*
- IAPE *Section 11 - Firearms*

Approach

The audit team conducted the following tests to determine if Property & Evidence firearm active evidence and release procedures were aligned with recommended practices, items were properly stored and recorded in RMS and could be located in the Property Facility:

- Observed and interviewed Property & Evidence staff;
- Identified and reviewed Property & Evidence policies to determine if they were consistent with IAPE standards;
- Physically inspected the Firearms storage area at the Property Facility;
- Conducted an inventory of a sample of impounded firearm items to verify if they were accurately stored, recorded in RMS and packaged in accordance with written policies.

Results

Policies and procedures for the Firearms Room are aligned with IAPE standards.

Firearm items are received into the Property Facility by sworn personnel initiating an impound designated as evidence, found, or safekeeping. Officers are required to complete a National Crime Information Center (NCIC) query on the serial number of all firearms impounded. Firearm items are obtained by Property Technicians at designated police locations including the Intake area at the Property Facility. All items are inspected to ensure they are barcoded, properly sealed, and initialed by the impounding officer. Items that are not properly impounded are placed in a correction bin and a notification by email is sent to the officer to correct the impound before the item is entered into storage within the Property Facility.

Firearm items are segregated from other property types, and a dedicated Firearms Room is used for storage of weapons, National Integrated Ballistic Information Network (NIBIN) evidence is also stored and segregated inside the room. The Firearms Room is secured using a swipe card system with the Property Supervisor and all five assigned Property Technicians having access. The system tracks entries and an electronic

access log is maintained for one year. Inside the Firearms Room, there are cameras that record activity within the area and video is maintained for four months.

The Firearms Room is one level and was found to have sufficient storage area, adequate shelving units, and was well-organized. Handguns are packaged in a cardboard box for impound. Some rifles are tagged and impounded and others are placed in longer cardboard boxes. Firearms are stored on large metal shelves by year in chronological order by report number. This process was developed to easily access and consolidate items.

Firearm items that are designated for scientific analysis are transported to the Crime Lab by Property Technicians weekly. These items are stored in a separate location from active evidence until returned from the lab. Once returned, they are entered into active evidence. Each time an item is moved, the status is updated in the RMS to ensure proper chain of custody.

The Property Supervisor periodically generates a list of items designated for disposal and has Property Technicians remove the items from active evidence. Weapons cleared for release are stored in the Firearms Room segregated from active items until picked up for sale by a contracted auction company. Altered weapons are designated for disposal and are destroyed in the drug destruction process. Prior to release or destruction of a weapon, Internal Affairs personnel complete a NCIC records check of the firearm to ensure it has not been reported stolen. The status of each item is then updated in the RMS system.

All firearm items selected for verification were found to be properly documented and stored in the correct location without exception.

The audit team requested an inventory list of items impounded in the Firearms Room to measure compliance with established policies and generally accepted firearms handling procedures. Utilizing random sampling, 40 firearm items were selected for testing from active and disposal locations. There were 20 items selected for a sheet to floor and 20 items for a floor to sheet review. Each item was tested for the following and no exceptions were noted:

- Located and stored as documented in the RMS
- Properly sealed
- Barcode label attached
- Package contained initials, ID#, Date

Recommendations

None. For information only.

4 – Active Evidence and Release Procedures – Currency

Background

At the time of our audit, there were over 2,400 currency evidence items held at the property facility. Protocols related to currency property management are detailed in the following written TPD policies and IAPE standards:

- TPD *Property & Evidence Section Manual*
- TPD *Packaging Manual*
- IAPE *Section 10 - Money*

Approach

The audit team conducted the following tests to determine if Property & Evidence currency active evidence and release procedures were aligned with recommended practices, items were properly stored and recorded in RMS and could be located in the Property Facility:

- Observed and interviewed Property & Evidence staff;
- Identified and reviewed Property & Evidence policies to determine if they were consistent with IAPE standards;
- Physically inspected the currency storage vaults at the Property Facility;
- Conducted an inventory of a sample of impounded firearm items to verify they were accurately stored, recorded in RMS and packaged in accordance with written policies.

Results

Overall, policies and procedures for the Currency Vault are aligned with IAPE standards. However, procedures are needed to enhance security of currency available for release as well as documenting discrepancies between the amount of funds impounded versus what is listed on the disposal list. In addition, we recommend TPD review the current forfeiture currency impound and storage process managed outside of the Property Facility.

Currency items are received into the Property Facility by sworn personnel initiating an impound and designated as evidence, found, or safekeeping. Currency seized through criminal investigations (i.e. seized property/forfeiture) is not impounded and stored within the Property Facility. Seized property currency is instead managed and maintained by sworn personnel responsible for asset forfeiture functions. A review of the TPD currency forfeiture impounding and storage controls was outside the scope of this audit. However, this is considered a high-risk area given the amount of cash and property typically involved with the forfeiture function.

Currency items designated to be stored at the Property Facility are obtained by Property Technicians at designated police locations including the Intake area at the Property

Facility. All items are inspected to ensure they are barcoded, properly sealed, and initialed by the impounding officer. Items that are not properly impounded are placed in a correction bin and a notification by email is sent to the officer to correct the impound before the item is entered into storage within the Property Facility.

Currency items are segregated from other types of property and stored in two large standing vaults within the Property Facility. One vault contains all active currency items while the other maintains the currency available for release. The vaults are secured by combination and key lock. The Property Supervisor and the five assigned Property Technicians are all provided the vault combinations, and all have access to the keys. The keys are stored in a separate area from the location of the vaults. There is no system (such as a card reader) to track entry into either vault; however, both safes are in range of cameras that record activity within the area and the video is maintained for four months.

Active currency items are impounded in small envelopes and stored in small cardboard trays by year and chronological report number. Once available for disposal, the item is transferred to the vault containing items available for release. The items available for release are also stored in small cardboard trays; however, they are placed in the order documented on the disposal list and not by chronological report number. This makes it difficult to locate an item when needed.

At the time of our audit, the assessment team observed several currency impounds stored in the vault containing a large number of items available for release. Currency items for release can either be returned to the owner, or if not claimed after a public notification process, deposited to the City general fund. A Property Technician periodically generates a list of items designated for disposal and transfers them to the vault containing items available for release. Two Property Technicians then remove items from the vault, conduct a count of the cash impounded, and compare the total counted to the amount documented on the disposal list. Currency released to the City is counted by two Property Technicians in an area covered by internal cameras. Discrepancies between the invoice and impounded currency is reconciled by crossing out the incorrect amount on the disposal list and documenting the correct amount on a cash receipts report. There is no written policy requiring notification to the impounding officer's immediate supervisor or to Internal Affairs personnel regarding the review, investigation, and documentation of any cash discrepancies.

Although we observed some inefficiencies trying to locate sampled items, all currency items selected for verification were found to be properly documented and stored in the correct location.

The assessment team requested an inventory list of currency items stored in the safes. Using random sampling, 40 currency items were selected for testing from active and disposal locations. We selected 20 items for a sheet to floor and 20 items for a floor to sheet review. Each item was tested for the following:

- Located and stored as documented in the RMS
- Properly sealed

- Barcode label attached
- Package contained initials, ID#, Date

All items selected were found to be stored in the proper location; one item did not document the impounding officer initials as required by policy. Although all items were located, the Property Technician had to review each individual disposal list to locate impounds sampled from the items available for release vault.

Recommendations

- 4.1 TPD review the forfeiture currency intake and storage process to ensure proper internal controls and alignment with recommended standards.
- 4.2 Property staff develop and implement a process to enhance security of processing currency available for release to the City. The “rule of two” principle should be followed for these items. A “rule of two” may be implemented by using two separate entities (i.e. Property Technician and a designated external entity such as IA personnel) to ensure the integrity of the process.
- 4.3 Property Staff review all currency items available for release and initiate proper disposal procedures to reduce the number of items currently being stored.
- 4.4 Property Staff develop and implement a policy that enhances documentation of discrepancies when total funds impounded do not match what is listed on the disposal list. Consideration should be given to establish procedures based on discrepancy thresholds (i.e. discrepancies under an identified dollar amount can be reviewed by the Property Supervisor, while discrepancies that exceed the threshold must be reviewed by Internal Affairs personnel).

5 – Active Evidence and Release Procedures – Biological Evidence

Background

At the time of our audit, there were over 10,000 biological evidence items held at the property facility. Protocols related to currency property management are detailed in the following written TPD policies and IAPE standards:

- *TPD Property & Evidence Section Manual*
- *TPD Packaging Manual*
- *IAPE Section 7 – Long Term Storage Locations*

Approach

The audit team conducted the following tests to determine if Property & Evidence biological active evidence and release procedures were aligned with recommended practices, items were properly stored and recorded in RMS and could be located in the Property Facility:

- Observed and interviewed Property & Evidence staff;
- Identified and reviewed Property & Evidence policies to determine if they were consistent with IAPE standards;
- Physically inspected the freezer and refrigerator storage sections at the Property Facility containing biological evidence;
- Conducted an inventory of a sample of impounded biological evidence items to verify if they were accurately stored, recorded in RMS and packaged in accordance with written policies.

Results

Policies and procedures for the Biological Evidence Storage are aligned with IAPE standards.

Biological items are received into Property by sworn personnel initiating an impound as evidence. Biological items are obtained by Property Technicians at designated police locations including the Intake area at the Property Facility. All items are inspected to ensure they are barcoded, properly sealed, and initialed by the impounding officer. A drying room is located in the Property Intake area and is used by officers for items that are wet (typically blood stained). These items must be dried and packaged properly before they can be stored.

The Property Facility contains one large walk-in refrigerator and two large walk-in freezers used for storing impounded biological evidence. Each unit has an alarm that activates if the temperature rises above a certain level. Alarms activated after business hours are monitored by TPD Dispatch and a notification is made to the on-call Property Supervisor or Technician to respond if needed. The cold storage units are on a six-month maintenance schedule completed by City Facilities personnel. Back-up

generators are in place to ensure cold unit storage remains operational during a power outage.

Upon opening the refrigerator and freezers, we observed that the shelves contained plastic containers in which all evidence items are stored. Biological evidence is stored by year and items are placed in report number chronological order in all the cold storage units. The Property Supervisor generates a list of items designated for release and has Property Technicians remove the items for proper disposal.

All biological evidence items selected for verification were found to be properly documented and stored in the correct location.

The assessment team requested an inventory list of biological items stored in cold units. Utilizing random sampling, 40 items were selected for testing from active and disposal locations. There were 20 items selected for a sheet to floor and 20 items for a floor to sheet review. Each item was tested for the following:

- Located and stored as documented in the RMS
- Properly sealed
- Barcode label attached
- Package contained initials, ID#, Date

All items selected were found to be stored in the proper location, one item did not document the impounding officer initials as required by policy.

Recommendations

None. For information only.

6 – Property Purge

Background

A systematic process to dispose of (purge) property from the Property Facility is an important property and evidence management function. At the time of the audit, over 362,000 items were stored at the Property Facility. About 588,000 items were impounded by Property and Evidence from February 2011 through March 2020. Protocols related to property purge are detailed in the following written TPD policies and IAPE standards:

- *TPS Property & Evidence Section Manual*
- *IAPE Standard 14.1 – 14.6 - Disposition*

Approach

The audit team conducted the following tests to determine if Property & Evidence property purge procedures were aligned with recommended practices and to identify potential improvements:

- Observed and interviewed Property & Evidence staff;
- Identified and reviewed Property & Evidence policies and practices to determine if they were consistent with IAPE standards;
- Reviewed available RMS reports documenting property impound and disposition data.

Results

Although Property staff periodically generate lists of items available for disposal, lack of a consistent purge process is not consistent with IAPE standards. A consistent purge process is important to help keep inventory at a manageable level.

TPD Operation Orders 31.302 and 31.303 establish procedures for the release and disposal of impounded items. Property and evidence items that cannot be returned to an owner are generally disposed of in the following manner:

- Currency is converted to the City General Fund (following the escheatment process);
- Drugs and tampered firearms are burned at an off-site facility;
- Firearms are sold through an authorized dealer;
- Items of value (including bicycles) are sent to auction;
- Property with low or no value (e.g. biological evidence, cd's, documents, clothes) are donated or destroyed in a manner made unusable.

Property and evidence items become available for release through the following established procedures:

- An email from the assigned case detective is forwarded to the Property staff authorizing the release or disposal of an item;
- A detective operating in a liaison role for Investigations personnel provides a list of items available for release from various cases;
- Notification and documentation authorizing the release on an item in some instances can be provided to Property staff by court personnel;
- The Property staff identifies “Hot Spots” based on a visual observation (i.e. bikes) and makes appropriate notifications to department personnel to review cases and release items.

Found and safekeeping items are impounded and stored within the Property Facility. A property receipt is provided to citizens by impounding personnel. Property Technicians mail a postcard to the owner at the last known address to begin a 30-day notification period for the owner to claim the impounded item. If the owner claims an item, an update is documented within the RMS once proper identification is provided to the Property staff. If an owner does not claim an item, it is disposed of in accordance with Property policies and procedures.

The Property Supervisor and Technicians periodically generate lists regarding items available for disposal throughout the various sections of the Property Facility. IAPE *Professional Standards* (Section 14.1) *Purge Standard and Reasoning* state the following:

Law enforcement agencies should have a systematic review process assuring that each item of property and evidence is evaluated for possible purging on an annual basis. There is no procedure more important to keeping the inventory of a property room at a manageable level than an effective on-going purging program. The property room inventory should be kept free of items that are no longer needed in order to avoid the need for additional storage space and staffing. The timely and appropriate disposition of property is extremely important to the efficient management of the property room. Overcrowded evidence rooms generally require more staffing to manage simply because the size of their inventory has a tendency to slow down routine operations involving evidence, storage, and retrieval.

Additional RMS functionality that enables Property staff to set purge reminders would help support the timely disposal of items.

Property staff advised they are not aware of system functionality that allows them to set purge reminders within the RMS. Items must be viewed within RMS individually to determine if they are available for release; a reminder cannot be set for a 30-day review of safekeeping items or misdemeanor cases which have a one-year statute of limitations.

The Property Supervisor obtains reports generated using Tableau, a data visualization software, that assists with analysis of data. Each month, the Property Supervisor develops a TPD Property Intake and Disposal Report that documents:

- Month and year
- Number of items entered into Property
- Number of items disposed
- Number of items +/- of entered compared to disposed

The report is forwarded through the chain of command for notification and provides information regarding the number of items being impounded monthly compared to the number of items being disposed. The Property Supervisor generated a report for the assessment team beginning February 2011 through March 2020. The report documented the following:

- 588,670 items were impounded February 2011 through March 2020
- 220,763 items were disposed February 2011 through March 2020
- 367,908 items added to the inventory since February 2011 through March 2020
- 99 of 110 (90%) months reviewed had more items impounded then disposed

Recommendations

- 6.1 Investigations supervisors ensure that assigned detectives develop an action plan for reviewing past cases to determine if they have been adjudicated or surpassed statute of limitations requirements. Property associated with these cases should be released whenever possible. This action plan should be documented, identify specific time periods for case reviews, and submitted through the chain of command for approval and implementation.
- 6.2 Property Supervisor and staff develop and implement an action plan that designates specific time periods and procedures to conduct purging activities to ensure consistency with IAPE standards.
- 6.3 Property staff contact the RMS vendor to determine if the system has the capability to enter and track an owner notification and disposal date for found, safekeeping, and items identified for disposal. These dates would electronically prompt the Property staff to appropriately handle the notification and disposal of items in a timely manner.

7 – Audits & Inspections/Missing Property

Background

A systematic process to inventory and audit property and report the status of missing property is an important property and evidence management function. Protocols related to property inventory and audits are detailed in the following written TPD policies and IAPE standards:

- TPD Operation Order 31.301 – *Property Unit Administrative*
- IAPE Standard 15.1 – 15.2 – *Inventories; Audit & Inspections*

Approach

The audit team conducted the following tests to determine if Property & Evidence property inventory and audit procedures were aligned with recommended practices, staff complied with policies and identify potential improvements:

- Observed and interviewed Property & Evidence staff;
- Identified and reviewed Property & Evidence policies and practices to determine if they were consistent with IAPE standards;
- Requested copies of missing property reports and Property Facility audits conducted by TPD personnel.

Results

Routine property inventories should be conducted to ensure the integrity of the property and evidence system. The lack of a regular inventory process does not comply with existing TPD Operations Orders or IAPE Standards.

According to Operations Order 31.301 – *Property Unit Administrative*, property inventories should be done:

- By Property Facility staff upon the assignment of a new Property Technician;
- Annually, of all high liability storage areas;
- By the TPD Audit & Compliance Unit During non-audit years.

Per policy, the purpose of the inventory is to ensure the integrity of the property and evidence system, not to require an accounting of every item of property or evidence. All discrepancies must be reported to the Support Services Division Director.

According to IAPE Standard 15.1 – *Inventories*, “an inventory should be conducted annually, or whenever a change in key-holding personnel or in the Chief Executive Officer is made.” The purpose of an inventory is to ensure that all items of property/evidence are accounted for. Conducting annual inventories helps identify property or evidence that is missing or misplaced from its assigned location and items that are present in a particular location that should have been previously removed.

According to the IAPE, agencies that conduct regular inventories are far less likely to experience an internal loss of property or evidence.

The Property Supervisor stated that although Property Facility staff periodically performs spot checks of inventory, they do not keep written records documenting the inventory process, prepare written reports or brief management on outcomes. She further indicated that no periodic inventories are conducted by the TPD Audit and Compliance unit, because the unit no longer exists.

A written policy is needed to formally establish procedures to document, follow-up and report to management any property identified as “missing.”

Neither TPD Operations Orders nor the *Property & Evidence Section Manual* address protocols to be followed when property or evidence cannot be located. According to Property Staff, current practice is to flag the item in RMS as “lost” and then research if it is determined necessary. No specific time frames are established to resolve the missing property or formally communicate findings. At the time of the audit, 97 items were flagged as “Lost” within RMS. The majority of these items were marked as “Cleared for Disposition”, which indicates they were likely released, but the location may not have updated within the RMS.

Routine property audits and inspections should be conducted to help provide early identification of potential problems or deficiencies in the property management function. The lack of a routine audits and inspections does not comply with existing TPD Operations Orders or IAPE Standards.

According to Operations Order 31.301 – *Property Unit Administrative*, an audit of the Property Facility should be conducted by the Audit & Compliance Unit once every three years. Additionally, IAPE Standards recommend that comprehensive audits should be conducted at least annually. Further, there should be inspections of the Property Facility conducted by the supervisor, or the unit commander, who is responsible for that operational area.

According to IAPE Standards, an audit is a review of the policies, procedures, and processes of the property and evidence functions of the agency to determine if they meet recognized standards, best practices, and comply with applicable statutes and codes. An inspection is a periodic review of designated aspects of the Property and Evidence function. Inspections should be both formal (i.e. scheduled) as well as informal (i.e. unannounced) and typically cover areas such as: security, access control, tickler files, missing evidence, partial examination of records, general cleanliness and housekeeping of the area, inventory levels, safety practices, and training.

The Property Supervisor stated that that no periodic audits or inspections are conducted by the TPD Audit and Compliance unit because the unit no longer exists and therefore, there was a lack of sufficient TPD staff resources to perform these functions.

Recommendations

- 7.1 Conduct periodic Property & Evidence inventories, audits and inspections in accordance with existing TPD Operations Orders. If resource constraints prevent execution of these activities as currently dictated by policy, evaluate other available options to meet objectives. All review processes initiated and completed should be appropriately documented (reports, memos, etc) and forwarded through the chain of command.
- 7.2 Develop and add written “Missing Property” procedures to the *Property & Evidence Section Manual*. At a minimum, these procedures should include:
- A process to formally document missing item/s in a memorandum through the chain of command;
 - The retention period and location for the memorandum to be retained;
 - Review of the item status (active evidence, active evidence - case adjudicated, found, safekeeping, etc) active evidence items may require notification to the appropriate prosecuting agency.
- 7.3 Property Supervisor prepare a report addressing all the items currently flagged as “Lost” within the RMS. The report should document the current status and provide an appropriate resolution for each item. The report should be forwarded through the chain of command for review and final approval.

Scope, Methods, and Standards

Scope

Our scope included current property management policies and procedures and verification of property at the time of this audit. Property inventory reports used to verify property were generated from the RMS in February 2020. Audit procedures focused on the following areas:

- Evidence Intake
- Property Purge
- Active Evidence and Release
- Drugs/Narcotics
- Guns
- Money/Vault
- Biological Evidence
- Missing Property
- Internal Tracking

Methods

To achieve audit objectives, we:

- Interviewed and observed Police Property & Evidence staff;
- Conducted site visits of the Police Property Facility, including intake/impound areas;
- Reviewed Police Department Property & Evidence policies and procedures and related Operations Orders;
- Conducted a security review of the Police Property Facility;
- Traced and verified a sample of inventory items from Versadex to items on the floor;
- Traced and verified a sample of inventory items from the floor to Versadex and case files;
- Tested a sample of released and disposed inventory for proper documentation and chain of custody;
- Compared TPD written policies and procedures to *Professional Standards* published by the International Association for Property and Evidence (IAPE), Inc.

Unless otherwise stated in the report, all sampling in this audit was conducted using a judgmental methodology to maximize efficiency based on auditor knowledge of the population being tested. As such, sample results cannot be extrapolated to the entire population and are limited to a discussion of only those items reviewed.