HOUSTON POLICE CRIME LAB

Central Evidence Receiving

Training Manual

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction

The Central Evidence Receiving (CER) Section is a service-oriented section. It does not conduct any evidentiary analysis. Other sections of the Laboratory rely on the CER Section to enter evidence items that are submitted by an officer in a timely and accurate manner so that they are available for analysis.

Even though the CER Section is not an accredited discipline of the Laboratory as defined by the American Society of Crime Laboratory Directors – Laboratory Accreditation Board (ASCLD-LAB), it does fall under the accreditation standards. In conjunction with these standards, the Laboratory has developed Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) as well as a Quality Assurance Manual (QAM) that establishes procedures each individual is responsible for following. Each CER Section employee will be responsible for these documents which may be updated from time to time.

Evidence submitted into the CER Section will be maintained according to the current procedures and requirements from the time they are submitted until they are destroyed or released. The time between the submission of items until their final disposition, is considered to be their 'life-cycle'.

Each employee will acknowledge they have reviewed the current ASCLD-LAB Guidelines, CER SOPs, and QAM.

ASCLD-LAB Accreditation Standards Acknowledgement: (Version:)

Signature	Date	Supervisor	Date

Central Evidence Receiving SOPs: (Version:)

Signature	Date	Supervisor	Date

Safety Manual: (Version:)

Signature	Date	Supervisor	Date

Quality Assurance Manual: (Version:)

Signature	Date	Supervisor	Date

Chain of Custody

The 'Chain of Custody'[1] for evidence consists of documentation showing the movement of an item from the point it is collected, up to the ultimate destruction or release disposition of that item. The documentation will show the date and time of each individual who handled an item and the date and time for each location where the item was stored. An individual will accept responsibility for each time evidence moves between locations or people. A broken Chain of Custody occurs if the chronological history of an item has gaps when the person who handled it or the location of the item cannot be established.

Exercises:

1. Use the EMS training database (or a mock case) to practice evidence transactions. Print and review the Chain of Custody information with the trainer.

   ______________________________ __________
   Trainer Date

2. What is a Chain of Custody?

   ____
   ____
   ____

3. Why is a Chain of Custody important?

   ____
   ____
   ____

4. At what time are Chain of Custody transactions recorded?

   ____
   ____
   ____

5. What steps need to be taken if a transaction is not recorded properly?

   ____
   ____
   ____

[1] Sources of review for this topic include the Quality Assurance Manual, ASCLD-LAB Legacy and International Criteria and Texas Department of Public Safety Physical Evidence Handbook available on the Laboratory Intranet.

Reasons Items are Submitted

A. For Destruction

Items submitted for destruction do not need to be analyzed. These items may be destroyed with any burn run. Unless specifically stated on submission documentation or elsewhere, there is no minimum hold time for items specifically submitted for destruction.

B. Analyze

1. Typically, these items will be associated with charges filed in a court. If charges have been accepted by a court, a court order, signed by a judge, must be obtained authorizing the items to be destroyed.
2. If no charges were filed, the charges were declined, or there was no indictment, the items may be destroyed only when there is written documentation from the division of concern verifying that they may be destroyed.

Exercise:

List the processing types associated with items that are submitted and explain the life cycle of evidence in each of the categories. ('Life Cycle' is defined in the Central Evidence Receiving Section.)

Evidence

A. Evidence Integrity

1. Loss, Cross-Contamination & Deleterious Change[2]
2. Chain of Custody[3]
3. Proper seals[4]
    1. Remedial Seals
        a. Items not sealed
        b. Items with compromised seals
        c. Inventorying items

B. Biological

Biological evidence is evidence that is derived from an animal source, typically human. Biological evidence is most often associated with the toxicology and the forensic biology disciplines. Items that are subject to decomposition (deleterious change) such as liquids, tissue or damp items should be stored to minimize any changes to the evidentiary value of the item (for example, drying the item, porous container or freezing).

C. Narcotic Evidence

Items that have chemical properties which lend themselves to abuse by individuals. Examples include marijuana, cocaine, ethanol, or PCP.

D. Latent Prints

Each individual possesses a unique fingerprint pattern which may be transferred to an item that is handled. This may include physical items where impressions are believed to exist, or items which bear impressions that have been collected from the surface of an item (tape lifts or photographs of impressions).

E. Canine Samples

These items are typically derived from evidentiary items that have been authorized for destruction. These are handled as though they are still evidence items. The original item may be subdivided at the request of a dog handler so it is appropriately sized to use in training the canines.

<u>Exercises:</u>

---

[2] 2008 ASCLD-LAB Manual, page 21, Essential Criteria 1.4.1.4
[3] 2008 ASCLD-LAB Manual, page 20, Essential Criteria 1.4.1.1
[4] 2008 ASCLD-LAB Manual, page 21, Essential Criteria 1.4.1.3

1. Review the available training documentation, Accreditation Standards, SOP and QAM.
2. Write what the intent is in stating that evidence is protected from loss, cross-contamination and deleterious change of evidence. In this discussion, use specific examples which must include cross-contamination of biological evidence as well as the potential degradation of evidence due to temperature and the loss of items. Address biological, narcotic, latent print and generalized physical evidence.
3. What is required for an item to be said to be properly sealed? Your explanation must contain when a proper seal is necessary and the definition a proper seal. Include an explanation of what two things a proper seal must be sufficient to prevent.[5]
4. List the location in the Quality Manual that addresses remedial seals.

[5] ASCLD-LAB 2008 Legacy Manual, Discussion for criterion 1.4.1.3.

Means of Submission

Direct Submission

These are items that are directly submitted into the CER Section by an officer or representative from an outside agency. These items must be entered into the Evidence Management System (EMS) and are not items that are being submitted that were previously received.

First floor lockboxes

Lockboxes are available on the 1st floor of 1200 Travis. These are locked during normal working hours and unlocked at the close of each business day. These locations allow officers to store items that are too large to be placed in the mobile lock boxes. Each box is locked by the submitting officer after the item(s) are placed inside. When the box is opened by CER Section, the items are removed and considered as a new submission to the CER Section.

1. Keys

   The CER Section maintains the only set of keys that are used each business day to open the lockboxes and remove any evidence that may have been deposited or to empty the boxes if necessary during a call out.

2. Documentation

   Each submission should be accompanied by an evidence submission form. The officer is also expected to sign the evidence into the logbook stored in the room. If this is not done, a representative of the CER Section will add the item to the logbook before carrying it to the CER Section work area for processing.

Mobile Boxes

Mobile boxes are strategically placed in the department so that officers can submit evidence without being required to travel to the CER Section during normal business hours. Typically, these boxes are transported to the CER Section twice a week by two officers. They are then opened, the inventory is verified and the individual items are entered into the EMS.

1. Keys

   The CER Section maintains the keys that are used to open the mobile boxes and remove any evidence that may have been deposited or to empty the bulky boxes on the first floor of 1200 Travis if necessary during a call out.

2. Documentation

   Each submission is logged into a tracking system at the site of the mobile box. This documentation is then used to verify the contents of the box when it is opened by a representative of the CER Section. A representative from the CER Section and both of the officers accompanying the box sign-off acknowledging the contents were verified.

After Hours / Call-Out

Each individual working in the CER Section is subject to be called out during non-working hours. A call-out roster is maintained in the Command Center listing the contact information for everyone in the section as well as all the laboratory management. It is the responsibility of each individual in the laboratory to ensure their current contact information is available to the department and to respond to on call assignments.

Exercises:

On at least ten occasions, observe the first three submission methods above (ten times each), noting what you observe. Record the dates you conduct this activity and how many cases are submitted each time. Write a paper summarizing the processes, what you observed, and why the documentation steps in each submission method are important.

Trainer Date

Evidence Data Entry

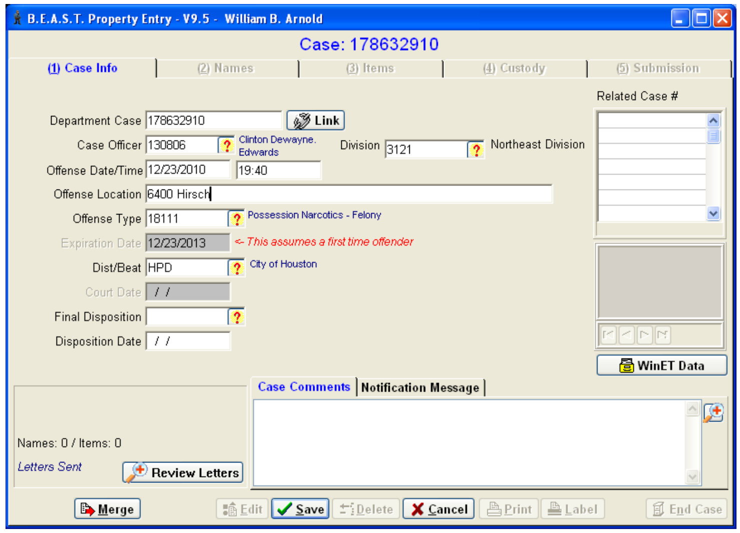
In this process, it is extremely important that as you enter a case, you complete the entry of each item and apply the barcode before moving on to the next item (if there is more than one item in a case)! Verify the item label is being placed on the correct item before applying the label.

A. From the opening screen in the Property Inventory system in the EMS, select 'New Case' in the lower left corner.

B. In the next screen, enter the information associated with the submission into the appropriate fields.

1. The two required fields are the Department Case Number and the Offense Type.
2. You will also enter as much other information as you have available.
3. Remember that the Case Officer is not necessarily the submitting officer. It may have been delivered by someone else.
4. Ensure that you have entered the division. This is important so that the appropriate division receives the automated disposition notices when the statute of limitations has expired.
5. Although not a required field, enter the date and time the offense occurred along with the location and the Dist/Beat (typically HPD).

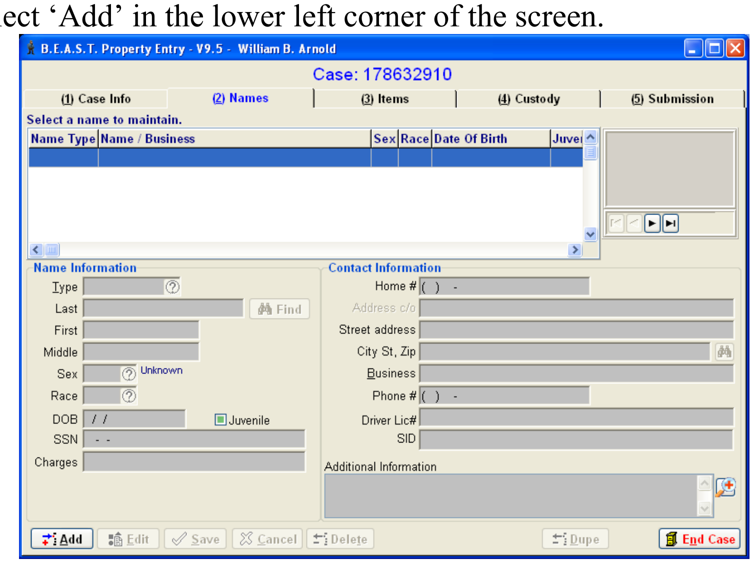
6. Additional comments may be added to the ‘Case Comments’ field near the bottom of the screen.



C. Once you save your entries, you’ll notice that the other tabs (they were originally grayed out) will be enabled so that you can complete your data entry into the system.

D. Select the second tab, ‘Names’. This is where the information associated with suspects, complainants or other entities will be entered.

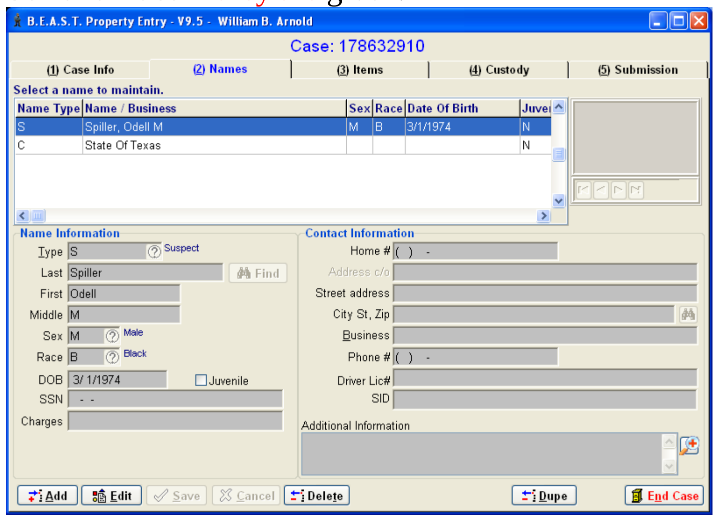
1. Select ‘Add’ in the lower left corner of the screen.



2. You will again enter as much information as you have available.

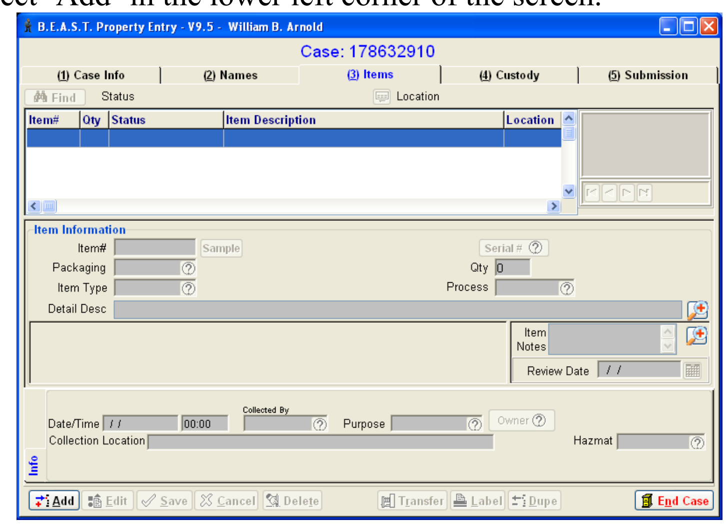
a. There will be occasions when there are no names associated with the case. Occasionally, officers will enter 'LNU, FNU', just enter what is given.

b. It is important to enter the Date of Birth as well as the Sex and Race if they are given.



E. Next, you will enter the information associated with each item of evidence that is being submitted. 'Items' is the third tab on the main screen.

1. Select 'Add' in the lower left corner of the screen.



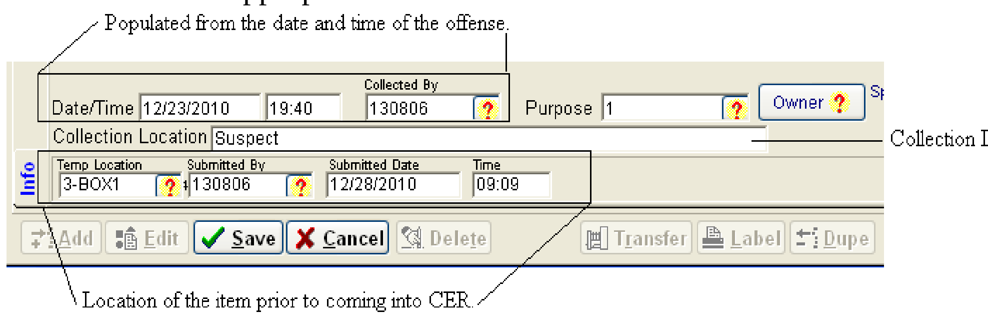
2. The next available, sequential item number will be entered by the system automatically. In this case it is one since it is the first item being entered for this case.

3. Always cross reference the incident number of the package with the incident number in EMS before entering an item. Each physical item will get a unique barcode. You should

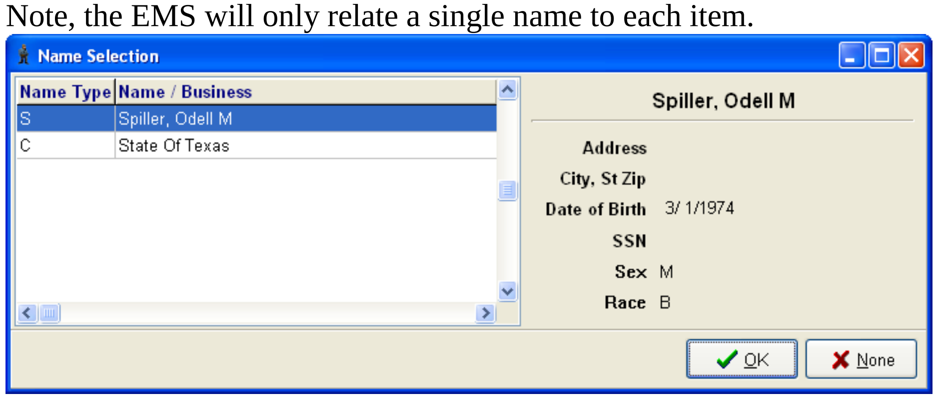
not place multiple (different) bar codes on a single discrete item.

4. You will then enter as much information as you have available regarding each of the items submitted. It is important that the Packaging and Item Type, be accurate.

5. The date and time of the offense and the individual collecting the item are populated from the information you have entered previously. Enter the appropriate collection location for the item and the temporary location information in the appropriate fields



6. As each item is saved, the system will prompt you regarding the individual that should be associated with each item. This can also be selected from the 'Owner' icon depicted on the right in the screen shot that precedes this dialog. Note, the EMS will only relate a single name to each item.



7. Generate the barcode for the item you have entered by clicking on the label button at the bottom of the 'Items' tab and applying it to the item before starting another entry.

Exercises:

1. Observe trained evidence technicians create a case and enter case information into EMS. Repeat the process for a total of twenty times, making notes to help you make your own entries.

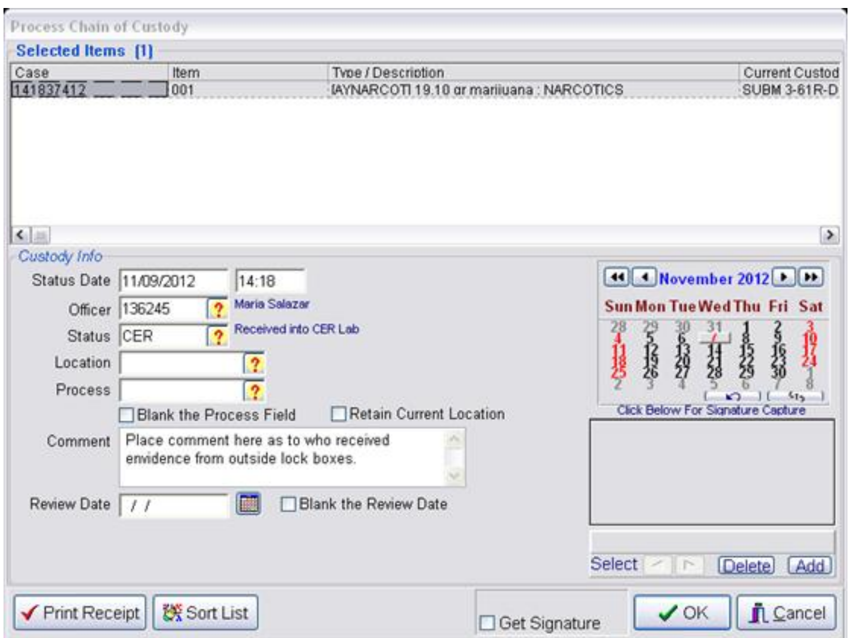
2. Create at least ten cases and enter case information into EMS. Have a trained evidence technician observe you as you enter these cases. Record the case numbers.

________________________________ ___________________

Trainer Date

Evidence Transfers

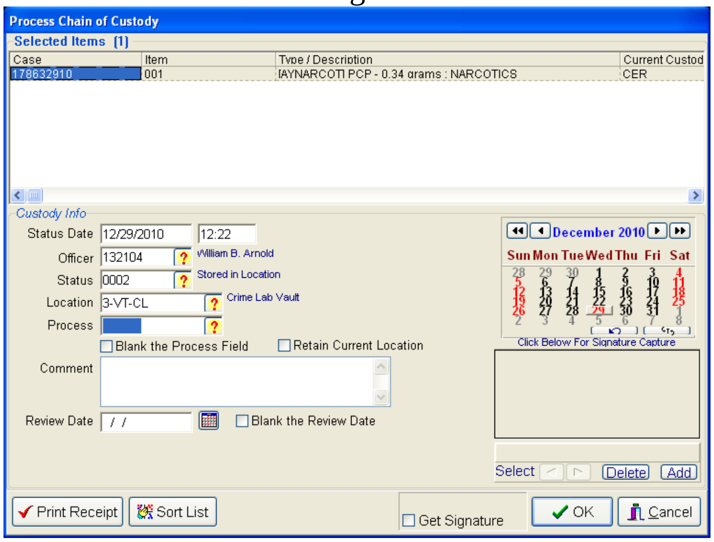
1. After all of the items for each of the cases you are working with have been entered into the system, you will then need to transfer the items to a storage location in the EMS. Scan your personal bar code or the bar code for "Received into CER Lab'.
2. The 'Officer' field will be set to your employee ID number and the Status field will be 'CER'. The location will be left blank.
3. If there are comments associated with the entry of the items received, they can be entered in the 'Comments' field. This information will be reflected for all items associated with this transfer.
4. Scan the bar code for each of the items being transferred. In this example, there is only a single item.



5. Press 'OK'.
6. The Custody Tab, tab 4, will now reflect the entry into the electronic Chain of Custody for each of the items transferred.

A. Next, select an appropriate location for part or all of the items you are moving to storage. Repeat this transfer process, but enter the location where the items are to be placed. The status code will be 'Stored in Location'.

   Scan the barcode for each of the items to be transferred to the location you have selected. Any comments you enter for this transfer will be associated with each of the items being moved in the transaction.



Releasing Evidence

When evidence is released, it will be done following the Evidence Documentation Procedures. The appropriate 'Status Code' will be used in the EMS to denote the reason the item(s) are being released.

A. For Court

1. When an item is released for court purposes, scan the bar code for status code TCFL - 'To Court'. The location will be left blank and any comments desired may be entered into the comments field. You will check the 'Get Signature' box which will prompt you to collect the individual's signature when you select 'OK'.

2. When prompted for the signature, type in the name of the person accepting the evidence and the employee ID number. After they have signed the signature pad, click 'OK' to complete the transaction.

B. Outside Agency

1. Follow the same procedure as releasing item(s) for court. You will utilize status code 0014, 'Transferred to Other Agency'. Collect the signature of the individual accepting the evidence.

C. Return to Owner

1. A court order is required to release items to their owner.

2. Every effort will be made to coordinate the return of the item(s) to the case officer rather than directly to a citizen.

   It is strongly recommended that a copy of the identification of the citizen be collected and placed in the case record when the transfer is made.

3. Follow the same procedure as releasing item(s) for court. You will utilize status code 0008, 'Returned To Owner'. Collect the signature of the individual accepting the evidence.

D. Evidence For Analysis

1. Releasing Evidence

   Scan the EMS barcode "CER Bin for Evidence Release." The analyst will then transfer evidence into their custody via the Laboratory Information Management System (LIMS). NOTE: Before an analyst takes custody of the evidence he/she should verify that he/she is taking custody of the evidence associated with the case assigned.

2. Receiving Evidence

When evidence is received from the analysts, it may be transferred to an individual's custody or directly to a storage location.

The fact that the individual accepting the evidence has logged in their own account and entered their password will serve as an electronic signature.

Exercises:

1. Observe trained evidence technicians release evidence and enter the appropriate information into EMS. Repeat the process as follows:
    a. Ten times for release to court.
    b. Five times for release to an outside agency.
    c. Twice for return to owner.
    d. Twenty times for release to/return from analysis.

2. Following proper procedure, release evidence in at least the same number and types of cases in Exercise 1. Have a trained evidence technician observe you as you release the evidence. Record the case numbers.

__________________________________ ____________________

Trainer Date

Evidence Destruction

A. Justice Information Management System (JIMS)
   Each individual in the section undergoes JIMS training offered by the Harris County District Attorney's Office.

B. Destruction Orders

C. Excess Quantity – 28 Day Letters

D. Burn Runs

Exercises:

1. Work with trained CER personnel to learn the procedures for destruction of evidence.
2. Directly observe all steps, from initiating destruction to the actual destruction. This shall be done at least twice, recording the dates of destruction and how many cases were destroyed.
3. Write a paper summarizing the destruction process. Be sure to include the following in the paper: 28-day letter, creation/content of a destruction order, excess quantity cases, legal requirements for destruction, coordinating destruction, events on the day of destruction, follow up after evidence is destroyed.

__________________________________ ____________________

Trainer Date