

SOP Template: Collection and Preservation of Relevant Evidence

This SOP details the procedures for the **collection and preservation of relevant evidence** to ensure integrity and reliability throughout the investigative process. It covers the identification, documentation, packaging, labeling, and secure storage of evidence, emphasizing proper handling techniques to prevent contamination or degradation. The goal is to maintain a clear chain of custody and support accurate analysis and legal admissibility.

1. Purpose

To outline standardized and reliable procedures for collecting, handling, and preserving relevant evidence so as to maintain its integrity, prevent contamination or loss, and preserve a defensible chain of custody.

2. Scope

This SOP applies to all personnel involved in the collection, processing, and storage of physical, digital, and documentary evidence during an investigation.

3. Responsibilities

- **Investigators:** Identify, collect, document, and preserve all relevant evidence.
- **Evidence Custodian:** Ensure proper storage and maintain chain of custody records.
- **Supervisors:** Oversee adherence to procedures and ensure all personnel are trained in evidence handling.

4. Definitions

Term	Definition
Chain of Custody	A chronological record of the handling, transfer, and location of evidence.
Contamination	The introduction of extraneous materials or information that may compromise evidence validity.
Evidence	Any physical, digital, or documentary item relevant to the investigation.

5. Procedures

5.1 Identification

- Conduct a systematic search to locate and identify all relevant evidence at the scene.
- Assign a unique identification number to every piece of evidence.

5.2 Documentation

- Photograph and, where appropriate, video evidence in situ before collection.
- Record detailed descriptions, including identifying marks, condition, and location found.
- Complete an evidence collection form/log.

5.3 Collection

- Wear appropriate PPE (e.g., gloves, masks) to avoid contamination.

- Use correct collection tools and techniques for the specific type of evidence (e.g., tweezers for trace, paper bags for biological).
- Minimize the number of handlers as much as possible.

5.4 Packaging

- Place evidence in suitable containers (paper, plastic, anti-static bags, etc.) immediately after collection.
- Seal packaging with tamper-evident seals and initial/date all seals.
- Do not mix evidence from different sources or individuals.

5.5 Labeling

- Label all evidence packages with:
 - Unique evidence number
 - Date and time of collection
 - Collector's name
 - Description of item
 - Location found

5.6 Secure Storage

- Store evidence in a designated, secure evidence room or locker with restricted access.
- Maintain an up-to-date evidence inventory log.
- Monitor storage conditions (temperature, humidity) for sensitive evidence types.

5.7 Chain of Custody

- Document every transfer, handling, and examination of evidence in a chain of custody record.
- Require signatures, dates, and times for each individual involved in evidence handling.

6. Precautions

- Avoid direct contact with evidence-always use gloves and relevant PPE.
- Do not eat, drink, or smoke in the evidence handling area.
- Immediately report and document any loss, contamination, or compromised evidence.

7. Documentation and Forms

- Evidence Collection Form
- Chain of Custody Log
- Evidence Inventory Sheet

8. Review and Training

- All personnel handling evidence must be trained on this SOP annually.
- SOP is to be reviewed and updated as necessary or at minimum once every two years.