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Evidence Management Community of Practice Newsletter

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Vol. 1, Issue 1



Welcome to the Evidence Management Community of Practice Newsletter!

This monthly newsletter from the National Institute of Standards and Technology (NIST) is part of the [Evidence Management Steering Committee \(EMSC\)](#) established in collaboration with the National Institute of Justice (NIJ) to

Upcoming Events and Trainings

[International Association for Property & Evidence \(IAPE\) Training](#) - A two day in-person training focusing on best practices for

provide educational opportunities and share information with evidence management stakeholders. Each issue will include relevant articles and highlight upcoming events and training opportunities.

Forensic evidence management is a significant concern for law enforcement agencies across our nation, with several contributing factors. For example, advances in forensic testing, such as the ability to recover DNA profiles from evidence which previously would not have yielded usable DNA, have led to an increase in recent years in the type and amount of evidence submitted for testing. Backlog reduction programs aiming to reduce the number of untested sexual assault kits have also led to an increase in evidence moving through property rooms. Additionally, scrutiny of evidence management has led to more negative media attention when agencies have failed to properly manage their evidence. Unfortunately, the infrastructure and best practices required to handle these increases in evidence submission have not kept up with the demand.

In response to these challenges, section 13 of the *Justice for All Reauthorization Act of 2016* directed the NIJ—in consultation with federal, state, and local law enforcement agencies and government laboratories—to establish best practices for evidence retention. NIST, in collaboration with NIJ under an interagency agreement, has established the [EMSC](#) to develop best practices for retention, preservation, integrity, and disposition of evidence and property. EMSC is also encouraging the adoption of these best practices through broad stakeholder education and engagement initiatives.

Ask the Steering Committee

Each issue of the newsletter will answer an evidence management question from one of our readers. The

evidence and property room management.

Due to COVID-19, dates of in-person trainings are changing daily. The most up to date list of upcoming Property & Evidence Trainings can be found [here](#).

Unable to travel? IAPE offers two great online training options. Choose between a full two-day course or individual classes.

[Click here to learn more about IAPE's online courses](#)

Institute of Police Technology and Management (IPTM)
- Property and Evidence Room Management - A two day in-person training on how to properly document, inventory, control, dispose of, and purge property and evidence of all types.

Due to COVID-19, dates of in-person trainings are changing daily. The most up to date list of upcoming Property and Evidence Room Management trainings can be found [here](#).

[Click here for a full list of IPTM's upcoming trainings](#)

California Association for Property & Evidence (CAPE) - Annual Training Seminar - October 18-23 2020, San Diego, CA

evidence management community is composed of many stakeholders representing different perspectives. Yet, these stakeholders often encounter similar obstacles. EMSC subject matter experts are here to help answer questions with *Ask the Steering Committee*.

EMSC members work at local, state, and federal agencies as forensic nurses, evidence custodians, medical examiners, and laboratory and law enforcement personnel. Please submit questions that you or your agency are struggling to answer, topics you are interested in knowing more about, or questions about how others in the community are handling a particular issue.

Send your questions to AskEMSC@NIST.gov.

QUESTION: Since this is the first issue, we'll start things off with a question that we know is on many people's minds. *What is the best way to handle items of evidence that have suspected or known contamination with fentanyl?*

BACKGROUND: On March 18, 2015, the United States Drug Enforcement Agency (DEA) issued a nationwide alert about the dangers of fentanyl and fentanyl analogs. The DEA alert emphasized a rising threat of heroin laced with fentanyl and reported an increase in deaths. While this risk is not new, several recent law enforcement alerts and increased media attention have brought this hazard to the forefront.

THE PROBLEM: Fentanyl is a commonly prescribed narcotic painkiller absorbed through the skin or mucosa. The drug comes in a variety of forms, such as powder, tablets, capsules, solutions, lozenges, transdermal patches, lollipops, and "rocks." Crime scene investigators, laboratory personnel, and other evidence handlers can potentially be exposed to fentanyl while processing crime scenes and during evidence collection and handling. The risk of exposure to fentanyl extends to first responders, health care providers, medical examiner and coroner office employees,

CAPE's 31st Annual Training Seminar focuses on helping members stay up to date with current property and evidence management.

Fentanyl in the News

[In Glowing Colors: Seeing the Spread of Drug Particles in a Forensic Lab](#), *National Institute of Standards and Technology*, April 22, 2020, E. Sisco, M.E. Staymates, A. Burns

A study conducted to determine the spread of drug particles in a laboratory during the analysis of suspected drug evidence.

[Federal, State Attorneys Want Extension of Fentanyl Order](#), *Forensic Magazine*, *Associated Press*, January 31, 2020, A. Sainz

Federal and state attorneys are urging Congress to extend an order that criminalizes possession of the dangerous opioid fentanyl and related substances.

[Orange police cruiser contaminated with fentanyl](#), *IAPE news blog*, *The Recorder*, January 28, 2020, D. McLellan

A police cruiser was contaminated with fentanyl

and emergency medical service professionals working with patients who may have easily aerosolized drugs on their clothing or are wearing transdermal patches. While naloxone can reverse the effects of fentanyl, exposure can still be harmful and require medical attention. In rare cases exposure to fentanyl may be fatal.

THE SOLUTION: As a best practice, the correct use of personal protective equipment when handling evidence or caring for patients helps reduce the risk of exposure to fentanyl.

Fentanyl Handling Best Practices

The use of best practices is important to reduce exposure to fentanyl and to properly protect those who are encountering it in the field or laboratory.

1. Improve your knowledge about fentanyl aerosolization:

- Aerosolization is the process or act of a physical substance being converted into particles small enough to become airborne.
- Occurs when disturbed fentanyl residue becomes airborne.
- Can occur when handling fentanyl drug evidence.
- Can occur during the collection and packaging of evidence with fentanyl residue.
- Can be minimized with techniques that reduce disturbance of fentanyl drug evidence during collection and packaging operations.

2. Techniques to reduce the risk of fentanyl exposure and aerosolization:

following an arrest in Orange, New Jersey.

[A Safer Way for Police to Test Drug Evidence](#), *National Institute of Standards and Technology*, September 17, 2019, E. Sisco, E. Robinson, A. Burns, R. Mead

A proposed method for police to safely test whether a package contains illegal drugs without having to handle any contents directly.

[New Protocol for Measuring Background Levels of Drugs in Crime Labs](#), *National Institute of Standards and Technology*, September 25, 2018, E. Sisco, M. Najarro, A. Burns

A new protocol to measure detectable background levels of drugs in the laboratory.

Evidence Management in the News

Missed the NIST 2019 Evidence Management Conference? [View all the presentations by clicking here.](#)

[House Passes Bill to Let State Patrol Destroy Crime Guns](#), *Forensic Magazine*, *Associated Press*, January 27, 2020, M. Bellisle

- Use chemical resistant gloves (e.g., nitrile) to handle or collect known or suspected fentanyl evidence.
- Use safety goggles and half-face respirators throughout the evidence collection and development process to provide additional eye and respiratory protection from trace airborne fentanyl drug evidence. When available, handle evidence under a fume hood or in a glovebox designed for handling dangerous substances.
- Cover the evidence with clean butcher paper or a similar barrier, and fold to prevent cross-contamination; when possible, seal in a bag before handling the evidence. Double bagging of evidence can assist in minimizing damage to packaging and prevent fentanyl residue from adhering to the outside of the package. The outermost packaging should be labeled “**Suspected Fentanyl.**”
- After the collection of fentanyl drug evidence, remove chemical protective gloves by turning gloves and barrier gowns inside out before disposal, then wash hands thoroughly with soap and water. **Do not use hand sanitizers**—any alcohol-based cleaners or bleach increase the absorption of fentanyl through the skin.
- To properly clean any contaminated equipment, wash hard surfaces with water and household cleaners. Change the water frequently and rinse surfaces with clean water after washing. Vacuum carpet and upholstered surfaces with a HEPA-filtered vacuum and use adequate respiratory protection.
- Manage fentanyl evidence by storing and securing as drug evidence.
- Use a crush-proof box, such as Department of Transportation (DOT) compliant, level 4G (non-crush)

Washington state House of Representatives passed a bill that allows the State Patrol to destroy guns they confiscated during criminal investigations.

[Evidence Management of Self-Collected Items: A Targeted Gap Analysis](#), *Evidence Technology Magazine*, Winter 2019, P. M. Speck, R. A. Ekroos, D. K. Faugno, J. A. Johnson, V. Sievers & S. A. Mitchell

An analysis of several issues surrounding self-collection by victims.

[NIBIN Policies and Procedures for the Property Room](#), *Evidence Technology Magazine*, Fall 2019, D. Jokerst & M. Pettolina

Information on developing a National Integrated Ballistic Information Network (NIBIN) policy for your agency and property room.

fiberboard shipping boxes, or a reusable “Pelican” style case for transporting fentanyl evidence. Shipment of the evidence must only occur in collaboration with qualified hazmat shippers who follow DOT specific regulations for the transfer of suspected and known amounts of fentanyl.

References and Additional Educational Links:

[An Easy to Implement Approach for Laboratories to Visualize Particle Spread During the Handling and Analysis of Drug Evidence.](#) *Forensic Chemistry* (2020, May).

[Evaluation of Occupational Exposures to Illicit Drugs at Forensic Sciences Laboratories.](#) National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (2020, March).

[Hazardous Waste Transportation.](#) Environmental Protection Agency (2019, November 25).

[Fentanyl Exposures and Cleanup.](#) Minnesota Department of Health (2019, July 24).

[Fentanyl: A Briefing Guide for First Responders.](#) Drug Enforcement Administration (2018).

[Fentanyl Safety Recommendations for First Responders.](#) Drug Enforcement Administration (2017, November 28).

[Preventing Emergency Responders' Exposures to Illicit Drugs.](#) National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (2017, August 24).

Field Evidence Management Policy Guide. Federal Bureau of Investigation (2015, April 10).

[DEA Issues Nationwide Alert on Fentanyl as Threat to Health and Public Safety.](#) Drug Enforcement Agency. (2015, March 18).



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