





POLICIES AND PROCEDURES MANUAL

	PROPERTY AND EVIDENCE CONTROL	
	POLICY NUMBER: 84-1	ISSUING AUTHORITY 
	EFFECTIVE DATE: June 12, 2025	Christine A. Elow Police Commissioner

I. GENERAL CONSIDERATIONS AND GUIDELINES

The property and evidence control function of a police department should provide for the security and control of seized, recovered, evidentiary, abandoned, lost, or found property in its custody. This is critically important in supporting investigations, helping to guarantee successful prosecution at criminal/civil trials, facilitating the timely return of property to its rightful owners, and establishing the department's reputation as an honest, reputable agency worthy of the public's confidence and trust.

It is vital that a police department's property and evidence control function develop and maintain strict measures for the receipt, handling, security, and disposition of all property.

II. POLICY

It is the policy of the Cambridge Police Department to:

- A. manage and control all found, surrendered, evidentiary, and other property coming into its custody;
- B. properly and lawfully preserve, package, record, account for, handle, and store all property and evidence recovered or turned in;
- C. endeavor to return property expeditiously to its rightful owners;
- D. dispose of property and evidence that is no longer useful or is potentially dangerous, as provided by law; and
- E. maintain strict accountability for all property and evidence in its possession.

III. DEFINITIONS

- A. **Audit:** An inspection of the documentation and accountability of a random sampling of in-custody property sufficient to evaluate the integrity of the property and evidence function.

- B. *Inspection*: An examination of the department's property storage areas to determine if they are being maintained in a clean and orderly fashion, that the accreditation standards for the property management system are being followed, and that the property is being protected from damage and deterioration.
- C. *Inventory*: An accounting of every item of property and evidence held at the police department.

IV. PROCEDURES

A. 84.1.1 (M) Evidence/Property Control System

1. All property shall be placed under the control of the Property and Evidence Unit prior to the end of the shift unless a delay is authorized by a supervisor and then as soon as practical thereafter. The property and evidence clerks will log all property into the ARMS as soon as possible. In certain situations, officers may use the vault in the front desk area for the temporary storage of property with authorization from a supervisor.
2. The circumstances under which the property came into the possession of the department and a detailed description of each item of property obtained shall be documented in a police report. In some cases, when an item is of low value and can be returned to the owner quickly, officers may tag the item and complete a property submission form but not a full police report.
3. The following guidelines provide direction for the packaging and labeling of property prior to storage.
 - a. When property is received by the property clerks, either through the temporary storage lockers, directly from officers, or from the Investigations Unit by way of the pass-through, they shall:
 - (1) examine the property and the submission form and review the incident report to confirm that the property, form, and report all match;
 - (2) ensure that all information is recorded to include case/CAD number, date and time of recovery, location of recovery, officer, type of incident, name of the suspect if known, and the victim's name if applicable;
 - (3) tag and label all items with an appropriately-colored tag;
 - (4) identify items that should be packaged and labeled separately;
 - (5) identify items that are similar so they may be identified collectively and packaged together;
 - (6) tag bulk items with a case number;
 - (7) package the property according to department protocols, including a warning if the item needs to be handled with care, such as items that will be sent to the lab for DNA or ballistics testing;

- (8) place items that need to be identified without opening the packaging in clear plastic bags; other items may be stored in a variety of materials including brown paper bags, cardboard boxes, paper envelopes, and metal cans;
 - (9) seal containers with evidence tape;
 - (10) place firearms and edged weapons in packaging designed for this purpose;
 - (11) log the property into the system, generate a bar code, and attach it to the tag; and
 - (12) place the property in the assigned location depending on the nature of the property.
 - b. When property is handled by Crime Scene Services prior to being processed by the Property and Evidence Unit, the property shall be transferred to the property clerks by way of a pass-through locker.
 - (1) On occasion, property may go to the lab prior to being submitted; however, in all cases, the property will be delivered to the property clerks for storage.
4. Extra security measures for handling exceptional, valuable, or sensitive items of property shall include the following.
- a. Firearms and ammunition shall be stored in a secure and separate room inside the property area that is designated exclusively for this purpose. Access by authorized personnel is limited by card swipe and keypad and is recorded electronically.
 - b. Drugs, money, and high value items shall be stored in a secure and separate room inside the property area that is designated exclusively for this purpose. A card swipe and keypad limit access to authorized personnel. Items are stored in secure lockers and drawers inside the room.
 - c. Cameras inside each of the rooms record all movement.
 - d. An alarm will be set manually at times when the property clerks are not on duty.
5. The department shall attempt to identify and notify the owner or custodian of all property in its custody using any available information, including public sources.
- a. A certified letter will be sent if the department has an address for the property owner. In some cases, the department may only have access to a telephone number and will attempt to call.
 - b. Personnel shall keep a record of these attempts, either with a receipt of certified mail or a note-to-file regarding a phone call.
 - c. Unclaimed property is defined as all property that was lost, stolen, abandoned, or seized from an arrested person and thereby comes into the possession of the police department for which:
 - (1) no owner has been identified or notified, and it remains unclaimed after 120 days;

- (2) an identified owner has refused or failed to retrieve the property within ten days after receipt of notification; or
 - (3) the property has been held for safe-keeping and remains unclaimed after thirty days.
- 6. The procedures for the temporary and final release of property from the control of the property and evidence function are as follows.
 - a. When an item of property is released from the property area on a temporary basis, either to court, to another police department, to the state lab for testing, or for any other reason, the following shall apply.
 - (1) All pertinent information shall be recorded electronically in the Automated Records Management System to include the person transferring the property, the destination, the time and date of leaving and subsequent return, the purpose for the temporary transfer, and any notes.
 - (2) Upon return, packaging shall be inspected for damage.
 - b. When an item of property is released for final disposition, either destroyed, sold at auction, or returned to the owner, the following shall apply.
 - (1) For most items, a supervisor will provide authorization to release the property for final disposition. However, property may be returned to its proper owner without authorization if the property is of low value and can be returned quickly.
 - (2) All pertinent information shall be recorded in the Automated Records Management System to include the date, type, and description of disposition, the identity of persons or vendors, any receipts, and notes.
 - c. For found and prisoner property, a supervisor shall review the circumstances and contents of the property and determine its disposition. Permission to dispose of the property by any means shall be granted in writing by a supervisor. The authorization, description, and receipts shall be entered into the Automated Records Management System.
- 7. Additional internal controls are as follows.
 - a. All personnel handling and/or managing property in the custody of the department shall maintain strict chain of custody protocols; all movement of property shall be recorded in the Automated Records Management System.
 - b. All property shall be subject to strict inventory controls. The department property clerks shall be responsible for ensuring that timely inspections, audits, and inventories are conducted.
 - c. Supervisory approval is required for any deviations from the procedures outlined in this policy.

- d. All security equipment shall be in good working order, to include card and keypad access controls, cameras, and temporary lockers.
 - e. Packaging procedures shall make it possible to identify contents without opening the packaging. All containers and packages shall be inspected for tampering as a safeguard against substitution at all stages in the chain of custody.
 - f. All personal use of property is strictly forbidden; however, some property, as a final disposition, may be acquired by the department for its internal use.
 - g. Personnel are prohibited from storing property in any space other than those designated for the property function, such as desk drawers, vehicles, and uniform lockers.
 - h. Changes in personnel shall not hinder or interfere with adherence to the guidelines and procedures set forth herein and approved by the Police Commissioner.
- B. 84.1.2 (M) Storage and Security
- 1. All in-custody and evidentiary property shall be stored in the property room designated exclusively for this purpose and access shall be limited to authorized personnel.
 - 2. Explosives and flammable liquids shall not be brought into the property areas. These shall be photographed and turned over to the Explosive Ordinance Disposal Unit (EOD) or the fire department for disposition. The photographs will be entered as evidence.
 - 3. Motorized vehicles seized as evidence shall be examined and inventoried in the designated area of the garage and towed to a tow-lot as soon as possible.
 - 4. Alcoholic beverages may be entered as evidence or may be photographed, and the contents emptied at the discretion of the officer.
 - 5. Perishable items requiring refrigeration shall be stored in the appropriate refrigerator in the property room. One refrigerator is for temporary storage and the other for long-term storage. There is a refrigerated locker in the pass-through temporary storage unit for times when a property clerk is not on duty.
- C. 84.1.3 (M) Temporary Security
- 1. Secure facilities shall be provided for storage of in-custody or evidentiary property during periods when the property room is closed.
 - 2. When the property room is closed and a property clerk is not available, all property coming into the possession of the police department shall be stored temporarily in the temporary storage lockers located on the third floor of Robert W. Healy Public Safety Facility.
- D. 84.1.4 (M) Security of Controlled Substances, Weapons for Training
- 1. The department prohibits the use of evidentiary controlled substances, weapons, or explosives for investigative or training purposes.

2. Explosives, gas, and other flammable liquids shall not enter the property area. These items should be photographed, recorded in the Automated Records Management System, and submitted to the EOD or the fire department.

E. 84.1.5 (M) Records, Status of Property

1. The Automated Records Management System shall reflect the status of all property held by the department to include the location, date and time received or released, character, type and amount of property on hand, and chain of custody from the time the property was stored until its destruction or final disposition.
2. The department uses a bar code system as an additional method for identifying property.

F. 84.1.6 (M) Inspections and Reports

1. To maintain a high degree of evidentiary integrity over agency-controlled property and evidence, the following documented inspections, inventories, and audits shall be completed.
 - a. An inspection to determine adherence to procedures used for the control of property and evidence shall be conducted semi-annually by the property clerks.
 - b. An audit of property and evidence in compliance with accreditation standards shall be conducted whenever a property and evidence supervisor is assigned to and/or transferred from the position. The audit will be conducted jointly by the newly designated property and evidence supervisor and a person designated by the Police Commissioner.
 - c. An annual audit of property and evidence in compliance with accreditation standards shall be conducted by a person not routinely or directly connected with control of property and evidence as directed by the Police Commissioner.
 - d. Unannounced inspections of property and evidence storage areas shall be conducted at least once a year by the Professional Standards Unit at the direction of the Police Commissioner.

G. 84.1.7 (O) Final Disposition

1. The procedures for the final disposition or destruction of found, recovered, and evidentiary property after legal requirements have been satisfied are as follows.
 - a. Found property not returned to its rightful owner shall be offered to the finder after a year and a day according to law. If the finder is not available or does not choose to accept the property, the department may dispose of it as it sees fit with supervisory approval.
 - b. Prisoner property that comes into the custody of the department subsequent to an arrest, such as backpacks and bags, that are not returned to the owner, shall be disposed of after 90 days.
 - c. The proceeds of auctioned property shall be deposited into the appropriate bank account and may be used for the benefit of the public, for the acquisition of equipment for the department, or for investigative purposes.

- d. Property sent for destruction shall be recorded in the Automated Records Management System.
 - e. Occasionally, a useful item designated for disposal such as a tool, may be acquired for department use with the approval of a deputy superintendent or member of higher rank.
- H. 84.1.8 (M) Property Acquired through the Civil Process
- 1. All property acquired by the department through civil process or asset forfeiture proceedings shall be accounted for in agency records and disposed of pursuant to legal authority.
 - a. The department may acquire property through civil process or forfeiture. In such cases, the handling and management shall be the responsibility of the designated lieutenant of the Criminal Investigations Section.
 - b. The only types of property acquired this way are money and vehicles, which are only acquired with the authorization of the courts.
 - c. Final disposition of property acquired through civil process or forfeiture shall be conducted according to all legal requirements.