Lost Evidence Means Trouble

DIFFUSE THE TIME BOMB of LOST, MISHANDLED OR TAMPERED EVIDENCE…

Achieved goals

- Significant Time Savings and Reduced Costs

- Secure and Reliable Chain of Custody

- Unlimited Access to Reports You Require

- Accountability and Integrity

- Premier and Modernized Evidence Management Capabilities

- Streamlined Purging and Inventory Capabilities

- Peace-Of-Mind & Department Integrity!

The ongoing and troubling trend of lost evidence in property rooms across the U.S. is, in large part, tied to inadequate evidence management systems in place at many law enforcement agencies.

Media coverage on lost, mishandled or misplaced evidence abounds, often pointing out faulty evidence handling procedures. In other instances, clear-cut theft of evidence or property is at play along with evidence

> " The question is, which agency is going to blow up? Which agency can afford to lose its executive staff as a result of some evidence being destroyed or mishandled? "
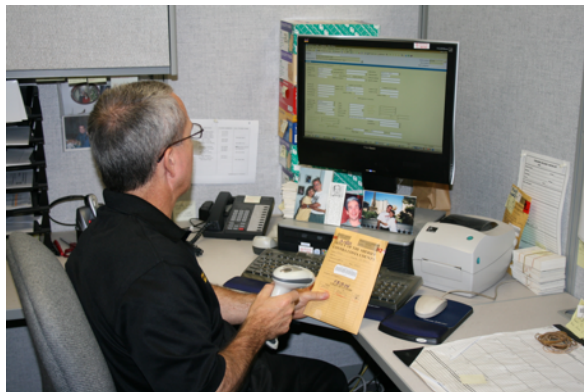>
> -Commander John San Agustin, El Paso County

tampering. In 2013, the press reported on a steady stream of such incidents. For example, drugs and guns were discovered missing in the property room at the Chattanooga, Tennessee, Police Department. The district attorney ordered an investigation by the Tennessee Bureau of Investigation, after which a police sergeant in connection with the probe was given administrative leave pertaining to missing drugs. In another incident last year, three Eugene, Oregon, Police Department employees were put on administrative leave in connection with an investigation revealing that more than 1,000 evidence items had been misplaced. A state police detective had conducted a search warrant, and wrote in a report that he believed theft and evidence tampering would be discovered in the three employees' work areas. However, no criminal charges were field due to insufficient evidence.

Any Agency Vulnerable To Jeopardized Evidence

If any law enforcement agency cannot account at all times for the evidence in its possession, this represents a huge liability. "Essentially, we have a time bomb (in the property and evidence room) that is ticking," asserts John San Agustin, Commander for the El Paso, Colorado, Sheriff's Office, who is a homicide investigator and who has testified in cases involving missing evidence in courtrooms across the country. "The question is, which agency is going to blow

El Paso County, CO - Commander John San Augustin emphasizes the need for proper evidence management.

up? Which agency can afford to lose its executive staff as a result of some evidence being destroyed or mishandled? I don't think any agency will volunteer to take that risk," Agustin said. Presently, Agustin worries, law enforcement is very reactive when it learns evidence is missing, and this usually means property room personnel are fired along with, in some cases, the agency's chief administrator.

Contra Costa County, CA - Evidence technicians can routinely perform inventories and audits of his property room on a regular bases by using modern software.

Automating Lets You See What Evidence Is In and Out

The problem of lost or mishandled evidence is precisely why having a good automated evidence management system is so crucial for any agency. Rich Wara, director of property and evidence in the investigations unit of the Contra Costa County, California, Office of the Sheriff, would agree. His agency uses the EvidenceOnQ evidence management software program from FileOnQ, Inc. He values the software most for its ability to accomplish complete audit trails and inventories. For instance, Wara explains, "EvidenceOnQ allows you to go out and scan an individual location, create a report, and do a reconcile of this report to see what is and is not there. This capability will tell you what evidence items are not there when you scanned and that you need to look for them. Now, you have to audit this," Wara continued. "Doing this manually could take a person years to inventory an evidence room of our size."

> " Now, we can run a monthly report in less than three minutes!
> **-** Director of Evidence, Rick Wara, Contra Costa County "

Barcoding Helps Manage, Track Flow of Evidence

At the core of any automated evidence management system is its barcoding capability. The barcode allows the evidence room personnel to manage and record the flow of evidence while it is in the possession of the law enforcement agency. Each time an evidence item is placed on the shelf in the evidence room, the evidence technician can scan the bar code label at that location, then scan the bar code label on the evidence item. Barcode scanning is far more accurate and faster than manual tracking methods. Therefore, its use not only reduces chances for human error leading to missing evidence, but barcode scanning greatly improves work efficiency within property rooms, too.

Darrell Allen, property room supervisor at the San Antonio, Texas, Police Department, another user

San Antonio Police Department , TX - Reduced there staff hours by over 70% by modernizing their evidence management system. Increasing not only department efficiency but integrity.

of EvidenceOnQ, sees the barcoding feature as essential to reliable evidence tracking. "The barcodes are consistent, and they are similar to the bar coding that comes from the lab, which puts us on a different level from a professional appearance standpoint," Allen said. "The ability to pull up an item (off a barcode) and immediately generate a chain

of custody report shows the movement of any given item, when it leaves, the signature of the individual who took it. All of that, plus when the evidence goes to court, shows professional management and that the evidence has been watched," Allen said. "EvidenceOnQ is the basis for everything we do (in the evidence room)," Allen added.

Unique Identity for Each Barcoded Item

David LaBahn— President and CEO of the Association of Prosecuting Attorneys (APA)

In the opinion of Joe Latta, executive director for the International Association of Property and Evidence (IAPE), the real advantage of a barcode is the ability to do inventory. For the most accurate records, he said, every evidence item must have a unique identity. "Otherwise, if several pieces of evidence were missing from a bin or bag, and only one barcode was assigned, you'd never know it," Latta said.

David LaBahn, president and CEO of The Association of Prosecuting Attorneys, considers the automation of evidence management critical for law enforcement agencies and for his work, too. For example, with automated software most electronic files showing evidence will have a report attached to them, which can help give good, more complete information on the evidence item and speed up the prosecuting attorney's work on a specific case. And although chain of custody is important, LaBahn feels a different emphasis is appropriate. "Rather than chain of custody, this is all about flow—where things are at," he said. "The evidence management system provides that kind of information. If you have that flow of information, and can see that the lab, for example, has finished its work with a particular piece of evidence, you can get a report, and now you have the discovery package for the defense," LaBahn said.

> " This is not just about the chain of custody, this is all about flow— where things are at...
> -President & CEO David LaBahn, The Association of Prosecuting Attorneys "

Time Savings Helps Apply Evidence Room Resources Elsewhere

Evidence management software not only makes tracking items more efficient and tightens chain of custody, but the huge time savings gained allows evidence room personnel to focus on other critical tasks. Allen, the San Antonio PD property room supervisor, reveals that before adopting EvidenceOnQ, it took a staff of six individuals to process a day's intake of property. "Since the software went in, now a staff of three performs intake in about three to four hours on an average day," Allen said. "This allows us to take some labor and move it to the purging process. We have a more consistent flow of purging," Allen added.

Police Management MUST Make Evidence Tracking a PRIORITY

While automating evidence is obviously invaluable for an evidence room staff, it is equally pivotal for the entire law enforcement agency, and why the top administrators must know at all times the status of evidence. Both Latta and Agustin believe there must be support for strict and tight evidence management from the top of any law enforcement agency. "There must be direction and leadership," Latta urges.

John Firman is the Director of Research, Programs and Professional Services for the IACP. http://www.theiacp.org

> **"The tools for having reliable evidence management are readily available, so there's no excuse for not having it.**
> -Director John Firman, IACP

John Firman, director of the International Association of Chiefs of Police (IACP) Research Center, feels equally passionate about solid evidence management. "If you're in the chief's seat, you can identify that your commanders, sergeants, majors and others did not oversee evidence management properly, but the truth is, the person held culpable for these breakdowns is the chief," Firman said. "It has to be this way." What's more, Firman continues, the technology for ensuring reliable evidence management is, in his words, "readily available, so there's no excuse for not having it." The IACP trains its nearly 20,000 members on best practices for evidence management. "We know we have an impact with these training sessions because members are telling us that they are implementing policies, practices and protocols based on the recommendations coming out of the IACP," Firman said.

....

While automating evidence management can certainly help prevent loss, misplacement or theft of evidence, there are other important benefits offered. One important benefit already referenced is time savings. The reduction in man hours alone by automating evidence management can pay for the cost of a system in as fast as six months to a year after initial purchase depending on the size of the agency. This benefit is often overlooked by an agency's top administration who is unaware of the significant time and money wasted performing daily tasks like entering and logging evidence.

Other benefits include one-time data entry, customized reports, more reliable inventory and audits, tighter chain of custody, and higher overall accountability with reduced costs. These in themselves should be a huge factor and incentive to have a modern evidence management system in place.

About the FileOnQ Inc. (Developers of EvidenceOnQ)

Formed in May 1996 as Integrated Software Solutions, we have specialized—from the beginning—in the development of products focused on lifecycle records management for the corporate, departmental, and workgroup user. For the past nine years, we have dedicated ourselves to powerful and customizable solutions for Law Enforcement to track and manage their property and evidence from the crime scene to the court room. Police and sheriff departments, district attorneys, and prosecutors value the ability to access, view, manage, and track evidence and associated documents, media instantly using a web browser. Allowing them to communicate and work together on cases and evidence like never before.

Agencies at the local, state, and federal level have successfully implemented our system to not only manage evidence but also officer equipment, assets, critical incident scenes, fleet vehicles, case management, and more. Agencies have discovered that what we offer is much more than a software system. It is a powerful platform with the tools needed to increase efficiencies throughout their entire jurisdiction.

May be reached at:
sales@fileonq.com | 1.800.603.6802 | www.FileOnQ.com