



Office of the City Auditor and Clerk

Sarasota Police Department Property and Evidence

Detailed Audit Report

Audit # EX 10-03

Performed by:

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Pamela M. Nadalini
City Auditor and Clerk

Final Report Issued June 3, 2010

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Background and Introduction

The Sarasota Police Department's (SPD) Property and Evidence Unit is the central repository for all items obtained by personnel during the course of police operations. The unit is currently divided into two separate storage areas and one overnight intake area with a total approximate space of 3800 square feet and includes items with varying dispositions, including those with classifications such as: found, safekeeping, evidence, etc.

The Property and Evidence Unit has the sole responsibility for receiving, logging, maintaining, and disposing of all items that enter its custody. Items received and maintained by the unit include high-security items such as weapons, narcotics, jewelry and money; large items such as bicycles and cars; perishable and biohazard materials such as DNA samples and blood; homicide and sexual assault evidence as well as other general items. The unit is also responsible for tracking the official chain of custody for each item (which is critical to proving the validity of evidence in trials) and maintaining accurate records of inventory.

There are three full-time positions within the Property and Evidence Unit, which consist of one Property Manager and two Property and Evidence Technicians. Over the course of the previous calendar year, the unit's ICAD system (property database and bar coding computer system) recorded over 40,000 transactions that took place related to new item entries, movements, inventories, and disposals of property items.

Along with the rest of SPD, the Property and Evidence Unit expects to move into the new police headquarters building most likely in June/ July 2010. At that time, each item in the property storage areas will need to be accounted for, securely transported to its new location, and have all movement(s) and responsible individual(s) reflected in the chain of custody. Due to the volume of items that will be relocated and the increased security risk associated with the move, Internal Audit will likely perform follow-up on this audit and related physical security and safeguarding/accountability controls after the move has taken place.

Purpose

This audit was undertaken at the request of SPD to ensure that items located in property and evidence were properly recorded and safeguarded. This audit was not originally included as part of Internal Audit's 2010-2012 Audit Schedule; however, due to the high-risk nature of items maintained by SPD and because the department requested an independent review by an outside party, Internal Audit amended its schedule to include this audit.

Scope

The scope of this audit included a review of items held in property and evidence, as well as a review of the internal controls management noted were in place over this area during the 2009 Risk Assessment. The time period audited was March 20, 2009 to March 31, 2010.

Audit Objectives

The audit focused on the following objectives:

1. Determine whether controls are in place and functioning as intended to provide reasonable assurance that items of property and evidence are properly accounted for, recorded, and safeguarded;
2. Determine whether controls are designed to adequately mitigate or reduce risk; and
3. Determine whether the department is in compliance with both internal policies and state accreditation standards related to property and evidence.

Audit Standards

The Internal Audit Department will have a peer review within the next three years by the Institute of Internal Auditors (IIA). While the Internal Audit Department strives to follow the guidance included in the IIA's International Professional Practices Framework, the *Standards* do not allow the department to note that the department is in accordance with IIA *Standards* until the peer review indicates such compliance.

Testing Methodology

Internal Audit procedures included interviews and discussions with management and staff, review of policies and procedures and related documents, process walk-throughs and testing of available documentation. An unannounced physical inspection of a randomly selected sample of items was also performed to determine whether items were located in the indicated areas and recorded appropriately both in the ICAD property system and on Property Record forms.

Audit Criteria

Conditions observed during audit fieldwork were evaluated against the following sources:

- Commission for Florida Law Enforcement Accreditation, Inc. (CFLEA) Standards Manual (Edition 4.0),
- SPD's General Order (GO) 731.00- Property Control, and
- International Association for Property and Evidence (IAPE) Standards- Best Practices.

Noteworthy Accomplishments

Policies and procedures were noted to be comprehensive and included most elements of best practices noted in IAPE Standards.

Property vaults were generally neat and organized. During the physical inspection, all items in the auditor's sample were easily located in the correct storage areas.

Based on the auditor's sample during a physical inspection, the auditor determined that employees had maintained accurate records of inventory and appropriately safeguarded items within their control for all items tested.

Audit Conclusions

Observations and recommendations in this report are offered as independent guidance to management for their consideration in strengthening controls. A full list of observations and recommendations begins on page 6 of this report. For information on priority levels assigned to audit recommendations, please see [\(Exhibit A\)](#).

Internal Audit determined the following through fieldwork and testing:

1. **The majority of controls tested were in place and functioning as intended to appropriately account for, record, and safeguard items maintained by SPD's Property Unit.** A relevant exception involved controls over converting items to department use. The auditor could not confirm that controls were in place for the conversion process due to the inability of the department to locate documentation for most of the items in the auditor's converted items sample.
2. **The majority of controls tested were adequately designed to appropriately reduce or mitigate risk.** Opportunities exist to enhance and modify control design over monitoring biometric access logs and recording chain of custody information.
3. **CFLEA Accreditation Standards-** Based on the sample tested, the auditor determined that compliance was achieved for most of the standards relating to Property and Evidence. SPD should consider reviewing Standard 35.02M and modifying the current documentation process for chain of custody information to ensure full compliance.

Internal General Order 731.00- Auditor determined that compliance was achieved for most of the provisions tested in the internal property policy. A relevant exception to full compliance related to chain of custody requirements (GO 731.72.5), where items in the auditor's sample did not substantially meet all of the requirements for detailed documentation.

Observations and Recommendations

Issue #	Subject	Observation	Recommendation	Concur	Do not concur	Management Response	Committed Action Item Due Date
1	Chain of Custody	Complete detailed chain of custody information is not recorded in SPD's current property system (ICAD). Information appropriate to the chain and missing from the system includes: method of transfer of items; reason for transfer; location of labs and tests ordered; date and time of receipt in labs; and signatures of item recipients (on hardcopy forms) where items leave the custody of the Property and Evidence Unit.	Chain of custody information should be enhanced to fully comply with Accreditation Standard 35.02M and General Order 731.72.5 and to maintain a more thorough and accurate history of the transfer of evidence.	X		731.72.5 is used by Criminalistics for Evidence Processing Procedures, this procedure is followed by Criminalistics. Property and Evidence follow the procedure listed in 731.71.2 & 731.71.3 under Temporary Release of Property. All transfers will be documented on stored video.	6/1/10
2	Biometric Access Monitoring	Employees have biometric access to different areas within SPD, which is restricted according to job and access needs. The responsibility for reviewing the access logs and following up on failed access attempts on a regular basis has not been assigned to any specific individual. Further, there is no periodic review of all users' location access rights to determine the appropriateness of the rights granted.	Develop a process for monitoring biometric access entry logs to ensure appropriate security is in place, especially over high-security areas within SPD. User access rights should be reviewed for all users periodically to ensure that access is in line with each user's job needs.	X		Biometric access entry logs are being printed on a weekly basis and forwarded to the Property and Evidence Manager for review. Biometric access to Property and Evidence will only be granted with the approval of the Commander of the Criminal investigations Division. Video recordings are available to document any biometric access denials.	6/1/10
3	Organizational Structure	The Property Unit is organizationally placed under the Criminal Investigations Unit; the Property Manager reports to the Criminal Investigations Division (CID) Commander.	To avoid any perception of conflict of interest and to ensure the integrity of items collected, the property function should be independent of patrol and investigation personnel. Consider placing the Property Unit under a different functional area, as indicated by International Association of Property and Evidence (IAPE) Standards.		X	Uniform Officers, Detectives, and Property and Evidence Specialist do not have the same chain-of-command. Detectives report to a Detective Sergeant, Property and Evidence Specialist report to the Property and Evidence Manager and Patrol Officers report to a Patrol Sergeant. The current assignment arrangement is consistent with accreditation standards.	N/A
4	Converting Items to Department Use	Staff was unable to locate documentation for the majority of items in the auditor's sample for items converted to department use.	To ensure appropriate disposition and use of items, document all instances in which an item is converted to department use as prescribed in General Order 731.86.9.	X		All instances where items are converted to Department use will be documented and comply with General Order 731.86.9. All transfers will require written permission from the Chief of Police; original approvals will be maintained in Property and Evidence files.	6/1/10

Exhibit A-Internal Audit Recommendation Priorities

Internal Audit utilizes the following classification scheme applicable to internal audit recommendations and the appropriate corrective actions:

Priority Level¹	Description	Implementation Action³
High	Fraud or serious violations are being committed (or have the potential to occur), security issues, significant financial or non-financial losses are occurring. ²	Immediate
Medium	A potential for incurring moderate financial or equivalent non-financial losses exists. ²	Within 60 days
Routine	Operation or administrative process will be improved.	60 days to 6 months

¹ The City Auditor and Clerk is responsible for assigning internal audit recommendation priority level categories. A recommendation that clearly fits the description for more than one priority level will be assigned the higher level.

² For an audit recommendation to be considered related to a significant financial loss, it will usually be necessary for an actual loss of \$25,000 or more to be involved, or for a potential loss (including unrealized revenue increases) of \$50,000 to be involved. Equivalent non-financial losses would include, but not be limited to, omission or commission of acts on behalf of the City which would be likely to expose the City to adverse criticism in the eyes of its citizens.

³ The implementation time frame indicated for each priority level is intended as a guideline for establishing target dates. Determining proposed action dates is the responsibility of the Charter Official(s) over the area(s) or function(s) audited.