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Standard Practice for the Transmittal of Evidence in Sexual Assault Investigation¹

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INTRODUCTION

The meaningful analysis of physical evidence recovered in sexual assault investigations requires careful attention to the control and preservation of easily lost trace evidence and easily damaged or degraded biological materials. Not all items of evidence can be preserved in the same manner if the best results are to be achieved during subsequent analysis by the examining forensic laboratory.

1. Scope

1.1 This practice describes the basic considerations that will help preserve different items or types of sexual assault related evidence for subsequent analysis. This practice is designed to be used in conjunction with other specifications, guides, and practices associated with sexual assault examinations that are listed in Section 2.

2. Referenced Documents

2.1 ASTM Standards:

- E 1459 Guide for Physical Evidence Labeling and Related Documentation²
- E 1492 Practice for Receiving, Documenting, Storing, and Retrieving Evidence in a Forensic Science Laboratory²
- E 1732 Terminology Relating to Forensic Science²
- E 1843 Guide for Sexual Assault Investigation, Examination, and Evidence Collection²
- E 2057 Specification for Preparation of Laboratory Analysis Requests in Sexual Assault Investigations²

3. Terminology

3.1 *Definitions*—For definitions of terms used in these specifications see Standard Terminology E 1732 and the Compilation of ASTM Standard Definitions (1990).

4. Summary of Practice

4.1 Evidence collected from the victim or suspect, other physical evidence from the crime scene, and investigative facts and medical conclusions associated with a sexual assault examination should be treated in a manner that will ensure their suitability preservation for presentation in legal proceedings.

4.2 All individuals associated with the investigation should be prepared to protect the chain of evidence custody and preserve what are often trace amounts of perishable biological materials, and other trace evidence such as hairs, fibers, and particulate evidence that may not be visible to the unaided eye.

4.3 These standard specifications are to be used in conjunction with E 1843 and E 2057.

5. Significance and Use

5.1 The procedures put forth in this standard are designed to preserve sexual assault evidence items during collection, storage, and transmittal for analysis at an appropriate laboratory.

6. Procedure

6.1 Chain of Evidence Custody

6.1.1 The chain of custody in a sexual assault examination of a victim is unique in that it may be difficult to control in the midst of administering to the needs of an often mobile and traumatized individual.

6.1.2 An “investigator” in this usage may be, but is not limited to, an emergency medical practitioner, social worker, nurse, physician, or law enforcement officer.

6.1.3 It is the responsibility of each “investigator” of the assault to ensure that the chain of custody is continued by the subsequent investigator, evidence transporter, or evidence storage person.

6.1.4 The basic requirements for the labeling and initiating a chain of custody of evidence items are described in E 1459.

6.2 Preservation of Evidence

6.2.1 All items of physical evidence collected in the investigation should be treated as though they are, or may contain, perishable biological materials until they can be examined by an appropriate forensic laboratory.

6.2.2 Liquid blood samples should be collected and transported as required by the examining forensic laboratory. Dried stains may be transported at room temperature.

¹ This practice is under the jurisdiction of ASTM Committee E30 on Forensic Sciences and is the direct responsibility of Subcommittee E30.01 on Criminalistics. Current edition approved Jan. 10, 2001. Published March 2001.

² *Annual Book of ASTM Standards*, Vol 14.02.