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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*:²

E1459 Guide for Physical Evidence Labeling and Related Documentation

E1492 Practice for Receiving, Documenting, Storing, and Retrieving Evidence in a Forensic Science Laboratory

E1732 Terminology Relating to Forensic Science

E1843 Guide for Sexual Assault Investigation, Examination, and Evidence Collection

E2057 Specifications for Preparation of Laboratory Analysis Requests in Sexual Assault Investigations³

3. Terminology

3.1 *Definitions*—For definitions of terms used in these specifications see Terminology E1732 and the Compilation of ASTM Standard Definitions (1990).

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² For referenced ASTM standards, visit the ASTM website, www.astm.org, or contact ASTM Customer Service at service@astm.org. For *Annual Book of ASTM Standards* volume information, refer to the standard's Document Summary page on the ASTM website.

³ Withdrawn. The last approved version of this historical standard is referenced on www.astm.org.

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 suitable preservation for presentation in legal proceedings.

4.2 All individuals associated with the investigation should be prepared to protect the evidence chain of 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 Guide E1843 and Specification E2057.

4.3.1 Additional information can be found in Practice E1492.

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 *Evidence Chain of 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.