

The Importance Of Property Room Policies & Procedures

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On any given day of the week you can read an article in a newspaper that challenges the credibility of a law enforcement property/evidence room. The following information is not meant to point a finger at anyone suggesting you are not doing your jobs correctly, but rather it is meant to bring attention to a growing problem and remind us to check our policies and procedures insuring that they are being followed. The articles listed below are from outside of Oregon but we are not immune to these problems. As you read these, remember some of Oregon's agencies have run up against similar problems and have paid dearly with loss of credibility to their departments, lost jobs and criminal cases that may be lost or have been lost because the evidence is no longer available.

\$1 Million in Drugs Missing from Florida Evidence Room: 1,200 pounds of marijuana and 2 pounds of cocaine are missing from the evidence room of the Volusia County Sheriff's Department. The evidence manager was arrested and charged with conspiracy to traffic in cocaine and marijuana. He was released on \$300,000 bail and could face up to 30 years in prison if convicted.

Marijuana Stolen From Highway Patrol Office in Fayetteville: Fayetteville authorities investigating the theft of 500 pounds of marijuana from the evidence room. Access was gained through a wooden door that was kicked in. The door will be replaced with a steel door. The estimated street value is \$500,000.

Jailbreak Evidence Disappears: Sloppy Storage a Serious Problem: A Woman who helped her husband break out of Orleans Parish Prison in July secured a plea agreement this week after key evidence, including a gun, disappeared - a sign that disarray in the property & evidence room is jeopardizing cases, the clerk of the county said.

Nashville, Tennessee - Nearly \$3M in drugs and, \$147,000 in cash and dozens of guns were missing from the evidence room at the Memphis police department, according to the audit findings released. State Officials said auditors warned the department about problems in its evidence room back in 1999. The auditors wrote those problems weren't fixed at the time. Police Director James Bolden said improvements have since been put into place including better oversight and a surveillance camera.

Some of the problems that auditors in the Nashville case found could probably be duplicated in many "evidence room horror" stories across the country. Auditors found:

- There was no policy manual.
- Too many workers had access to evidence, and storage was inadequate.
- Inadequate procedures for destroying contraband, weapons and drugs.
- Clerks could alter property room records, making thefts possible.
- Cash could not be found even though records showed it was still in the property room.

- Marijuana was found lying loose around the property room.

A successful and efficient property management system must develop and maintain strict procedures on the handling, security and disposition of property. The consequences of mismanagement of the property control function are the unsuccessful prosecution of criminal cases, embarrassment to the police department and loss of public confidence. These consequences can be avoided when all those involved with the function become aware of the problems and issues that confront the property/evidence room personnel.

The Oregon Association for Property & Evidence Officers was organized in an effort to educate the Oregon Law Enforcement community on how to better manage an evidence room and avoid mistakes that could cause your department and community embarrassment. The networking created within the association has helped us to bring property room standards within our state to a more efficient level. We have worked together on policy/procedure manuals, destruction forms, purging processes and more at the meetings being held. Please contact us with any questions or comments.

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