



Quality Division Use Only

| | | | |
|---------------------|----------|-------------------|----------|
| Quality Tracking #: | 2024-002 | Classification: | Incident |
| Risk Level: | Low | Section: | Firearms |
| Date of Discovery: | 02/01/24 | Date of Incident: | 02/01/24 |

| | |
|---|---------------------------------------|
| Forensic Case Number(s), if applicable: | Agency Case Number(s), if applicable: |
| 2024-00949 | 010713524 |

Description of Non-conformance:
A Firearms examiner did not photograph fired cartridge cases prior to swabbing for possible blood and decontaminating the firearm.

Additional Information/Follow-Up:
The firearm section began preserving potential DNA for future testing by swabbing firearms and fired evidence with possible blood in 2023. Previously, firearms and fired evidence with possible blood were swabbed by forensic biologists. The Forensic Biology section partnered with the Firearms section to provide training for firearms staff and develop a process for swabbing potentially bloody evidence and preserve trace evidence (e.g., possible hairs and fibers). The Firearms section issued a new SOP (Biological and Trace Evidence Retention) on September 1, 2023, documenting requirements for the new procedure. One of the requirements in the new SOP states in clause 3.3.6 that "Photographs shall be taken of the evidence prior to swabs being taken."

A Firearms examiner authorized to swab evidence did not capture photographs prior to swabbing cartridge cases for possible blood on 2/1/2024. The examiner remembers photographing evidence and viewing the image on the camera screen, but when they tried to download the photograph from the SD card, the image was not on the card. The examiner acknowledges that they may be remembering photographing evidence from a different case, because it is their usual process.

The examiner had swabbed the possible blood and decontaminated the evidence prior to discovering that the photograph was not captured. When the examiner realized that they did not have a photograph, they contacted their manager and the Forensic Biology analyst who had provided training for collecting possible blood. The DNA analyst suggested photographing the evidence after swabbing and annotating the photograph to document where the possible blood had been.

While the requirement to photograph evidence prior to swabbing is a best practice, HFSC recognizes that there is a risk that images may not be captured due to equipment issues or because an examiner forgets to photograph evidence prior to swabbing. When interviewed, all examiners currently authorized to swab firearms and fired evidence stated that they upload their photographs as soon as practicable, either the same day or the following morning. If there were issues with their photographs, the evidence would be available to photograph after swabbing, and they would be able to annotate where the evidence was swabbed.



The examiner's initial problem with the camera played a role in causing this incident. The camera battery had run out of power when they initially tried to capture a photograph. The examiner first tried to utilize a new camera that had recently been purchased, but it was still in the original box and had not yet been assembled and did not have a charged battery. The examiner was able to find a charged battery for the original camera. Although the examiner was able to resolve the issue with the camera, it had distracted them, and this may have caused them to not save the images to the SD card.

HFSC's Crime Scene Unit (CSU) swab firearms and fired evidence collected on scene prior to submission to the Houston Police Department Property Room. Therefore, HFSC's Firearms examiners are only required to swab evidence when they observe possible blood on items not collected by CSU. The Firearms section encounters one to three items per week that require swabbing.

Summary of Root Cause Analysis:

Note: Incidents are documented for tracking purposes and trend analysis. Root Cause Analysis is not required for incidents.

N/A

Actions Taken:

The Firearms section set up the new camera, purchased new SD cards, and verified that the new cards worked in both cameras.

The "Biological and Trace Evidence Retention" standard operating procedure was revised to state, "Photographs shall be taken of the evidence. These photographs should be taken prior to swabs being taken" and added the requirement that "if photographs are not captured prior to swabbing, they shall be captured as soon as possible and annotated to indicate where the evidence was swabbed." The revised SOP was issued on 03/28/2024.



Houston Forensic Science Center
Incident/Corrective Action Report
Quality Division

Section Manager: Donna Eudaley

Date: 04/16/24

Division Director: Amy Castillo

Date: 04/22/24

Incidents or Corrective Actions that involve the Biology/DNA section are reviewed by the Technical Leader and CODIS Administrator.

Technical Leader: N/A

Date: _____

CODIS Administrator: N/A

Date: _____

Quality Director: Jackeline Moral

Date Closed: 04/23/24