



Crime Scene
Vehicle Examination Building Standard Operating
Procedure
Crime Scene Unit



1. Vehicle Examination Building (VEB) Standard Operating Procedure

1.1. Introduction

This standard operating procedure (SOP) is a supplemental SOP to the Crime Scene Unit (CSU) SOP and specifically addresses the Vehicle Examination Building or VEB. This SOP is not intended to direct crime scene investigators (CSIs) on how to process a vehicle but outlines the procedures for accepting and tracking vehicles at the VEB and reviews security, equipment and safety measures found there.

1.2. VEB Security

The VEB is operated by HFSC's Crime Scene Unit and is located at 1305 Dart Street, Houston, Texas 77007. This location consists of an outdoor lot and a building containing eight vehicle bays with an office space. A secured high fence surrounds the property. Access into the fence is gained by scanning a Houston Police Department (HPD) badge at the electronic badge reader at the exterior of the secured gate. Allowing HPD personnel, with approved access, inside the lot enables vehicles to be dropped off outside of normal business hours. Access to the office space and secured bays is only gained using a Houston Forensic Science Center (HFSC) badge. HPD personnel are only able to gain access to these areas when they are escorted by HFSC personnel

The VEB exterior secured gate is electric and is monitored for normal wear and tear. If at any point the VEB exterior secured gate becomes inoperable, the CSU on-call supervisor shall be notified. The CSU on-call supervisor will notify the Director of Business Development and arrangements will be made to have the gate repaired. If the gate repair extends beyond normal business hours, the CSU on-call supervisor will contact the on-duty HPD Watch Commander who will arrange for an HPD patrol officer to stand by the perimeter, until the gate becomes operable.

Like the exterior secured gate, the bay doors are electric and monitored for normal wear and tear.

If an issue arises with the bay doors not closing properly, an attempt can be made to close the door manually by holding the red button (located next to the respective door), gently pulling the bay door down or by pulling the emergency release string. If these attempts don't work, the CSI shall notify the on-call supervisor who will notify the Director of Business Development for repairs.

If the garage bay door will not open, an attempt can be made to open the door manually by either holding the red button or by pulling the emergency release string. If these attempts don't work, the CSI shall notify the on-call supervisor who will notify the Director of Business Development for repairs.

In addition to the secured fence and secured access into the interior buildings, video surveillance cameras are present both around the exterior lot and inside the bays. These cameras are operated and monitored by HFSC.



During normal business hours, the VEB is operated by HFSC staff who are responsible for vehicle logistics. For the purposes of this SOP, the term VEB personnel includes administrative support assigned to CSU, CSIs or CSU management responsible for fulfilling this role.

1.3. Vehicle Workflow

1.3.1. Towing of Vehicles to the VEB

Vehicles are towed to the VEB under the authority of HPD officers/detectives. These officers/detectives are responsible for securing a search warrant, consent to search or disclose when neither is needed. In instances where neither a search warrant nor consent to search is required, the officer/detective shall provide written communication from the District Attorney's (DA) office (i.e.: abandoned vehicle, implied consent, etc.). Outside agencies that want vehicles processed by HFSC must make prior arrangements with HFSC management or have an associated HPD case number in order to be towed to the VEB for examination.

Vehicles are received at the VEB in two ways:

- Towed and brought in through the main gate
- Towed and brought in from HPD's vehicle lot, adjacent to the VEB

Once a vehicle is brought to the VEB, the officer accompanying the vehicle must complete a Vehicle Processing Request form and turn over vehicle keys (if keys are present). Vehicle Processing Request forms are either obtained from VEB personnel (during normal business hours) or available outside the office door (after business hours). If a case has more than one vehicle associated, a separate form must be completed for each vehicle. Completed forms and keys (if keys are present) are then given to VEB personnel or dropped in the gold mail slot adjacent to the black mailbox. The mailbox and mail slot are clearly labeled with instructions. In addition, if officers/detectives have additional questions, the CSU on-call number is posted, allowing the officer/detective to call and speak with a CSU supervisor.

If a vehicle is towed and the lot is full, the CSU on-call supervisor will be notified. Arrangements will be made to place the vehicle in the HPD vehicle lot, adjacent to the VEB. When this occurs, the on-call supervisor is responsible for documenting the HPD incident number, make/model and license plate of the vehicle. This information shall then be emailed to the CSU Management and VEB personnel, so arrangements can be made to bring the vehicle to the VEB when room is available. The officer/detective dropping off the vehicle is still responsible for completing the Vehicle Processing Request form.

If a vehicle is towed after normal business hours and it needs to be immediately placed in a bay, the CSU on-call supervisor will be notified. The CSU on-call supervisor will have a member of CSU respond to the VEB to open a bay. If all bays are full, the CSU on-call supervisor may work with an HPD contracted tow company to remove a vehicle from the inside and replace it with the new pending vehicle. Any movement of vehicles after hours shall be emailed to the CSU Management and VEB personnel. The officer/detective dropping off the vehicle is still responsible for completing the Vehicle Processing Request form.



1.3.2. Logging of a vehicle

VEB personnel enter the vehicle in the VEB log located on the CSU's SharePoint site (accessible to all of CSU) and write vehicle information on the white board located inside the office. At this point in the process, the vehicle is listed as LOGGED in the VEB log and PENDING on the whiteboard. Information listed in the VEB Log and on the whiteboard is information found on the Vehicle Processing Request form that was submitted by the officer/detective. If the officer/detective failed to submit a Vehicle Processing Request form, VEB personnel are responsible for contacting the officer/detective to obtain the information needed to complete the form. This can be done via telephone or email and must be documented in the case packet. Officer/detective contact information may be obtained through the HPD Records Management System (RMS) or by contacting the HPD Division responsible for towing the vehicle.

VEB personnel are responsible for verifying the information (to include vehicle make/model, VIN and case number) provided on the Vehicle Processing Request form with the associated vehicle. VEB personnel are responsible for checking to see if all vehicle doors are locked. During this process, gloves must be worn. Gloves must be changed with each vehicle.

- If a vehicle is locked and no keys are present, VEB personnel are responsible for arranging with the detective/officer to have the vehicle keys dropped off at the VEB before the vehicle is made READY.
- If the officer/detective advises that vehicle keys cannot be obtained, VEB personnel will update the VEB log to reflect that it is locked, and no keys are available. CSU will attempt to unlock the vehicle with unlocking tools or solicit the help of officers working at the HPD adjacent lot. If access to the vehicle cannot be obtained, the CSI assigned to process the vehicle will let both the assigned officer/detective and CSU Management know. If another vehicle is ready for processing, the on-call supervisor may reassign a vehicle to the CSI for processing during that shift.

Once vehicle information has been verified and logged, VEB personnel will email the case detective to request search authority and processing instructions. When search authority and processing instructions are received from the case detective, the following occurs:

- If a search warrant is received, VEB personnel will verify the information to include the vehicle make/model/VIN in the warrant against the vehicle. If a discrepancy occurs VEB personnel will re-contact the assigned detective to correct the concern. The vehicle remains as LOGGED/PENDING until appropriate changes are made.
- The VEB log is updated with search authority and processing instructions.
- The email from the detective is printed and placed with the Vehicle Processing Request form. Both the form and the attached instructions are then placed in the READY pile. The READY pile can be found on the file cabinet in the office.
- The vehicle is changed to READY in the VEB log and on the whiteboard.
- CSU Management is notified the vehicle is ready for processing.



If the case detective does not respond within 10 days of the vehicle arriving at the VEB, the vehicle will automatically be moved to the adjacent HPD lot. A follow-up email will be sent to the case detective documenting the move to the new lot.

Vehicles are often rotated from the lot to the bays for processing. This movement is done by forklift by the HPD personnel at the adjacent lot. To aid in this process, numbered markers are available for use at the VEB. These markers are labeled 1 – 8 to correspond with the bay numbers. Vehicles in the lot may receive a number marker to indicate it is ready to be moved into a bay for processing. The number marker reflects what bay the vehicle will be moved to.

1.3.3. Ready vehicles

Once a vehicle is listed as READY, designated CSU Management assigns the vehicles to CSIs to be processed for evidence. Assignments are typically given via email but may be assigned through TEAMS messaging, in person or a phone call. When CSU Management assigns the vehicle, they then update the VEB log to CSI NOTIFIED.

Upon arrival at the VEB, the CSI obtains the Vehicle Processing Request form and other associated paperwork from the Ready Pile. Prior to beginning processing, the CSI will:

- Review processing form/paperwork to make sure that they understand the requests and ensure that all the requests are applicable to the given case. The detective will be contacted if clarification is needed.
- Verify case number, make/model, license plate and VIN of the vehicle with the information that is contained in the paperwork. If a discrepancy is noted, a supervisor shall be contacted.
- Review all related RMS reports.

Refer to CSU SOP Section 20.2 for procedures on processing vehicles at the VEB.

1.3.4. HOLD Vehicles

There are occasions when a CSI does not complete vehicle processing in one shift (called to scene, needs additional time for processing, etc.) and the vehicle must be held until processing is completed. To place a vehicle on HOLD, the CSI must:

- Change the VEB log to PROCESSING IN PROGRESS.
- Change the whiteboard to PROCESSING IN PROGRESS.
- Send an email to VEB personnel and CSU Management requesting the vehicle be placed on hold and a brief explanation of why it is being held. The email should state whether the vehicle is able to be placed in the lot or needs to stay inside a bay for further processing.
 - If a CSI is unable to finish processing, and it is their Friday, the CSI shall include this information in the email so that the vehicle can be reassigned, if needed.

1.3.5. Completed Vehicles

Once a CSI has completed vehicle processing, they will:



- Update the VEB log to COMPLETED. Date of completion must be added.
- Update the whiteboard to DONE. Initial and date next to DONE.
- Complete a tow slip and leave it on the desk for VEB personnel.

The vehicle will be turned over to HPD and moved to the HPD lot adjacent to the VEB.

1.3.6. Infotainment Analysis:

If a CSI has completed processing a vehicle and INFOTAINMENT Analysis is part of the request:

- The CSI will update the VEB log to PROCESSING IN PROGRESS and the whiteboard to PENDING - Infotainment.
- An email must be sent to VEB personnel and CSU Management advising they have completed processing the vehicle and Infotainment Analysis can now be completed.
- VEB personnel and/or CSU Management will email Multimedia personnel to determine if the vehicle is supported for infotainment analysis. This email must contain the vehicle make/model, VIN, case number and vehicle key status.
 - **If the vehicle is SUPPORTED**, Multimedia personnel will complete their processing. Following their processing they will complete the tow slip and update the Whiteboard to DONE.
 - When the tow slip is completed and the whiteboard is updated, the VEB personnel will update the VEB log to COMPLETED.
 - The vehicle will be turned over to HPD and moved to the HPD lot adjacent to the VEB.
 - **If the vehicle is NOT SUPPORTED**, VEB personnel will print the email communicating CSI processing has been completed and the email from Multimedia communicating that the vehicle is not supported – these two items need to be added to the case packet.
 - VEB personnel will complete the tow slip and update the VEB log to COMPLETED.
 - The vehicle will be turned over to HPD and moved to the HPD lot adjacent to the VEB.

If the vehicle only needs INFOTAINMENT Analysis and CSU processing is not requested:

- VEB personnel will communicate with Multimedia personnel to determine if the vehicle is supported for infotainment analysis.
 - **If the vehicle is SUPPORTED**, Multimedia personnel will complete their processing. Following their processing they will complete the tow slip and update the Whiteboard to DONE.
 - When the tow slip is completed and the whiteboard is updated, the VEB personnel will update the VEB log to COMPLETED.
 - The vehicle will be turned over to HPD and moved to the HPD lot adjacent to the VEB.
 - **If the vehicle is NOT SUPPORTED**, VEB personnel will complete the tow slip and update the VEB log to COMPLETED. The vehicle will be turned over to HPD and moved to the HPD lot adjacent to the VEB.

1.3.7. Vehicles that do not require CSU processing



From time to time, vehicles are towed to the VEB and do not require processing by CSU. When VEB personnel determine that no processing is needed, VEB personnel will complete the tow slip, the vehicle is turned over to HPD and subsequently moved to the HPD lot adjacent to the VEB.

1.4. Hydraulic Lift

The VEB is equipped with a hydraulic lift that is used to inspect and photograph the undercarriage of a vehicle. The operating system of the lift is located on the lift and is comprised of a black rise button, black lock lever (lever facing Bay 1) and lowering lever (below the black rise button).

Whenever the lift is utilized, a minimum of two people must be present in the bay area at the VEB.

Prior to using the lift, the CSI shall conduct a pre-check and confirm the following:

- The power cable is connected
- The hydraulic lines/hose are free of cracks or liquid
- The arms of the lift are moveable
- The steel extension is free of cracks

If any of the items are found to be not functioning or damaged, then the CSI shall immediately notify CSU Management who will make arrangements for repairs. The CSI shall create a sign stating the lift is out of order. The sign will be clearly placed across the operating system levers with tape, informing others that the lift is out of service.

If the lift satisfactorily passes the pre-check, the lift is now ready for a vehicle.

To place a vehicle on the lift:

- The CSI will make sure the black swivel pads (found at the end of each arm) are in contact with the running frame (heavy gauged steel located underneath the vehicle and in between the tires). Each swivel pad (totaling four points of contact) must be placed along with the vehicle running frame.
 - Silver risers are located on the lift frame and can be used with the black swivel pad to ensure proper contact is made to the running frame.
 - CSIs shall not place the swivel pads on the following areas:
 - Directly on the tire, muffler, body or any area that is not part of the vehicle frame.
- CSI shall conduct a visible inspection of the placement of the arms prior to operating the lift.

To raise the vehicle, press the black rise button. Raise the vehicle approximately one foot off the ground, and gently shake the vehicle to ensure it is stable. If the vehicle is stable, continue to raise the vehicle to a desired height. A loud sound during this process is normal. The CSI shall be mindful of how high the vehicle is raised due to the building's air conditioning system.

To lower the vehicle, hold down the black lock lever (lever facing Bay 1) while simultaneously holding down the lowering lever (below the black rise button) to gradually



lower the arms until they are flat on the ground. Be mindful of the speed that the vehicle is lowered. Vehicle weight can cause the vehicle to lower quickly.

If a CSI needs additional assistance while operating the lift, they shall notify the on-call supervisor.

For detailed how to videos for operating the lift, please see the SharePoint CSU Homepage – In House training.

1.5. Safety Measures

1.5.1. CSIs will adhere to the HFSC Health and Safety Manual and Crime Scene Unit SOP.

Please refer to the Crime Scene Unit SOP for additional information.

Most equipment will have visible manufacture instructions available on or with the safety equipment.

A member of CSU Management must be notified if any injury occurs.

1.5.2. Fire Extinguishers

Fire extinguishers are located on:

- The west wall of the office
- The north wall near Bay #1
- The west wall near Bay #4
- The east wall near Bay #5
- The south wall between Bays 6 & 7.

Fire extinguisher operation instructions are posted on or near fire extinguishers. For further information on usage please refer to the HFSC Fire Safety Training in Qualtrax.

1.5.3. Eyewash Station

Eyewash stations are designed to flush the eye and face of hazardous substances that can cause injury.

The eyewash station is located on the east wall next to the Bay #1 closet. Sinks with running water are also available on the south wall of the office, the bathroom, and on the east wall near Bay #1.

1.5.4. First Aid Kits

A First Aid Kit is a container of medicines, supplies, and information for situations in which quick medical attention is needed for minor injuries. The First Aid Kit is located on the east wall near Bay #1.

1.5.5. Sharps Containers

Sharps are defined as any object that could readily puncture or cut the skin of an individual. A sharps container is used for disposal of sharps waste. An appropriate container is leak-proof on the sides and bottom, has a means of permanent closure, bears



the biohazard symbol, and is designed for sharps collection. A sharps container is located on the desk near the south wall near Bay #1.

1.5.6. Spill Kits

A spill kit is a labeled container with absorbent materials used in response for cleaning up and containing chemical/hazardous spills. The spill kit is in the closet near Bay #1 and instructions are included in the container. Cat litter is also located in the bays. Cat litter can be used to absorb minor spills that do not require a spill kit.

1.5.7. Explosive Proof Fans

Explosive proof fans provide ventilation to keep workers safe and helps prevent sparks and explosions that can occur in volatile environments. (Used in industries that work with grain, chemicals, paints, ammunition, fuel, explosives, dust, fine particles, and fibers.) Explosive proof fans are located in the closet near Bay #1.

1.5.8. Disposal of Gasoline/Hazardous Material:

Any excess fuel that needs to be disposed of can be dropped off at City of Houston Environmental Service Centers. For a list of these centers, please visit:
<https://www.houstontx.gov/solidwaste/esc.html>

1.5.9. Evacuation Plan:

Evacuation plans are posted in the following locations:

- North wall of office
- East wall near Bay #1
- West wall near Bay #4
- East wall near Bay #5
- West wall near Bay #8