

Internal Audit Report 15-02
Police Crime Lab
August 2015



City of Sioux Falls
Internal Audit Department
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Police Crime Lab INTERNAL AUDIT REPORT 15-02

INTRODUCTION

The Police Department Crime Lab is the repository for property and cash acquired and held by the Sioux Falls Police Department, County Sheriff's office and Animal Control. The major responsibility of the Crime Lab of the Sioux Falls Police Department is to receive all incoming evidence, to store it properly, to preserve its condition, to maintain it securely, to prevent tampering, and to lawfully release or dispose of it. The department must maintain documentation of the entire process that is sufficiently accurate and complete to satisfy any court which has reason to examine the process. The consequences of any mismanagement of evidence could result in the unsuccessful prosecution of criminal cases.

BACKGROUND

Staff in the Crime Lab includes a Crime Lab Manager, Evidence Technicians and Forensic Specialists. Staff is responsible for following and recording the continuity of custody of material and items collected as physical evidence, also known as the chain of custody. Any break in the chain of custody may cause evidence to be ruled as inadmissible in court. The department uses a software system called New World to electronically document all evidence that is acquired and to track the dates and reasons evidence is transferred from one location or person to another.

The Crime Lab acquired over 16,000 items of evidence in the calendar year 2014. This evidence is kept in various secured locations through-out the Police Department building based on type of evidence.

OBJECTIVES

The objectives of this audit were to:

1. Review current policies in place over evidence handling and compare to leading practices.
2. Determine whether controls in place are functioning as intended to provide reasonable assurance that items of property and evidence are properly recorded and accounted for.

SCOPE AND METHODOLOGY

The scope of this audit included a review of internal controls over acquiring and retaining evidence in the Police Crime Lab, as well as, testing a sample of evidence acquired in the calendar year 2014 to ensure the items are accounted for and recorded in New World accurately.

RESULTS

Internal Controls of Evidence Rooms

The Crime Lab has a system in place and working that manages property and ensures the integrity of all physical evidence under their control. This system allows internal controls over chain of custody, proper marking of evidence, proper seals and noted secured areas for evidence storage. Evidence personnel are responsible for accepting all evidence booked by officers, maintaining accurate and current records of chain of custody and location, safeguarding and maintaining the proper condition of property and maintaining a high level of security to avoid tampering, mishandling or loss of property.

The Crime Lab has internal policy and procedure manuals for each part of the evidence process. This includes evidence entry, handling, disposition, viewing, release and professional standards. During an observation of the evidence handling process, it was noted that evidence technicians were following the written policies and procedures for evidence entry and handling.

Security of the evidence rooms is established through the use of locks, keys, alarms and audit logs in the various evidence storage areas. Only authorized Crime Lab personnel have access to the areas used by the Department for evidence storage. Key physical safety controls could be improved to limit any possible tampering or removal of evidence within the storage areas.

Testing of Evidence

We received a listing and selected a statistically representative sample of evidence acquired in calendar year 2014. After looking up the descriptions of each item selected in New World, the auditor and Crime Lab manager went to each evidence location and physically found each item. The item was matched up to the listing based on the Evidence Location, Case Number, Tag Number, and physical description pulled from the evidence listing report. All items were located, accounted for and were labeled properly based on the information pulled from New World.

RECOMMENDATIONS

We made the following recommendation(s) that address the above referenced result(s).

- 1) We recommend the Police Crime Lab evaluate the current security controls within each evidence storage area and make necessary improvements.

Management's Response: The Crime Lab will be installing several security cameras in its sensitive areas as part of the city-wide security camera project.

Management Representative Responding: Brad Johnson, Crime Lab Manager

Date of expected implementation: Spring 2016

- 2) The Police Crime Lab should research and implement alternative handling/storing options in regards to cash evidence.

Management's Response: Research into alternative storage solutions for cash evidence began in 2014. The utilization of a bank account for storing the evidential cash appears to be the most viable solution. The solution is currently being discussed with the city's legal staff and the prosecuting attorneys that in charge of the associated criminal cases.

Management Representative Responding: Brad Johnson, Crime Lab Manager

Date of expected implementation: Summer 2016

CONCLUSION

The Police Department Crime Lab is responsible for all handling, storage and disposal of evidence. The Department's internal controls are in place and functioning to ensure proper care of evidence is taken at all times. The Crime Lab should consider additional security controls to ensure that no mismanagement of evidence occurs. They should also implement alternate handling options in regards to cash evidence due to the high risk nature of this type of evidence. We would like to thank the Sioux Falls Police Department Crime Lab staff for their cooperation and assistance during the audit.

AUTHORIZATION

The Sioux Falls City Council approved this audit by resolution in December 2014 as part of the 2015 Annual Audit Program. The Internal Audit division operates under the authority of an Internal Audit Charter adopted by City Council resolution 11-13.

AUDIT STANDARDS

This audit was conducted in accordance with the *International Standards for the Professional Practice of Internal Auditing* issued by the Institute of Internal Auditors.

STATEMENT OF INDEPENDENCE

Internal Audit is administratively and operationally independent of the programs and departments it audits, both in appearance and in fact. The Internal Audit Manager is accountable to an Audit Committee appointed by the City Council per section 32.022 of the Code of Ordinances of Sioux Falls, SD

DISTRIBUTION OF REPORT

This report is intended for the information and use of the Mayor and City Council, management, and others within the City of Sioux Falls. However, the report is a matter of public record and its distribution is not limited.

PERFORMED BY

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