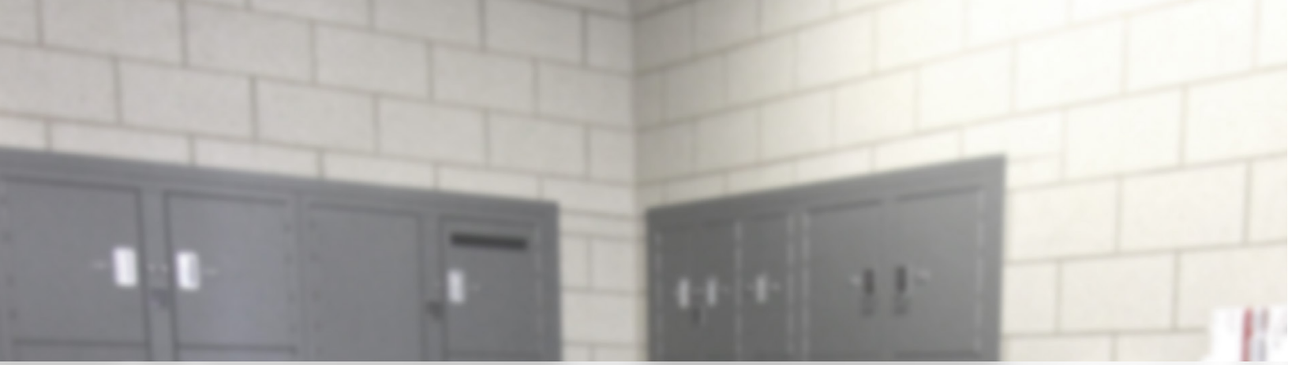
Spacesaver



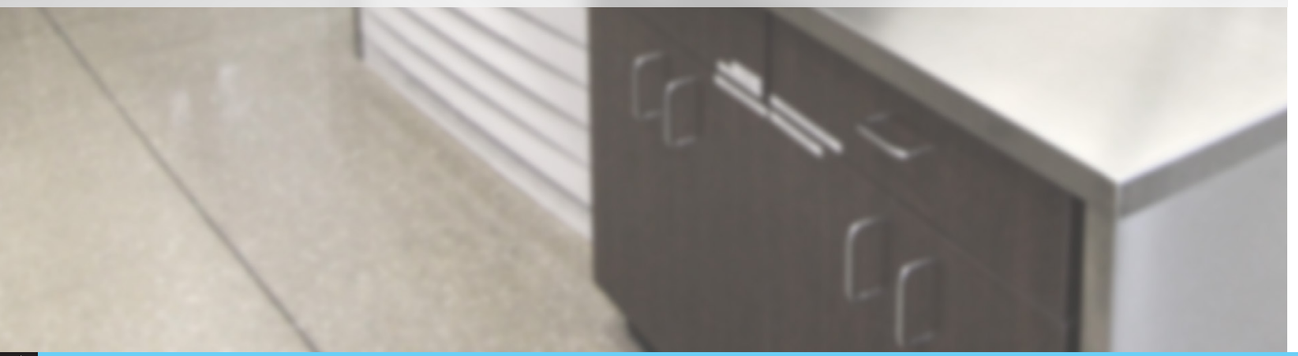
12 TRENDS IN EVIDENCE STORAGE & MANAGEMENT

Storage Solved®



The field of evidence management is changing every day, with new technologies, new techniques, and new standards of professionalism raising the bar for law enforcement agencies worldwide. While no one can predict the future, people who have devoted their careers to evidence management have valuable insights to share regarding what's working, what isn't, and what they see on the horizon.

Here at Spacesaver, our law enforcement consultants make it a priority to understand well-established traditions as well as up-and-coming trends in the evidence management profession. With that in mind, we've been talking with thought leaders in evidence management and asking them to share their insights. We hope this information helps you improve evidence storage and management practices at your facility.



CONTENTS

1 Evidence Management Comes into Its Own

2 Pass Back Lockers

3 Photograph & Release

4 Electronic Evidence Management

+ Evidence Disposition

5 Off-Site Evidence Storage

6 Regionalization of Small Departments

7 Marijuana Legalization

8 DNA Evidence

+ Balancing Openness with Security

9 Sexual Assault Kit Storage

10 In-House Forensics Accreditation

11 Handling Hazardous Materials

12 Body Cameras & Other Digital Evidence

Evidence management is truly coming into its own as a profession, with law enforcement agencies emphasizing best practices, internationally accepted standards, and opportunities for accreditation. This emphasis on professionalism has arisen for a variety of reasons: Sometimes it's because an agency has experienced a catastrophe where evidence has been stolen or tampered with, because of increasing media attention directed at the criminal justice process, or because a new generation of leaders are placing an emphasis on evidence management.

Regardless of the motivating events, law enforcement professionals are acutely aware of the importance of establishing and maintaining a secure chain of custody. Implementing modern evidence management systems is gaining importance at law enforcement agencies in the U.S. and around the world.

1 EVIDENCE MANAGEMENT COMES INTO ITS OWN

"Of all the things that can take down a sheriff or a police chief, one of the most common is dropping the ball in evidence management."

Bruce Adams, Evidence Specialist

TIP: *The International Association for Property and Evidence provides detailed information about accreditation.*

Depending on the size of a particular law enforcement agency and how its evidence management system is designed, evidence technicians sometimes need to return or "pass back" evidence to the booking officer before accepting it for processing. This is usually because evidence was improperly packaged or improperly labeled before being submitted to the evidence room. Evidence techs also need a way to transfer evidence to officers for presentation in court.

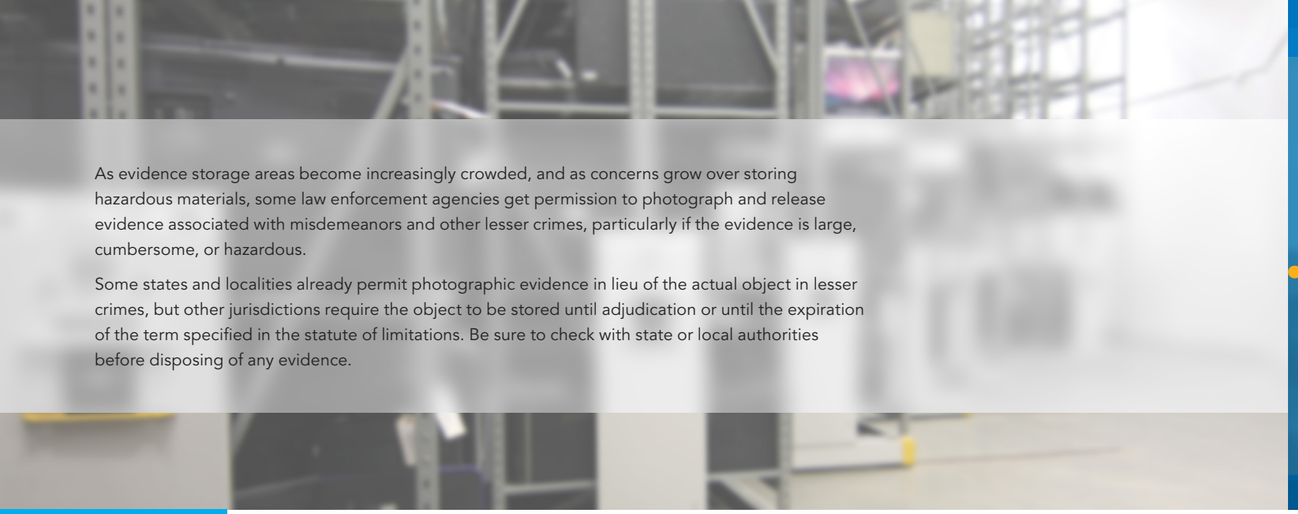
The chain of custody must be maintained while evidence remains in limbo between the booking officer and the evidence room, and that's where pass back lockers come into play. Technicians can notify the officer that the evidence needs to be labeled and packaged before it can be accepted, or that evidence is ready to be picked up prior to a court appearance.

2 PASS BACK LOCKERS

"We're getting a lot of requests for pass back lockers—lockers that can be repeatedly programmed for a single use."

Jim McClaren, Senior Principal

TIP: *Motion-activated cameras installed in evidence locker areas provide a record to verify evidence submittal and removal reports.*



As evidence storage areas become increasingly crowded, and as concerns grow over storing hazardous materials, some law enforcement agencies get permission to photograph and release evidence associated with misdemeanors and other lesser crimes, particularly if the evidence is large, cumbersome, or hazardous.

Some states and localities already permit photographic evidence in lieu of the actual object in lesser crimes, but other jurisdictions require the object to be stored until adjudication or until the expiration of the term specified in the statute of limitations. Be sure to check with state or local authorities before disposing of any evidence.

3 PHOTOGRAPH & RELEASE

"Requirements vary by jurisdiction. It's important to get permission from the presiding judge or other authority."

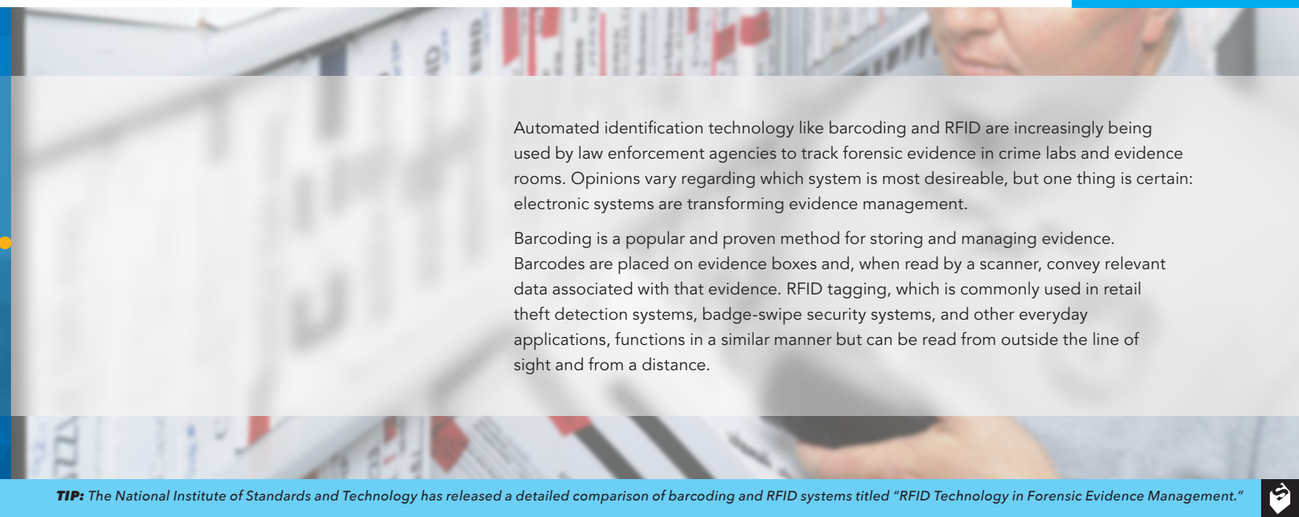
Darrell Allen, Property & Evidence Room Supervisor

TIP: *Evidence disposition regulations vary widely. Be sure to check with state and local authorities before photographing and releasing evidence of any kind.*

"A good property and evidence module helps track and manage items, including prompting case officers when it's time to initiate purging procedures."

Joe Latta (CPES), Executive Director and Lead Instructor

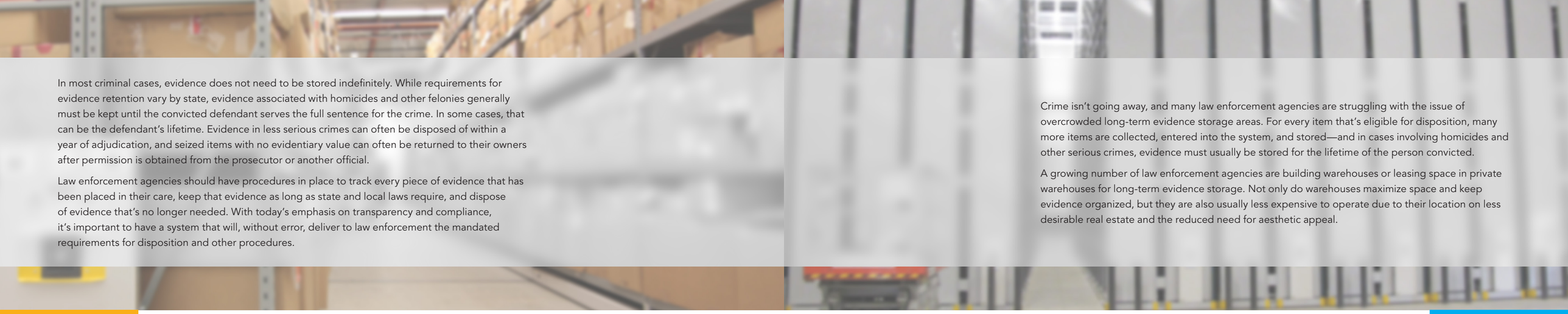
4 ELECTRONIC EVIDENCE MANAGEMENT



Automated identification technology like barcoding and RFID are increasingly being used by law enforcement agencies to track forensic evidence in crime labs and evidence rooms. Opinions vary regarding which system is most desireable, but one thing is certain: electronic systems are transforming evidence management.

Barcoding is a popular and proven method for storing and managing evidence. Barcodes are placed on evidence boxes and, when read by a scanner, convey relevant data associated with that evidence. RFID tagging, which is commonly used in retail theft detection systems, badge-swipe security systems, and other everyday applications, functions in a similar manner but can be read from outside the line of sight and from a distance.

TIP: *The National Institute of Standards and Technology has released a detailed comparison of barcoding and RFID systems titled "RFID Technology in Forensic Evidence Management."*



+ EVIDENCE DISPOSITION

In most criminal cases, evidence does not need to be stored indefinitely. While requirements for evidence retention vary by state, evidence associated with homicides and other felonies generally must be kept until the convicted defendant serves the full sentence for the crime. In some cases, that can be the defendant's lifetime. Evidence in less serious crimes can often be disposed of within a year of adjudication, and seized items with no evidentiary value can often be returned to their owners after permission is obtained from the prosecutor or another official.

Law enforcement agencies should have procedures in place to track every piece of evidence that has been placed in their care, keep that evidence as long as state and local laws require, and dispose of evidence that's no longer needed. With today's emphasis on transparency and compliance, it's important to have a system that will, without error, deliver to law enforcement the mandated requirements for disposition and other procedures.

"Keeping track of thousands, and sometimes millions, of items is a monumental mandate—and it's only possible with superior storage and management systems."

Kim Webley, Founder & CEO

TIP: *FileOnQ offers auto-disposition notification software that notifies the proper parties when evidence from a particular case is eligible for purging.*

OFF-SITE EVIDENCE STORAGE

5

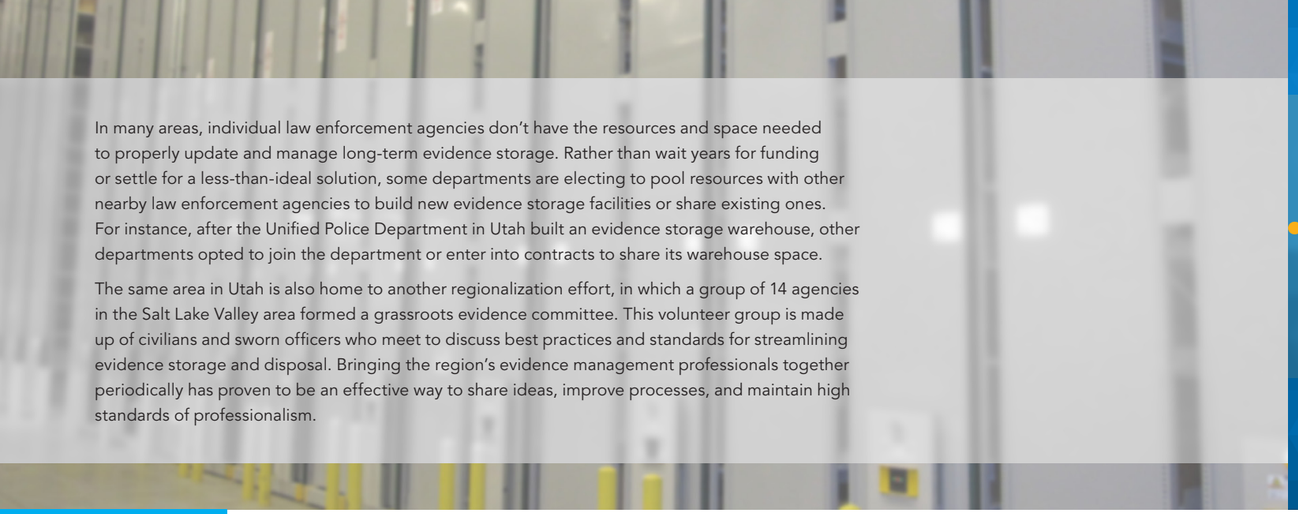
Crime isn't going away, and many law enforcement agencies are struggling with the issue of overcrowded long-term evidence storage areas. For every item that's eligible for disposition, many more items are collected, entered into the system, and stored—and in cases involving homicides and other serious crimes, evidence must usually be stored for the lifetime of the person convicted.

A growing number of law enforcement agencies are building warehouses or leasing space in private warehouses for long-term evidence storage. Not only do warehouses maximize space and keep evidence organized, but they are also usually less expensive to operate due to their location on less desirable real estate and the reduced need for aesthetic appeal.

"Long-term evidence warehouses are popping up in cities large and small."

Mike McCollin, Law Enforcement Systems Planner

TIP: *While law enforcement agencies' headquarters are usually located in high-value real estate areas, warehouses can be established on the outskirts of a city or town.*



In many areas, individual law enforcement agencies don't have the resources and space needed to properly update and manage long-term evidence storage. Rather than wait years for funding or settle for a less-than-ideal solution, some departments are electing to pool resources with other nearby law enforcement agencies to build new evidence storage facilities or share existing ones. For instance, after the Unified Police Department in Utah built an evidence storage warehouse, other departments opted to join the department or enter into contracts to share its warehouse space.

The same area in Utah is also home to another regionalization effort, in which a group of 14 agencies in the Salt Lake Valley area formed a grassroots evidence committee. This volunteer group is made up of civilians and sworn officers who meet to discuss best practices and standards for streamlining evidence storage and disposal. Bringing the region's evidence management professionals together periodically has proven to be an effective way to share ideas, improve processes, and maintain high standards of professionalism.

6 REGIONALIZATION OF SMALL DEPARTMENTS

Spacesaver

"Small law enforcement agencies are joining together."

Gary Lowery, Public Safety Market Sales Manager

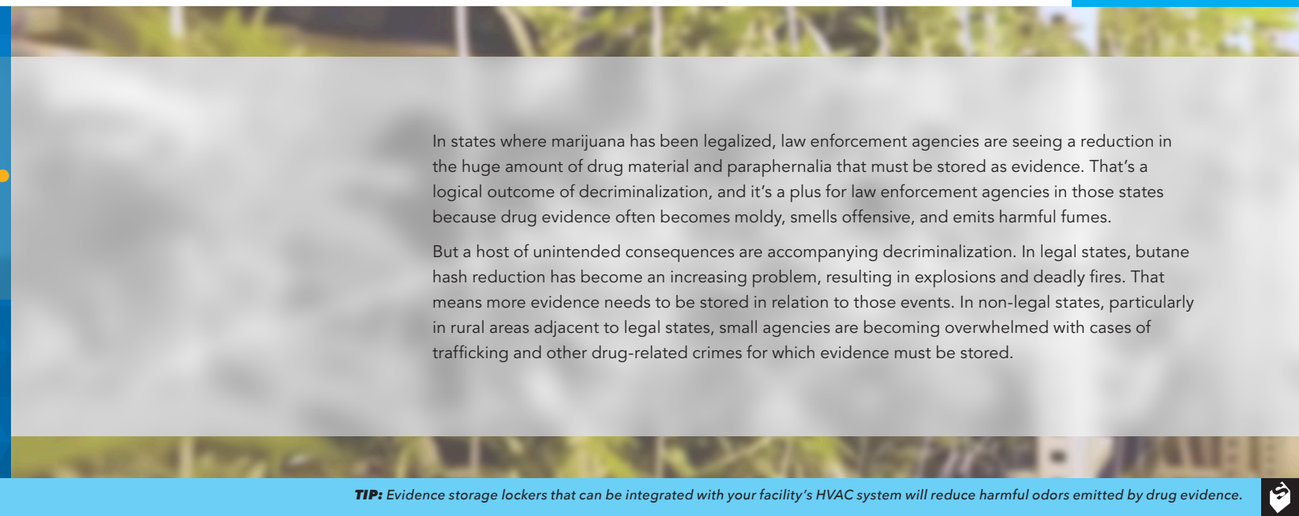
TIP: *Working with other nearby agencies can be an effective way to improve evidence management facilities and practices.*

"The legalization of marijuana is having a lot of unintended consequences."

Bruce Adams, Evidence Specialist

FileOnQ

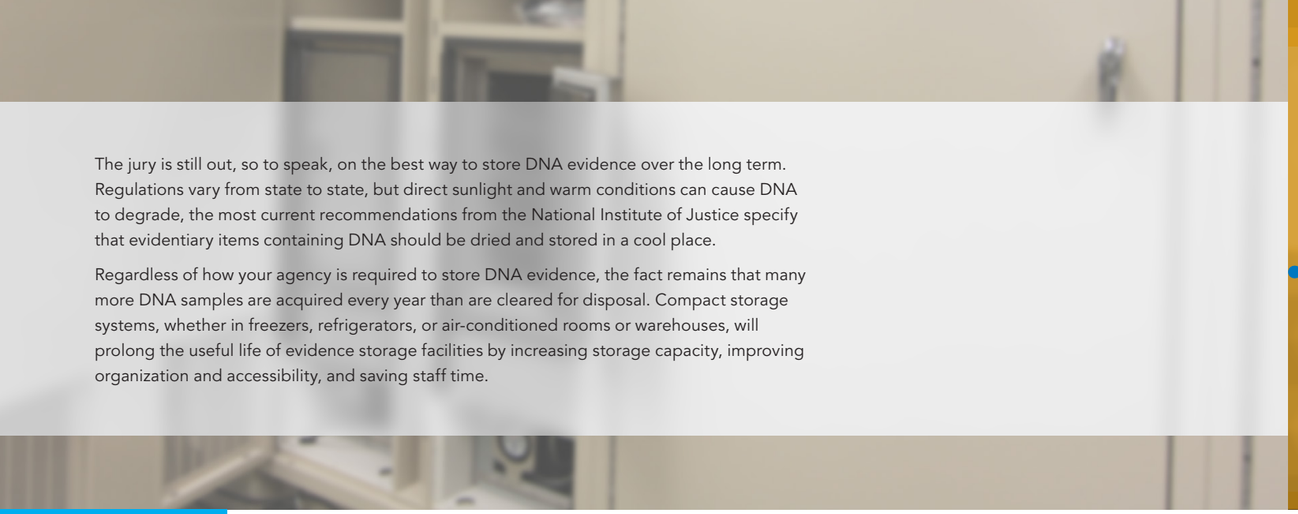
MARIJUANA LEGALIZATION 7



In states where marijuana has been legalized, law enforcement agencies are seeing a reduction in the huge amount of drug material and paraphernalia that must be stored as evidence. That's a logical outcome of decriminalization, and it's a plus for law enforcement agencies in those states because drug evidence often becomes moldy, smells offensive, and emits harmful fumes.

But a host of unintended consequences are accompanying decriminalization. In legal states, butane hash reduction has become an increasing problem, resulting in explosions and deadly fires. That means more evidence needs to be stored in relation to those events. In non-legal states, particularly in rural areas adjacent to legal states, small agencies are becoming overwhelmed with cases of trafficking and other drug-related crimes for which evidence must be stored.

TIP: *Evidence storage lockers that can be integrated with your facility's HVAC system will reduce harmful odors emitted by drug evidence.*



The jury is still out, so to speak, on the best way to store DNA evidence over the long term. Regulations vary from state to state, but direct sunlight and warm conditions can cause DNA to degrade, the most current recommendations from the National Institute of Justice specify that evidentiary items containing DNA should be dried and stored in a cool place.

Regardless of how your agency is required to store DNA evidence, the fact remains that many more DNA samples are acquired every year than are cleared for disposal. Compact storage systems, whether in freezers, refrigerators, or air-conditioned rooms or warehouses, will prolong the useful life of evidence storage facilities by increasing storage capacity, improving organization and accessibility, and saving staff time.

8 DNA EVIDENCE

"We're seeing DNA evidence being used to solve more and more cold cases."

Joe Latta (CPES), Executive Director and Lead Instructor

TIP: To save on cooling costs, check into options for compact storage in temperature-controlled warehouses and walk-in refrigerators and freezers.

"Police departments have to be dichotomies, in a way. There's this openness that you want to achieve if you're following principles of community-based policing, but at the same time, we're in need of much more secure facilities. We have to balance that protectiveness without making it look like a bunker."

Steve Loomis, Principal, Public Safety Design

BALANCING OPENNESS WITH SECURITY +

The design of civic buildings such as police departments can greatly impact the way the public perceives public institutions, both consciously and subconsciously. In fact, studies show that architecture and construction are interpreted by community members as a reflection of the government's responsiveness, transparency, and accessibility. In order to better serve the community, many federal and municipal buildings are putting new focus on designing buildings around the concept of openness.

However, in times of heightened political and safety concerns, it can be difficult to balance openness with security for employees and community members who access the building.

This balance of security and openness can be achieved in many ways. For example:

- Arranging departments for organizational clarity
- Opening up specific areas for community events
- Creating transparency using windows and glazing to allow passers-by to see inside and visitors to see outside

TIP: Include multiple accessible, inviting entrances with easy parking.

“Many states have enacted laws requiring agencies to submit all untested kits for analysis.”

Bruce Adams, Evidence Specialist

9

SEXUAL ASSAULT KIT STORAGE

With technological advances in DNA analysis, attention has turned to the tremendous backlog of untested sexual assault kits being held at law enforcement agencies nationwide. These kits, some of which were assembled decades ago, have the potential to convict or exonerate defendants accused of sexual assault. One study conducted in Detroit found that 28 percent of the kits that were tested ended up yielding the perpetrator’s DNA identification.

While such results are promising, the problem is that few agencies know exactly how many kits they have or where these kits are located. As more and more states require agencies to find all untested kits and submit them for testing, new procedures must be established to maintain a well-organized system and a secure chain of custody. Going forward, some experts foresee law enforcement facilities that have a single area designated exclusively for sexual assault kit storage, organized by case number.

TIP: *Modern DNA collection methods have eliminated the need to collect blood in most cases, so refrigerated storage is generally no longer required for standard sexual assault kits.*

“Demand for accredited forensic services is exploding, and a growing number of medium to large police departments are looking to bring timely lab services in-house.”

Jim McClaren, AIA, OAA, NCARB, Senior Principal

IN-HOUSE FORENSICS ACCREDITATION

10

Rather than sending evidence to an off-site facility for processing, some departments are upgrading in-house forensics labs and expanding lab services. This switch to onsite labs can offer more timely analysis and provide better investigative value.

This presents a number of opportunities, including improved workflow, but it also poses concerns. Staff must attain a higher safety rating, particularly staff who perform autopsies, and the facility must be designed to contain potentially hazardous pathogens. The National Institutes of Health designate four bio-safety levels that specify requirements for facility design and safety equipment. Forensic pathologists, for example, typically wear full respirators, headgear, and hazmat suits, and they use military-grade dictation devices to record their findings and observations.

Along with technical considerations, these facilities should also be designed with the knowledge that families of victims could visit. Areas that could be visited by families and friends of homicide victims should be designed to be safe and secure but also to provide some level of comfort and soothing calm.

TIP: *Hazmat suits used in forensics labs require a significant amount of storage space. Be sure to specify lockers that are large enough to securely store safety gear.*

Not all crime scene evidence is as harmless as a set of fingerprints. In many cases, the evidence itself presents a potentially lethal threat. That's the case with spray paint, gas cans, and other flammable or explosive materials. Other items that are commonly collected as evidence, such as a mattresses or sofa cushions infested with lice or bedbugs, do not pose a serious threat but should still be quarantined.

Law enforcement agencies are increasing their efforts to separate hazardous materials evidence from benign or inert evidence. This usually involves the installation of secure, vented, fire-rated cabinets inside or even outside an evidence storage facility. Large trash bins, if kept secure, can be used to quarantine mattresses and other items that do not contain hazardous materials.

11 HANDLING HAZARDOUS MATERIALS

"I'm seeing an increased awareness of hazardous materials that need to be stored as evidence."

Bruce Adams, Evidence Specialist

TIP: Check an item's label or refer to a Material Safety Data Sheet to determine best practices for storing hazardous materials.

"The San Francisco Police Department has 2,200 sworn officers. That's a lot of data."

Mike McCollin, Law Enforcement Systems Planner

12 BODY CAMERAS & OTHER DIGITAL EVIDENCE

With increasing media attention being directed at law enforcement officers' encounters with the public, many agencies are installing dash cams and requiring officers to wear body cameras while on duty. As a result, those agencies are collecting many hours of video footage every day—and video consumes a tremendous amount of data.

Some agencies prefer to keep this data on site by purchasing hard drives, transferring footage to them, and storing them in evidence rooms or other secure locations. This is generally considered to be the most cost-effective option. Other agencies use online cloud services to store digital evidence.

Regardless of how a particular agency opts to store digital evidence, the expense of storing the files should be taken into account when budgeting for the future. In addition, formal procedures should be established and implemented to maintain evidence, as well as to dispose of files that are not needed for evidentiary purposes.

TIP: If your agency opts for online cloud storage, be sure to verify the provider's security credentials.

EXPERTS & INFLUENCERS

BRUCE ADAMS

Evidence Specialist
FileOnQ, Inc.

Following a 20-year career working crime scenes and evidence room, Adams is now an Evidence Specialist with FileOnQ.

DARRELL ALLEN

Property and Evidence Room Supervisor
San Antonio Police Department

Allen has been the Property and Evidence Room Supervisor at the San Antonio Police Department for 10 years.

JOE LATTA (CPES)

Executive Director, Lead Instructor
International Association for Property & Evidence, Inc.

Joe is a retired Police Lieutenant with the Burbank Police Department in Burbank, California. Joe retired in 2001 and has been instructing property and evidence training classes ever since.

STEVE LOOMIS, FAIA, LEED® AP

Principal, Public Safety Design
AECOM

Steve is one of the specialty practice leaders for AECOM, one of the largest architecture and engineering firms in the world. He has led the AIA Academy of Architecture for Justice and served as the Chair for both its annual conference and the Justice Facilities Review Jury.

JIM McCLAREN, AIA, OAA, NCARB

Senior Principal
McClaren, Wilson & Lawrie, Inc.

Jim's firm has completed over 265 police facilities throughout North America as well as the two largest forensic science labs in the world. He has instructed in police facility planning for the International Association of Chiefs of Police for nearly three decades.

GARY LOWERY

Public Safety Market Sales Manager
Spacesaver Corporation

Gary Lowery has been involved in the design and installation of evidence rooms for the past 10 years. He has also participated and been a member of CAPET & IAPE throughout this time. Prior to his current role, Gary worked for 7 years with the Spacesaver Group.

MIKE McCOLLIN

Law Enforcement Systems Planner
Systems & Space

As a systems planner, McCollin has designed storage systems for the San Francisco Police Department, the California DEA, and about 30 other agencies.

KIM WEBLEY

Founder and CEO
FileOnQ, Inc.

An organizational leader in storage and retrieval management for the first twenty years of his career, Kim has dedicated the last twenty years to founding and leading FileOnQ as one of the premier law enforcement management software companies.



Spacesaver Corporation
1450 Janesville Avenue
Fort Atkinson, WI 53538-2798
1-800-492-3434
www.spacesaver.com



KI
1330 Bellevue Street
P.O. Box 8100
Green Bay, WI 54302-8100
1-800-424-2432
www.ki.com

Spacesaver Corporation is a division of KI.
KI is a registered trademark of Krueger International, Inc. Spacesaver is a registered trademark of Spacesaver Corporation.
© 2016 KI and Spacesaver Corporation. All Rights Reserved. SSC/DEL TrendsEvdStgMgmt_0316_Broch_PST (TrendsEvdStgMgmt__Broch_PST)