



AUDIT OF EVIDENCE PROCEDURES  
OF THE OPD PROPERTY AND  
EVIDENCE UNIT

Exit Conference Date: December 18, 2007

Release Date: March 6, 2008

Report No. 08-07

CITY OF ORLANDO

OFFICE OF AUDIT SERVICES AND MANAGEMENT SUPPORT

Beryl H Davis, CPA, CGFM  
Director

Mona S Mellon, CPA  
Audit Program Manager

Jessica L Dlugolinski  
Senior Auditor

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# CITY OF ORLANDO

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## MEMORANDUM

To: Karin Weaver, Police Deputy Chief

From: Beryl H. Davis, CPA, CGFM, Director  
Office of Audit Services and Management Support

Date: Exit Conference: December 18, 2007      Release: March 6, 2008

Subject: Audit of Evidence Procedures of the OPD Property and Evidence Unit  
(Report No. 08-07)

In accordance with our annual operations plan, the Office of Audit Services and Management Support has performed an audit of the evidence procedures of the Orlando Police Department (OPD) Property and Evidence (P&E) Unit. Our objective was to determine that the integrity of police evidence is controlled through compliance with adequate policies and procedures.

We conducted this audit in accordance with generally accepted government auditing standards. Those standards require that we plan and perform the audit to obtain sufficient, appropriate evidence to provide a reasonable basis for our findings and conclusions based on our audit objectives. We believe that the evidence obtained provides a reasonable basis for our findings and conclusions based on our audit objectives. We reviewed controls regarding evidence handling and storage within the P&E Unit and performed such other auditing procedures as we considered necessary in the circumstances. We tested evidence items both from storage and records. Our scope did not include a review of controls over evidence processes such as latent prints, photo lab work and crime lab work. Our scope also did not include a review of controls over non-evidence property maintained by the P&E Unit.

Based upon our tests and inquiries we determined that, on the whole, the P&E Unit has adequate written policies and procedures which control the integrity of police evidence, and staff are following these written policies and procedures. The recommendations in this report are intended to enhance internal controls currently in place.

We would like to express our appreciation to the personnel of both the P&E Unit and the Staff Inspections Unit for their courtesy and cooperation during this audit.

BHD/am

c: Honorable Buddy Dyer, Mayor  
Byron W. Brooks, Chief Administrative Officer  
Joseph M. Robinson, Chief of Staff  
Val Demings, Police Chief  
Mayanne Downs, City Attorney  
Rebecca W. Sutton, Chief Financial Officer  
Jody M. Litchford, Deputy City Attorney  
Conrad C. Cross, Chief Information Officer  
Susan Manney, Police Lieutenant  
Robert Beal, Police Support Services Manager

## **BACKGROUND**

The Orlando Police Department (OPD) Property and Evidence (P&E) Unit is primarily responsible for the handling and storage of police evidence. The OPD Staff Inspections Unit has certain responsibilities for monitoring police evidence operations.

According to the P&E Unit Policies and Procedures Handbook, “the primary mission of the P&E Unit is to receive, log, maintain, distribute and have readily available all evidence property, and to ensure an accurate inventory of all tangible evidence property is maintained until it is disposed of according to Department Policy, State Statutes or City Ordinances.” The P&E Unit reports to the Support Services Division of the Administrative Services Bureau.

The P&E Unit has nine full time employees, including one Police Evidence Supervisor. Four employees are assigned to administrative duties. One employee is assigned to transport evidence items to and from the Florida Department of Law Enforcement (FDLE) crime lab and substations. Three employees are assigned to storing, retrieving and purging evidence. They work in the secured storage area of the P&E Unit. The P&E Unit utilizes the AS400 computer system to maintain records of all evidence items.

The majority of the evidence is stored within the P&E Unit’s office at the Orlando Police Headquarters. Larger items are stored in secured areas on a different floor of the Headquarters. Extremely large (bulk) items, such as vehicles, are stored at a local towing and wrecker vendor.

The primary mission of the OPD Staff Inspections Unit is to ensure all OPD departments are following adequate policies and procedures and adhering to law enforcement industry standards. Accreditation standards and OPD written policies and procedures require the Staff Inspections Unit to conduct an annual inventory and inspection of the P&E Unit in addition to other evidence verification procedures. The Staff Inspections Unit also reports to the Administrative Services Bureau. During the audit period the Staff Inspections Unit was staffed by two sworn police personnel; this number was reduced to one individual at the end of FY 2007.

## SUMMARY OF RECOMMENDATIONS AND RESPONSES

### RECOMMENDATIONS

### RESPONSES

Each recommendation is classified with a “Criticality Factor”, defined as:

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|--------|---|
| HIGH   | represents a control risk or needed improvement requiring immediate attention.        |
| MEDIUM | represents a control risk or needed improvement requiring attention in the next year. |
| LOW    | represents a process improvement that can be addressed at management’s discretion.    |

**The Property and Evidence Unit should:**

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|----|---|--------|
| 1. | Increase the physical safeguards over the storage of bulk evidence items and develop procedures to accurately track the chain of custody at the towing and wrecker vendor location. (HIGH)                              | Concur |
| 2. | Ensure the physical safeguarding of evidence in temporary storage at substations by collecting the access keys from employees no longer authorized for access or by changing the locks. (MEDIUM)                        | Concur |
| 3. | Implement a dollar limit of \$5,000 or less for cash evidence that can be placed in temporary storage and transported by courier without an escort. (HIGH)  | Concur |
| 4. | Require the courier to carry a police radio when transporting evidence. (MEDIUM)  | Concur |
| 5. | Document existing procedures for P&E Unit employees who transport evidence. (MEDIUM)  | Concur |
| 6. | Conduct a meeting with OPD management to determine how to ensure that accountable personnel (officers and other personnel who submit evidence) submit approved purge reports to the P&E Unit every six months. (MEDIUM) | Concur |

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|-----|--|--------|
| 7.  | Contact the Technology Management Division to create efficient electronic access to individual purge reports for accountable personnel. (MEDIUM)   | Concur |
| 8.  | Amend Orlando Police Department Policy and Procedures Section 1123.7, "Property and Evidence," to ensure accountability over purged evidence, in particular evidence in the custody of an officer who leaves City employment. (HIGH) | Concur |
| 9.  | Document in written Policies and Procedures the existing practice to require the Video Tape Unit to be present for Law Enforcement Trust Fund deposit verifications. (LOW)   | Concur |
| 10. | Evaluate and determine whether the current barcode scanner system should be replaced or updated and whether to implement further automated processes for evidence. (MEDIUM)  | Concur |

**The Staff Inspections Unit should:**

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|-----|--|--------|
| 11. | Document detailed procedures for the Staff Inspection Unit's annual inspections, inventory, and Law Enforcement Trust Fund deposit verifications for the P&E Unit. (LOW) | Concur |
|-----|--|--------|

## ISSUES AND RECOMMENDATIONS

### **Objectives, Scope, Methodology and Conclusions**

The objective of our audit was to determine that the integrity of police evidence is controlled through compliance with adequate policies and procedures.

Our methodology included: reviewing written policies and procedures, recent inspections/audits, and law enforcement industry standards; interviewing and observing OPD employees performing evidence handling and storage procedures; examining tested evidence items and comparing them to computer system inventory records; and observing the physical locations and safeguards over police evidence.

Our scope did not include a review of controls over evidence processes such as latent prints, photo lab work and crime lab work. Our scope also did not include a review of controls over non-evidence property maintained by the OPD Property and Evidence (P&E) Unit.

We determined based upon our tests, observations and inquiries that, on the whole, the P&E Unit has adequate written policies and procedures which control the integrity of police evidence, and staff are following these written policies and procedures. The recommendations in this report are intended to enhance internal controls currently in place.

### **Increase Controls Over the Physical Safeguarding of Evidence Stored Offsite**

There are some controls over the integrity of bulk evidence items stored at the offsite towing and wrecker vendor; however, we noted these controls do not appear adequate. We were informed that the gate to the secure area is locked with a padlock, to which numerous employees, including vendor employees, know the numeric access code.

Currently, OPD personnel who store evidence offsite are safeguarding these items by marking the closed gate with tamper proof red tape, initialing and taking a photograph of it then verifying the tape with the photograph before each re-entry, to provide detection of unauthorized entry.

It should also be noted that the area for evidence is secured and is located within the vendor's further secured facility; therefore, the risk of improper access to the evidence area is limited primarily to vendor and OPD employees. However, any problems with the chain of custody could lead to a compromise of the integrity of evidence. Thus, we recommend the P&E Unit increase the physical safeguards over the storage of bulk evidence items and develop procedures to accurately track the chain of custody at the towing and wrecker vendor location. We suggest that the lock be replaced or a new location be considered.

**Recommendation 1.** We recommend that the P&E Unit increase the physical safeguards over the storage of bulk evidence items and develop procedures to accurately track the chain of custody at the towing and wrecker vendor location.

**Response** We concur.

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**Increase Controls  
Over Temporary  
Storage and  
Transportation of  
Evidence**

The P&E Unit has recently improved controls over the temporary storage and transportation of evidence by assigning a position, the courier, to be responsible for transporting all evidence. This transporting occurs from three Community Policing Offices (Northwest, Southeast and Primrose) and the Orlando International Airport to the main P&E Unit at Headquarters; and between the main P&E Unit and the FDLE crime lab. Our review also noted further potential improvements.

Officers and other personnel who submit evidence can temporarily secure evidence at three Community Policing Offices or the Airport. Evidence submission consists of packaging evidence items, filling out evidence cards, signing a log sheet, and securing the evidence in lockers or lock boxes. We were informed that the keys to the lockers and lock boxes are held by the P&E Unit personnel only. Prior to the assignment of the courier, substation employees would transport items to the P&E Unit at OPD Headquarters.

It should be noted that our audit did not reveal actual circumstances involving tampered or stolen evidence nor large amounts of cash being transported; thus, the below recommendations are made to enhance the newly established controls. The apparent reason for the following issues is that the courier position is new and such controls have not been considered.

First, it came to our attention that employees at the Airport still have access to the lock box for photos and, therefore, it may be possible that employees in other substations may still have access to lockers and lock boxes. As a result, it is possible that both the integrity of evidence items and documentation of the chain of custody could be compromised. In order to comply with the Orlando Police Department Policy and Procedures Section 1123.7, "Property and Evidence," regarding safeguarding evidence and maintaining a documented chain of custody, we recommend the P&E Unit ensure the physical safeguarding of evidence in temporary storage at substations either by collecting the access keys from employees no longer authorized for access to the lockers or lock boxes, or by changing the locks.

Second, we observed that it is possible, at present, for the courier to transport large amounts of cash without security or a witness. We believe that the dollar amount of cash evidence allowed to be temporarily stored at substations and then transported by the courier should be limited. In order to increase the safety of the courier and further safeguard the evidence, we recommend the P&E Unit implement a dollar limit of \$5,000 or less for cash evidence that can be placed in temporary storage and transported by courier without an escort.

Third, we observed that the courier does not bring a police radio when transporting evidence from substations. As a result, the courier might not be able to contact help, if there were a situation, as quickly as if he/she carried a police radio. We recommend the P&E Unit require the courier to

carry a police radio when transporting evidence.

Finally, we found that the courier and P&E Supervisor appear to be properly trained and knowledgeable about important controls such as never leaving evidence in the vehicle unattended, or requiring an escort to the vehicle when items cannot be concealed; however, we found that detailed written procedures and rules for the courier position have not been prepared. As a result, important controls currently being practiced could be overlooked or not enforced by current or future employees. To improve internal control by ensuring that training and enforcement of the courier's procedures continue, we recommend the P&E Unit document existing procedures for P&E Unit employees who transport evidence.

**Recommendation 2.** We recommend that the P&E Unit ensure the physical safeguarding of evidence in temporary storage at substations by collecting the access keys from employees no longer authorized for access or by changing the locks.

**Response** We concur.

**Recommendation 3.** We recommend that the P&E Unit implement a dollar limit of \$5,000 or less for cash evidence that can be placed in temporary storage and transported by courier without an escort.

**Response** We concur.

**Recommendation 4.** We recommend that the P&E Unit require the courier to carry a police radio when transporting evidence.

**Response** We concur.

**Recommendation 5.** We recommend that the P&E Unit document existing procedures for P&E Unit employees who transport evidence.

**Response** We concur.

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### **Increase Controls Over the Evidence Purge Process**

Orlando Police Department Policy and Procedures Section 1123.7, "Property and Evidence," requires officers, and other personnel who submit evidence, to provide approval every six months to the P&E Unit for the disposition of evidence that is no longer needed. This is done by reviewing a purge report available from the AS400, which sorts and summarizes the evidence items in storage according to each individual who has submitted evidence for storage. Officers or other personnel who submit evidence should verify that the evidence is no longer needed for trial and that there are no appeals pending, initial items that can be disposed, have their supervisor review and sign the purge sheet and return it to the P&E Unit.

Currently, the responsibility to monitor compliance with this procedure is shared between the Property and Evidence Unit Supervisor and the submitting personnel's supervisors. There is a tracking spreadsheet available to all employees through the OPD computer network to review individual personnel's purge histories. Recent updates to procedures to provide for better tracking and communication with the supervisors of personnel responsible to purge evidence have resulted in moderate improvements in the timeliness of purging evidence. Timely purging is important to prevent crowded storage spaces which could lead to disorganized evidence storage or possible unnecessary costs to acquire increased space.

To increase the efficiency of the purging process we recommend the P&E Unit conduct a meeting with OPD management to determine how to ensure that accountable personnel (officers and other personnel who submit evidence) submit approved purge reports to the P&E Unit every six months. We suggest the P&E Unit communicate the consequences of untimely evidence purges during this meeting.

Another apparent delay is that the purge report can only be printed by the P&E Unit and, therefore, officers or other personnel who submit evidence or their supervisors must first contact P&E to obtain purge reports. It takes P&E approximately 5-10 minutes to generate and print each purge report and the P&E Unit is not sufficiently staffed to print and distribute all purge reports every six months. To improve the purging process, we recommend the P&E Unit contact the Technology Management Division to create efficient electronic access to individual purge reports for accountable personnel (officers and other personnel who submit evidence).

We also noted that the written policy and procedures over purging evidence are not clear as to the officer and supervisor responsibilities required to verify that items are no longer needed for trial and that there are no appeals pending. This is of particular concern in regard to evidence in the custody of an officer who leaves City employment. It is possible that officers leaving City employment could improperly approve the disposition of needed evidence instead of turning custody over to a supervisor. We discussed with the Police Legal Advisor and others familiar with these processes the possible effects of improper dispositions as well as possible means to increase the review and accountability over evidence disposition at both the officer and supervisor level. In conclusion, in order to strengthen controls over the purging of evidence, we recommend that the P&E Unit amend Orlando Police Department Policy and Procedures Section 1123.7, "Property and Evidence," to further describe and to ensure accountability over purged evidence, in particular evidence in the custody of an officer who leaves City employment.

**Recommendation 6.** We recommend that the P&E Unit conduct a meeting with OPD management to determine how to ensure that accountable personnel (officers and other personnel who submit evidence) submit approved purge reports to the P&E Unit every six months.

**Response** We concur.

**Recommendation 7.** We recommend that the P&E Unit contact the Technology Management Division to create efficient electronic access to individual purge reports for accountable personnel.

**Response** We concur.

**Recommendation 8.** We recommend that the P&E Unit amend Orlando Police Department Policy and Procedures Section 1123.7, "Property and Evidence," to ensure accountability over purged evidence, in particular evidence in the custody of an officer who leaves City employment.

**Response** We concur.

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**Increase Controls  
Over Cash Evidence  
Counting**

We found that, in general, controls over cash evidence handling are adequate; however, we noted an opportunity for improvement that may enhance the controls already in place.

We noted that when the Staff Inspection Unit verifications are performed, the staff requests the presence of the Video Tape Unit; however, this procedure is not required per the P&E Policies and Procedures Handbook. In order to maintain controls over cash handling in the future we recommend the P&E Unit document in written Policies and Procedures the existing practice of requiring the Video Tape Unit to be present for LETF verifications.

**Recommendation 9.** We recommend that the P&E Unit document in written Policies and Procedures the existing practice to require the Video Tape Unit to be present for Law Enforcement Trust Fund deposit verifications.

**Response** We concur.

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**Evaluate the Barcode Scanner System**

In general, the current barcode scanner system provides some efficiencies and documentation for inventory, audit, purging, and FDLE transporting procedures. However, because of the following circumstances, we suggest the system in place be evaluated to ensure that best practices are used in the future.

First, we found that only one out of the two barcode scanners is functioning and it does not always function as it should. For example, P&E staff often encounter problems when attempting to transfer into the computer the information scanned. When this occurs, they must re-scan the items. The other scanner is broken and the vendor used to reprogram the scanners is no longer in business. In addition, the Technology Management Division has been unable to reprogram the scanners. These conditions reduce the efficiencies gained by use of a barcode system. Because there is only one working scanner and it is not fully reliable, we suggest that research for an updated or new barcode scanner system begin as soon as possible.

Second, we noted that there are potential uses of a barcode scanner system not being performed by the P&E Unit. Every evidence item is assigned a barcode sticker at the time of submission. This barcode is integrated with the AS400 inventory system and the location and barcode of each item is recorded in the system. The barcode system is only used to create lists of items scanned for inventory, audit, purging, and FDLE transporting procedures. We noted, for example, that the system is not being used to update the AS400 or run comparison reports (besides the inventory exception reports). One reason for this is that P&E is not satisfied with

the current barcode scanner system due to the problems referred to above and therefore has not invested further effort to increase its use.

In order to ensure the best possible system is utilized in the future, we recommend the P&E Unit evaluate and determine whether the current barcode scanner system should be replaced or updated and whether to implement further automated processes. We suggest this be done by contacting the Purchasing and Technology Management Divisions, as well as peers, and attending classes or trade shows to research the best practices and differing electronic systems for evidence. The costs and benefits of potential new barcode scanner systems should be considered, in addition to OPD's vision of future technology processes.

**Recommendation 10.** We recommend that the P&E Unit evaluate and determine whether the current barcode scanner system should be replaced or updated and whether to implement further automated processes for evidence.

**Response** We concur.

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**Document and  
Update Procedures  
for Staff  
Inspections Unit**

Per our inquiry and review of related documents, the Staff Inspections Unit's inspections of the P&E Unit appear to be effective and beneficial to the integrity of evidence. However, we noted an enhancement that may increase the efficiency and effectiveness of these inspections.

The Staff Inspections Unit is required to perform an Annual Inspection and an Annual Inventory, and to verify all cash deposits of the P&E Unit, according to the Accreditation Standards, Orlando Police Department Policies and Procedures Sections 1123.7, "Property and Evidence" and 2106.0, "Staff Inspections Unit," and the P&E Unit Policies and Procedures Handbook.

However, we noted that the Staff Inspections Unit does not have detailed written step by step procedures to guide these

inspections. The Staff Inspections Unit personnel have indicated that they refer to prior inspection reports and rely on their professional judgment in order to perform the current inspections. Through our observation and review of recent inspections, we agree that this has had effective results. Our concern is to maintain efficiency in the future and to retain the current staff's personal knowledge and experience by documenting these steps. We noted that the Staff Inspections Unit typically has rather frequent turnover, with its staff being sent to different assignments and new employees being placed in this unit. Therefore, we recommend the Staff Inspections Unit document detailed procedures for the Staff Inspection Unit's annual inspections, inventory, and LETF verifications for the P&E Unit. We suggest these be evolving documents used by the Staff Inspections Unit to both train new staff and provide an efficient guideline for its inspection activities.

**Recommendation 11.** We recommend that the Staff Inspection Unit document detailed procedures for the Staff Inspection Unit's annual inspections, inventory, and Law Enforcement Trust Fund deposit verifications for the P&E Unit.

**Response** We concur.

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