

Property and Evidence

803.1 POLICY

This policy provides guidance for the proper collection, storage, and security of evidence and other property. Additionally, this policy provides for the protection of the chain of evidence and those persons authorized to remove and/or destroy property.

The Department recognizes that Property and Evidence procedures change over time due to many factors and places responsibility on the Evidence Unit to maintain a current Evidence Collection and Packaging Manual for use by Department personnel. The procedures in the Evidence Collection and Packaging Manual should be followed by employees with any exceptions based on articulable reasons and supervisory approval, if feasible.

803.2 DEFINITIONS

Booking – Entering and placing an item into evidence through the RMS and actual submission into an evidence locker or other appropriate place.

803.3 PROPERTY HANDLING

Any employee who first comes into possession of any property, shall retain such property until it is released pursuant RCW and/or policy or placed into evidence according to current Department procedure.

803.3.1 PROPERTY CLASSIFICATION

1. **Found Property** - Found property valued at less than the amount established by RCW 63.21.050 may be left with the finder if there is no reason for the officer to retain the property or the owner cannot be identified. Where ownership can be established as to found property with no apparent evidentiary value, such property may be released to the owner without the need for booking.
2. **Safekeeping Property** – Safekeeping property not already booked into the evidence system may be returned to the owner immediately by an officer. Safekeeping property booked into the evidence system may be released by an Evidence Technician consistent with current procedures.
3. **Evidence, Seized Property or Property for Destruction** – These types of property must be placed in the evidence system consistent with current procedures.
 - (a) Employees should notify the Evidence Unit via email if they become aware a property item's status has changed to Recovered-Stolen or other significant property status updates.

803.3.2 TEMPORARY EVIDENCE LOCKERS

Temporary evidence lockers are located at each police facility. These lockers are used to store evidence and/or found property on a temporary basis.

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Evidence in temporary lockers should be booked no later than the following work shift and should not be held over the officer's scheduled days off without supervisory permission. The use of temporary lockers for holding items for more than a work week is generally prohibited and requires supervisor permission.

After placing the items into a temporary locker, the officer will document the use of the locker pursuant to current established procedure.

After securing the item in the temporary locker, officers secure the key either by retaining it personally or transfer the key to a supervisor for secure storage in a locked office drawer.

Supervisors should check temporary lockers periodically to ensure proper use. If any lockers are out of compliance, the supervisor shall take the appropriate action to correct the issue.

803.3.3 EXCEPTIONAL HANDLING

Certain property items require a separate process. The following items are processed in the described manner:

- License plates found or taken pursuant RCW and not stolen or connected with a known crime should be placed in the designated container for return to the Department of Motor Vehicles. No formal property booking process is required.
- Government property, unless connected to a known criminal case, may be released directly to a responsible employee of the appropriate agency/department. No formal booking is required.

803.3.4 PROPERTY SUBJECT TO FORFEITURE

Whenever property seized by the Department is subject to forfeiture, specific notification procedures must be followed. It shall be the responsibility of the seizing officer to ensure that the current Department asset forfeiture procedure is followed.

803.4 PROPERTY CONTROL

1. Every time property is released or received, this information is documented pursuant established current procedures to maintain the chain of possession.
2. Officers desiring property for court should contact the Evidence Unit at least one business day prior to the court day.

803.4.1 RELEASE OF PROPERTY

The Vancouver Police Department shall make every effort to return property that is in the possession of this department when such property is not considered evidence of a crime or is no longer needed as evidence. In such cases, the Evidence Unit shall make a reasonable attempt to identify the lawful owner and provide notice consistent with established procedures.

If the property remains unclaimed beyond time frames established by law, the Evidence Unit shall make necessary arrangements to dispose of the property consistent with current procedures and law.

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803.5 INSPECTIONS OF THE EVIDENCE ROOM

1. Unannounced inspections of evidence storage areas shall be conducted as directed by the Chief of Police or designee.
2. An annual audit, of some degree, of property held by the Department shall be conducted by a designee appointed by the Chief of Police, not routinely or directly connected with evidence control.
3. Whenever a change is made in personnel who have access to the evidence room, an audit, of some degree, shall be conducted by a designee appointed by the Chief of Police, not routinely or directly connected with evidence control.

803.6 EVIDENCE FACILITY SECURITY

Access to the Vancouver Police Department Evidence Facility is restricted to authorized personnel only. It shall be the responsibility of the Evidence Unit supervisor to control all access into the facility.