



STATE OF FLORIDA

DEPARTMENT OF FINANCIAL SERVICES

Criminal Investigations Division

Forensic Sciences Laboratory

**GUIDE TO THE COLLECTION, PACKAGING, SUBMISSION, AND
ANALYSIS OF EVIDENCE**



AN AMERICAN ASSOCIATION FOR LABORATORY ACCREDITATION accredited TESTING Laboratory (fire debris ONLY), meeting ISO 17025 and
A2LA requirements Certificate 4202.01



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NOTE: Evidence will be accepted from any public law enforcement agency and fire service agency in matters related to criminal investigations occurring in the State of Florida. Some analyses of samples collected outside the State of Florida may be permitted providing there is a connection to a crime which has occurred in the State of Florida or other compelling circumstances (requires approval by the Chief of the Forensic Sciences Laboratory). Other evidence may be accepted from other public agencies in special circumstances but must be approved by the Chief of the Forensic Sciences Laboratory or a designee in advance. Submission procedures for evidence other than fire debris may require exceptions to this Guide. Please call the Forensic Sciences Laboratory (FSL) to determine the proper procedure(s) for these items.

I. OVERVIEW

- A.** Fire Debris Analysis is a specialized service provided by the Forensic Sciences Laboratory. This analysis assists law enforcement officers and fire investigators by determining the presence of ignitable liquids and, if present, the classification at a fire scene. The results of this analysis may aid in the investigation of a fire scene based on the presence, or absence, of ignitable liquids.
- B.** Video analysis begins with accessing the video in question and deciding the best course of action to clarify the picture. After that, the analyst can stabilize, filter, and examine the video. Often the final work product is an image captured from the video at a select moment which shows either the crime, the victim, or the suspect. Another tool available to analysts is the hardware and software which allows the extraction of video data from damaged DVRs.
- C.** The purpose of this document is to provide instruction on the Forensic Sciences Laboratory's submission policies and requirements, as well as an overview into each analysis/testing process.

II. COLLECTION OF EVIDENCE – The collection of evidence from various crime scenes requires expertise in recognizing the value of the types of evidence at the scene, skill in collecting the evidence, knowledge in packaging the evidence, and the ability to preserve the evidence. These attributes may be at different levels depending on the individual and will be impacted by the policies of the agency for which they work. The following is offered as a general overview for the types of evidence typically accepted by the Forensic Sciences Laboratory.

A. FIRE DEBRIS

- 1.** Isolate the fire scene, making certain to limit access, until after you have viewed the scene and selected the evidence to be submitted for testing.
- 2.** Determine the fire's area(s) of origin and the presence of any indicators of the use of ignitable liquids. Use your experience, training, and observations. Properly trained canines may aid the investigator in determining the area with the highest probability of containing an ignitable liquid. Be aware that certain materials will have ignitable liquids in them as artifacts of their manufacture.

Also, certain locations within a scene may be more likely to have prior spills of ignitable liquid which may be incidental to the fire under investigation (garage, tool shed, paint shop, etc.).

3. Isolate the area of origin and select samples from within it. Remember, if the area where you take the sample did not have any ignitable liquid on it, the Forensic Sciences Laboratory cannot find any ignitable liquids on that sample. It is recommended that multiple samples be selected should there be an indication that ignitable liquid was poured along a trail.
4. Two or more small samples are better than one large one. **DO NOT** fill any container more than half (50%) to seventy-five (75%) percent full as the Forensic Sciences Laboratory will require a sufficient headspace above the debris to perform a proper extraction.
5. Take care not to cross-contaminate the samples. If you are using tools such as carpet cutters, saws, or shovels, clean them between samples. Warm soapy water, followed by a water rinse, should sufficiently clean the tool. To test this, you may wipe the tool after cleaning with a paper towel and submit it for testing, as a comparison sample with the case. Your hands and gloves may also act as carriers of cross-contamination. Wear latex or nitrile gloves when collecting samples and dispose of them between samples. **DO NOT** put them in the evidence container.
6. Carefully photograph and record the location of the fire scene and the samples you take. Ideally, this should be done prior to the selection of samples as well as after.
7. If possible, obtain comparison samples. Most comparison samples of building materials are samples of the same type of material as the suspect sample that, to the best of your knowledge, had no ignitable liquid applied to it. While most comparison samples may be construction materials (wood, carpet, drywall, foam padding, etc.), a prudent investigator will also determine what, if any, ignitable liquids were stored or used at a scene (examples include insecticides, spot cleaners, carpet or other cleaners, paints, stains, shellacs, varnishes, etc.). It may not be possible to isolate and submit a sample of every ignitable liquid noted at a scene, but the brands of materials found or used should be documented.
8. Be aware that many manufactured items may contain trace residues of ignitable liquids as artifacts of their manufacture. For this reason, it is important that, if at all possible, comparison samples and exemplars should be collected. Comparison samples and exemplars may be necessary to definitively determine whether any ignitable liquids found in a sample were present as artifacts of the materials in the samples or were foreign to the materials in the sample. Be aware that the failure to provide a comparison sample or exemplar may result in the Forensic Sciences Laboratory's

inability to provide definitive testimony that the ignitable liquid could not have been inherent to the matrix or substrate.

9. On rare occasions, there will be the need to obtain a control sample (a sample with a known history) from a manufacturer or retailer, which should not have been exposed to contamination by an ignitable liquid prior to collection. Example: If the brand and lot for a specific carpeting used in a new construction has burned, the retailer may be approached for a small sample of the identical brand and lot of the carpet, provided it is still available.
10. Be certain that the sample selected is relevant to the fire scene.

B. VIDEO EVIDENCE

Note: Video surveillance systems are found in many locations, from the convenience store, the ATM machine, and other security systems. Some homeowners have installed simple video recording systems as part of their home security. Video evidence may provide valuable information regarding the commission of a crime or the whereabouts of a victim or suspect. The following recommendations are the minimum steps to be taken for preservation and collection of video evidence.

1. Determine the various locations where video systems may have been used in the crime scene or adjacent to it. These areas may include those cameras along the suspected route of a victim or suspect as well as the actual crime scene.
2. A canvass of areas near the scene or travel locations may indicate the use of additional video systems.
3. All collected videotapes, DVDs, CDs, thumb drives, flash media, or DVR surveillance systems must be treated as evidence with maintenance of the chain of custody from collection at a scene to submission at the Forensic Sciences Laboratory.
4. When video evidence is not voluntarily provided, a search warrant may be required for the seizure of the video evidence.
5. For some determinations, it may be necessary to provide a sketch showing the location and placement of a camera at the crime scene.
6. While this Forensic Sciences Laboratory does not provide photogrammetric calculations, should that type of determination be needed in the future, be certain to record any height measurements of reference items in the field of view.
7. For analog tape:

- a. Stop the tape recorder without ejecting the cassette.
 - b. Record the settings of the time display.
 - c. Record the time as noted on your cell phone or watch.
 - d. Record any discrepancies with any time keeping objects within the crime scene, i.e., cash registers, alarm systems, etc.
 - e. Record the value of the counter display on the recorder.
 - f. Rewind the tape and note the new counter display value.
 - g. Eject the tape and break the write protect tab.
 - h. Note the make and model of the recording device and the time-lapse mode setting.
 - i. Submit the tape to the Forensic Sciences Laboratory.
 - j. If there is an urgent need to view the contents of the tape prior to Forensic Sciences Laboratory submission remember that playing, pausing or slow- motion playing will degrade the original tape and affect its value in the Forensic Sciences Laboratory. If necessary, make a copy of the tape and view the copy. Do not use a home recorder for playing the tape as many may contaminate the video-recording head resulting in poor quality copies.
 - k. Maintain the copy and submit the original tape with a narrative with your request for analysis
- 8. If the surveillance system uses a digital media, contact the Forensic Sciences Laboratory to determine what media or devices are needed in order to capture the video data segment.
 - 9. Write-protect all original media. Never use the Pause operation when viewing original video recordings.
 - 10. Submit original video recordings. If originals cannot be obtained, call for further instructions.
 - 11. Label the outer container “FRAGILE, SENSITIVE ELECTRONIC EQUIPMENT” or “FRAGILE, SENSITIVE AUDIO/VIDEO MEDIA” and “KEEP AWAY FROM MAGNETS OR MAGNETIC FIELDS.”
 - 12. The use of an anti-static container (such as a Faraday Bag) for electronic devices or media is highly recommended.

III. PACKAGING SAMPLES

A. CONTAINERS – General Considerations

1. Essential properties:
 - a. Unused;
 - b. Airtight (For all Fire Debris);
 - c. Inert – will not break down when heated or in contact with solvents;
 - d. Clean – no hydrocarbon or other chemical residue; and
2. A properly packaged container satisfies the following criteria:
 - a. It seals any volatile liquid or chemicals and protects them from evaporative loss;
 - b. It is inert and relatively unaffected by the contents (for cans used for fire debris, rusting is an unavoidable complication);
 - c. It is sufficiently non-porous and intact to avoid contamination from one sample to another or from any other external source; and
 - d. Information written on the surface indicates the chain of custody and shows the protection of the collected material from the crime scene through submission by the presence of a correct seal.
3. Seals
 - a. A clean, air-tight seal is essential for fire debris or ignitable liquids. For metal cans used for the submission of debris, clean the “V” channel of the can rim before placing the lid on the can
 - b. Containers must be completely sealed to prevent any passage of vapors or contaminants into or out of the container. Be certain can lids are tight all the way around. Plastic bags (Section B.2.) being used for fire debris samples must be heat sealed completely, with no flaws in the seam. If a heat seal is not possible for a plastic bag with fire debris, tightly fold the opening five (5) times and completely seal with tape.
 - c. Tamper evident tape (tamper proof tape) must be placed across the container lid or seam in such a manner that the item cannot be partially or completely opened without tearing the tape (Refer to Image 1 below.).
 - i. Three pieces of tape at 2:00, 6:00, and 10:00 are recommended on cans.
 - ii. A crisscross of tape over the lid of a jar extending to the sides of the jar or bottle is also appropriate.
 - iii. Bags (plastic or paper) must have the tape seal across the original or any subsequent openings (cuts).



Image 1. Examples of proper tape seals.

- d. Seals and tape must be initialed or signed by the investigator of record. The date of the seal must also be included.

B. **CONTAINER TYPES**

1. Metal Cans

- a. Use only clean, non-rusted, containers. Unused metal cans with tight fitting lids are best. Cans with lids that do not fit, or holes rusted through, may be returned at the discretion of the Forensic Sciences Laboratory .
- b. To combat rusting, gray or other lined cans may be used. Can linings other than epoxy should not be used. Be aware that unlined cans, depending on the contents, are more susceptible to rusting through than most lined cans. No cans should be used for collection of samples until after the Forensic Sciences Laboratory has tested two or three samples for the presence of interferences.
- c. Submit an unused comparison can when lined cans are used.
- d. Cans should not be referred to as "paint cans" on official forms as they did not hold paint. Refer to them as “metal cans”.

2. Plastic Bags or Bottles

- a. Plastic bags acceptable for fire debris evidence submitted to the Forensic Sciences Laboratory are:
 - i. Polyester bags, polyamide (nylon 11) bags, nylon 6 bags, or

- other specialty plastic bags designated as being appropriate for transport of fire debris;
- ii. Approved only after consultation with the Forensic Sciences Laboratory and only with samples of a size or shape that will not fit into a metal can and provide sufficient headspace for analysis; and
- iii. Puncture and tear free. Punctured bags will be returned.

Note: Plastic bags left in a hot area (such as a car's trunk) for longer than one month may lose chemicals that keep the plastic pliable and will break or crack.

3. Glass jars:

- a. Teflon® lined caps are recommended for any glass jars containing possible ignitable liquids or solvents (non-Teflon® seals that are in contact with ignitable liquids or solvents may dissolve and contaminate samples);
- b. Pre-cleaned glass containers free from hydrocarbon residue are preferred (used Mason jars, baby food jars, or any previously used jar is **not** acceptable);
- c. Submit an unused comparison jar, if possible, to ensure that there is no contamination inherent to the jar; and
- d. Remember that glass will break (use care in the storage and transport of glass jars).

4. **NEVER fill a container to more than seventy-five percent (75%) of capacity. DO NOT** over-stuff containers. The method used for fire debris analysis in the Forensic Sciences Laboratory for recovering ignitable liquid residues requires an adequate headspace above the debris for the volatilization of trace ignitable liquids. **If the container is too full, the quality of the fire debris analysis will suffer.** For other evidence, the 50% to 75% rule will accommodate minor off-gassing of the sample. Please refer to Image 2 below for clarification.



Image 2. Example of a proper amount of sample inside the container (Left) and an improper amount of sample inside of the container (Right).

C. UNSUITABLE CONTAINERS FOR FIRE DEBRIS:

1. Paper bags as most other polymers, other than poly amides or other specialty “fire debris” bags, are completely permeable to the loss of ignitable liquid or contamination of the matrix from a nearby source;
2. Plastic containers, including cans with plastic lids, gaskets, or plastic bags;
3. Previously used containers, such as pickle jars, which could contain traces of contaminating substance;
4. Containers that may be contaminated by manufacturing process residues; or
5. Nylon bags other than those noted above unless the lab has tested the item.

Contact the Forensic Sciences Laboratory to test other products for contamination at (850) 539-2700. IF IN DOUBT, contact the Forensic Sciences Laboratory for advice.

IV. SUBMISSION

A. GENERAL SUBMISSION AND SHIPPING REQUIREMENTS

1. Submit separate items of evidence in individual containers. Several samples in plastic bags or small vials sealed into one large sealed can or other air-tight container will cause cross-contamination. Items packaged together in this manner will be treated as a single submission. All items submitted must be related to the case in particular, but items may be submitted which are not to be subjected to testing at the discretion of the submitting agent. The Forensic Sciences Laboratory shall include the item on its internal paperwork and the final report showing that no testing was performed.
2. Put only one case (one or more samples) in each box, so that, if one item

leaks, it will only affect that particular case.

3. Use plain boxes:

- a. Labels must not imply the box contains specific ignitable liquids since the identity of an ignitable liquid will not be confirmed until after Laboratory analysis (unless they are standards purchased as control samples for comparison);
- b. Avoid writing information on the exterior of the box that is not specific to the case; and
- c. Do not reuse boxes returned by the Forensic Sciences Laboratory.

4. Do not delay shipping the evidence to the Forensic Sciences Laboratory. The time between the fire, sealing of the evidence in the container, and shipping to the Forensic Sciences Laboratory can affect the FSL's ability to recover any ignitable liquid. It is best to collect and send the samples as soon as possible.

5. Liquid samples must be placed in clean, glass vials with screw-on lids. **DO NOT** use rubber-stoppered serum vials. **DO NOT** fill the container more than 50% full.

- a. **DO NOT send more than one-half a fluid ounce (15 milliliters) of a liquid to the Forensic Sciences Laboratory.** Add sufficient absorbent material (paper towel, gauze pad, etc.) to the liquid sample in the vial to take up all the free liquid. Seal the vial lid. **DO NOT** use paraffin to secure the lid. Tamper evident tape must be used. The vial should then be packaged with additional absorbent material and sealed inside a pint or quart can for secondary containment. This precaution avoids and virtually eliminates the potential spillage and loss of the suspected liquid. **REMEMBER** to submit comparison samples of any absorbent material used to absorb free liquids.

6. Cans and containers found at the scene should have any liquid removed. If the liquid is suspected of being an ignitable liquid which is either flammable or combustible, follow the instructions in section 5 above. Seal the holes on the container with a cork stopper and tape (or other impervious and insoluble method), then place the evidence into an approved container of appropriate size.

CAUTION! If the can is suspected to have fingerprints, do not use a plastic bag, but package it according to Florida Department of Law Enforcement (FDLE) or Federal Bureau of Investigations (FBI) procedures. It will not be appropriate for ignitable liquid analysis. It is the investigator's responsibility to choose the forensic test that would provide the "best evidence." Techniques for preparation of fire debris samples are non-invasive and can be modified to be performed without the application of heat. Thus, it may

be possible to request fire debris analysis first. If so, the sample will be returned following testing so the investigator may submit it to FDLE or another laboratory for print processing.

7. Tissue and body parts should be preserved **only** by freezing the sample. Caution the coroner or medical examiner that you do not want any preservatives placed on the tissue. Contact the Forensic Sciences Laboratory **BEFORE** shipping. The tissue should first be frozen and packed in a sealed ice chest

Water Ice and Dry Ice are not recommended, as there are distinct shipping issues with either. Freezing, followed by overnight hand or courier delivery, allows the frozen items to slowly thaw. They will then be ready for analysis when they arrive at the Forensic Sciences Laboratory .

8. Body parts or other items with the potential to have been contaminated by bodily fluids (such as a victim's or suspect's clothing) **must** be labeled as containing a **BIOHAZARD** before shipping to the Forensic Sciences Laboratory.
9. Once the sample has been selected and placed in a container, seal the container tightly in a manner that will prevent the possibility of the evaporation of any volatile liquid or chemical residues or the contamination of the evidence sample.
10. Mark the outside of the container with your initials, the incident location, your agency case number, the contents, and the location where found. This information may be placed either on an evidence label or written directly on the container's surface using a permanent marker.

Other valuable information that may be included: the incident date, the date and time the sample was collected, and your exhibit number. Please be certain to leave some room on the container for the laboratory to place its own markings.

B. GETTING YOUR EVIDENCE TO THE LABORATORY

1. Whichever method of delivery you use, you must be certain that the requirements for a proper chain-of-custody are fulfilled.
2. **Hand Delivery** - The Forensic Sciences Laboratory is open between 8:00 am to 5:00 pm, Monday through Friday. If you are delivering the evidence yourself, or if you are having it transported by another investigator, please plan to arrive within that time period. If, due to an unusual circumstance, evidence cannot be delivered within those time periods, please call the Forensic Sciences Laboratory at 850-539-2700 to make alternate arrangements. Submissions of sample evidence must be accompanied by a

completed Sample Submission Form, Form DFS-K1-1096, Rev. 7/18/2024, incorporated by reference in Rule 69D-5.001, Florida Administrative Code (F.A.C.). Copies of the Sample Submission Form are available at the Forensic Sciences Laboratory or may be downloaded from the Forensic Sciences Laboratory website at <https://www.myfloridacfo.com/division/difs/forensic-services>.

3. **Courier** - A completed Form DFS-K1-1096, Sample Submission Form, Rev. 7/18/2024, <http://www.flrules.org/Gateway/reference.asp?No=Ref->
, incorporated by reference in Rule 69D-5.001, F.A.C., must accompany the evidence. Only certified carrier services should be used (example: United Parcel Services, Federal Express, and United States Postal Service). Samples must be traceable through the carrier such as having a certified or registered mail receipt number. Shipped items must meet Federal Department of Transportation requirements as well as company specific policies. If known dangerous goods are being shipped, there are restrictions. It may be best to ship these items by ground or to consider hand delivery. The Sample Submission Form may be obtained by writing to the Forensic Sciences Laboratory at 38 Academy Drive, Havana, Florida 32333 or by downloading it from the Forensic Sciences Laboratory's website at <https://www.myfloridacfo.com/division/difs/forensic-services>.

C. SAMPLE SUBMISSION FORM

By completely and properly filling out the Sample Submission Form, Form DFS-K1-1096, Rev. 7/18/2024, (available on the Criminal Investigation Division's Website at [Sample Submission Form](#)), the investigator is documenting all the information necessary for the Criminal Investigation Division (Division) to track and process the case. The Sample Submission Form will also provide a chain of custody for the evidence's receipt and return. The current Sample Submission Form, Form DFS-K1-1096, Rev. 7/18/2024, must be utilized and completed in full for evidence to be properly logged in the Forensic Sciences Laboratory's computerized laboratory information management system.

To help you to learn about the Sample Submission Form, the following information is provided. Please refer to the Sample Submission form contained in this guide.

Note: Most fire debris samples are shipped to the Forensic Sciences Laboratory contained in unlined metal cans. Unlined cans will begin to rust through and eventually will breach the container exposing the contents to potential contamination, sometimes within only a few days. Lined cans may be used, but are often contaminated with treatment of the lining by the manufacturer. Therefore, it is critical to test samples from each batch in order to determine whether a contaminant is present. The Division makes every effort to quickly turnaround its analysis of this evidence by performing a vapor extraction procedure on the cans of fire debris. Once the Forensic Sciences Laboratory has extracted the vapors from the can onto an activated carbon strip (ACS), the ACS becomes the evidence that the Forensic

Sciences Laboratory tests and archives. The Forensic Sciences Laboratory will return all submitted items to any submitting agencies that fall outside of the Department of Financial Services (DFS), Bureau of Fire, Arson & Explosives Investigations (BFAEI), or non-BFAEI agencies. For BFAEI and other CID submissions, the submitted items will be transferred to Long-Term Storage and recorded in ACISS©. Final decisions on the samples will be handled in ACISS© and are outside of the laboratory's control.

1. Mark the appropriate box to indicate whether this is a **New Case** or **Additional Samples** to an older case submission.
 - a. Include the case number of the original case for additional items. This way the Forensic Sciences Laboratory can ensure that the same analyst works on all associated samples.
2. **Suspected Homicide or Fatality** – If there is a death associated with the fire, check the box marked “fatality,” if the death is suspected to have been as a result of a homicide, check “Suspect Homicide.”
3. **Special Testing** – Are there additional or unusual testing issues that must be considered with your evidence? These may range from the need to preserve the evidence for print or DNA testing by another laboratory to a request for the laboratory to include the physical properties of any chemicals identified in the report.
4. **RUSH Triage and Request Criteria** – RUSH requests may be granted if the request meets the following criteria:
 - a. Homicide or Fatality - If a fatality occurred in the fire it will be given rush priority. If the fatality is a suspected homicide, please indicate.
 - b. Injured first responders or citizens from any phase of the fire (including suppression, investigation, or clean-up) or scene examination.
 - c. The suspect is in custody or is a serious flight risk.
 - d. The property involved is a house of worship or historical property.
 - e. Active threats exist or suspected serial crimes involved.
 - f. Major events with significant dollar losses.
 - g. Suspect in custody/impending court.
 - h. Other situations which must be appealed to and approved by the Lab Chief.

5. **Laboratory Assigned #** – Leave this space blank unless you are sending an addition to a previous submission, and you know the laboratory case number associated with your case.
6. **Submitting Agency Case #** – Type in **YOUR agency's case number** for the case. This is a necessary identifier for the FSL's database. **DO NOT** use a dispatch number.
7. **Submitting Agent** – First and last name of the investigator, detective, or agent of record. If information may be released to any person other than the submitting agent, indicate in this area or in the remarks area the name(s) of any other person who may receive such information.
8. **Email** – The submitting agent's email address. In most instances the laboratory report will be emailed, unless the submitter specifically requests a mailed hard copy.
9. **Agency Name** – The name of the agency for whom the submitting agent works.
10. **Tel. #** – The submitting agent's full office/desk telephone number, please include area code and extensions.
11. **Agency Address** – The complete address (street, city, and zip code) of the agency location where reports and evidence may be shipped.
12. **Cell #** – The submitting agent's full cellular telephone number, please include area code.
13. **Incident Address** – The full address of the location where the incident occurred or where the evidence was taken. Include street address, city or village, and zip code. If it is a fire involving a movable object (car, boat, motorcycle), provide a description of where the object was found.
14. **Nature of Incident** – Description of any suspected crime and type of property damaged (e.g. "suspicious fire", "structure fire", "vehicle fire", "explosion", "criminal damaging," etc.).
15. **Incident Date** - The date the incident occurred.
16. **List of laboratory tests** – The following list indicates the types of tests performed by the FSL. The submitter must identify on the "List of Evidence Submitted" the appropriate letter code(s) associated with the test(s) below to designate the manner of testing requested:

(A) – **Determine presence and identity of ignitable liquid residues:** The Forensic Sciences Laboratory will conduct an analysis to determine the presence and identity of any ignitable liquid in the evidence sample.

(C) – **Comparison Sample:** The Forensic Sciences Laboratory will use the material to compare with other items and materials being analyzed. The comparison sample should be unburned material from the fire scene identical to the suspect sample and which the investigator is relatively certain contains no ignitable liquid. It may also be a known liquid or other material, obtained by the investigator, to be compared with the unknown. This also includes any unused cans or other materials such as gloves coming in contact with the evidence. Samples should be isolated and submitted for testing before being placed into use by Detectives.

(E/I) – **Explosives/Incendiaries:** The Forensic Sciences Laboratory will run a battery of tests to determine the presence and identity of any unreacted materials or the presence of any residues consistent with explosives or incendiaries.

NOTE: This service is not included in the Forensic Sciences Laboratory's scope of accreditation scope.

(CL) – **Unidentified Chemicals/Clandestine Laboratory:** The Forensic Sciences Laboratory will analyze oxidizers, salts, solvents, acids, and caustics found in certain crime scenes for chemical identification. Drugs (controlled substances or over-the-counter medications) must not be submitted and **will not be accepted.**

NOTE: This service is not included in the Laboratory's scope of accreditation.

(HO) – **Hold Only:** No Test Requested; The Forensic Sciences Laboratory will hold items without testing to maintain with the other evidence to preserve the chain-of- custody.

(V) – **Video/Digital Analysis:** The Laboratory will open the media, render it readable (if possible), and extract images and information that will aid an investigation.

NOTE: This service is not included in the Laboratory's scope of accreditation.

17. **List of Evidence Submitted** – Provide a complete description of each item of evidence, which, depending on the evidence submitted, may include container type and size, contents, and location obtained.

a. **Use only one line for each piece of evidence.**

- b. Do not refer to suspect liquids by name (gasoline, kerosene, etc.), unless the liquid was personally purchased by the submitter as a control sample. Simply identify any suspect liquids as a liquid.
- 18. **Test Requested** – Indicate the test letter code (see 18) to be performed on each item submitted. Typically, only one test per item will be indicated. If more than one type of test is needed, it may be necessary to decide which is of greater value as some tests will interfere with others. The investigator should contact the Forensic Sciences Laboratory in advance of making multiple test requests.
- 19. **Chain of Custody** – This area will show the chain of custody of the evidence from the time it is collected, through submission to the Forensic Sciences Laboratory, to the time it is either returned or stored by the Forensic Sciences Laboratory.
 - a. **Print Agent Name** – The printed name of the individual initiating an action.
 - b. **Agent Signature** – The signature of the person on the “Print Agent Name” line.
 - c. **Transfer** – The action taken. e.g., "sent to lab," "received by lab."
 - d. **Date and Time** – The date and time of the action (the time is not essential as you may not know when the item was picked up by the courier service).
- 20. **Remarks** – This section is for explanations or additional comments by the submitting agent about the case. Remarks can often help the analyst in examining the case. If a canine team was used to assist with the sample selection, this section would be an appropriate place to note that fact.

This section should also be used to request RUSH processing of evidence, including the reasons for such request.
- 21. **For Forensic Sciences Laboratory use only: (Received Via, Returned Via, etc.)** – This area will be used by the Forensic Sciences Laboratory to note additional information

D. SAMPLE DISPOSITION

The room available in the Forensic Sciences Laboratory’s evidence intake and holding area is limited. All case samples submitted by agencies outside of the Criminal Investigations Division will be returned to the submitter. Case samples submitted by the Criminal Investigations Division, Bureau of Fire Arson and

Explosion Investigations following completion of the case and preparation of a carbon membrane extract, will be transferred to Long-Term Storage with a property report created in ACISS© immediately after the transfer. The final decisions of the samples, retention or destruction, will be determined by the submitter in ACISS©, and outside of the Forensic Sciences Laboratory's control.

V. ANALYSIS

A. FIRE DEBRIS

1. It is beyond the scope of this document to completely explain the processes and chemistry involved in all laboratory analyses. Since a majority of the forensic requests sent to the Forensic Sciences Laboratory focus on the recovery and identification of ignitable liquids, this section will attempt to highlight the most important parts of the process. Thus, when you receive your results from the Forensic Sciences Laboratory you will have a better understanding of how the results were obtained.
2. Your evidence is received and secured in a locked evidence room. All necessary information concerning the case, based on the information provided on the submission form, is entered into the Forensic Sciences Laboratory's information management system (known as STARLIMS). The case is then assigned to an analyst. The analyst is given the evidence from storage and prepares it for analysis.
3. For fire debris, the analyst records information concerning the evidence in the STARLIMS (description, status of seal, etc.).
4. The extraction of any ignitable liquid residues from the debris sample can be achieved through several processes. The Forensic Sciences Laboratory uses a method called Passive Headspace Concentration, where the ignitable liquid vapors are released from the fire debris and concentrated on a carbon membrane placed in the vapor space above the debris. The analyst places an activated carbon strip (membrane) in the vapor space of the evidence can. The can will be heated at approximately 66° C for approximately 16 hours.
 - a. In instances where the concentration of ignitable liquid is so strong in the debris that an analyst can smell it when opening the can inside a fume hood, the analyst may simply hang the strip and allow it to adsorb overnight or a shorter period of time.
 - b. The Forensic Sciences Laboratory has experimentally determined 66° C for 16 hours to be the optimum time and temperature to cause trapped traces of ignitable liquid molecules to pass into the vapor state and attach themselves to the carbon strip.
 - c. The carbon strip is then removed, placed in a glass vial, and carbon

disulfide (CS₂) is added. The carbon disulfide is a solvent that is extremely efficient at removing the extracted ignitable liquids from the carbon strip. The result is a liquid extract that will be tested by instrumental methods.

5. Occasionally, an ignitable liquid is submitted in liquid form. In most instances the sample will be prepared by taking a small portion and dissolving it in a solvent. This is a simple dilution. The analyst has the discretion to spot a sample of the liquid in the bottom of a can and hang a carbon membrane to observe how the ignitable liquid will adsorb onto the strip. The extract or dilution will be treated as a sub-sample of evidence and marked accordingly. In addition, it shall be subject to tracking its chain of custody from creation to archival or return to the submitter or designee.
6. The preferred instrument for fire debris analysis begins with a gas chromatograph. The use of gas chromatography allows the components of these complex mixtures to be separated by their volatility and molecular size. Ignitable liquids are mixtures of many different substances (for example, gasoline contains over 400 chemicals). Once separated, the components are introduced into a detector. All samples are analyzed on a Mass Spectral Detector (GC/MS). This technique can identify ignitable liquids from the extremely volatile and simple like methyl alcohol to the very complex and relatively large molecules found in deteriorated diesel fuel. GC/MS provides a three-dimensional picture. Graphs are created by plotting the time it takes for an individual chemical to pass through the gas chromatograph and into the detector. The detector's response is created as the various molecules enter. The response is directly proportional to the concentration of that particular component in the sample. Each component will be bombarded by a beam of electrons and made to break apart into various fragments of different sizes. The combination of fragments produced is indicative of a particular chemical or class of chemicals and is called a mass spectrum (MS)
7. The graph showing the total number of molecular fragments produced by the detector against the particular time they exited from the chromatograph is called a total ion chromatogram (TIC). For various complex ignitable liquids, the TIC by itself may be characteristic of different ignitable liquids. However, the value of GC/MS is that the TIC can be further examined by dividing it into selected molecular ion profiles. Once the total ion chromatogram of a sample is collected, the computer can reconstruct the chromatogram showing only those chemical components fragment. By analyzing a large number of different fragments with these reconstructed ion chromatograms, the different blends of chemical compounds characteristic of particular ignitable liquid classifications are determined, and identifications can be made.
8. The reasons that analyses are not always clear, are complex and depend on

numerous variables. Ignitable liquids differ from each other by the number and proportions of their components. Lacquer thinners are mostly composed of smaller molecules with high volatility. While gasoline contains many high volatiles, it also contains components of lower volatility and extends across a wider range. Kerosene contains few high volatiles, but many mid-range and low volatiles. These are examples of only three types of ignitable liquids. There are many others that may contain very different components anywhere along the range.

9. Ignitable liquids lose most of their volatile components as they are exposed to heat from fires or evaporation. This deterioration changes the pattern in the chromatogram. The analyst must be able to understand the deterioration variable in order to interpret the chromatogram. In most cases, even with 95% deteriorated gasoline, enough components remain to allow the analyst to identify the pattern.
10. Whether extraction has any effect on any remaining volatile material in the sample can be difficult to determine because the answer is often dependent upon the initial concentration of the ignitable liquid in the debris. Concentration of any trace ignitable liquids can only be determined after laboratory analyses; the Forensic Sciences Laboratory cannot guarantee that re-extraction will show the same levels of ignitable liquid. If the concentration of ignitable liquid is high in the sample, there should not be an issue with re-extraction provided the can was properly re-sealed and has not rusted through. If the concentration is very low, it is possible that the extraction onto the ACS could reduce the concentration of volatiles to the point where a re-extraction could be effective.
11. Possibly the greatest interference in analyses of fire debris evidence is pyrolysis, or the thermal decomposition of materials resulting in pyrolysis products (where chemical compounds that make up the material thermally decompose into combustible gases and charcoal) formed in the fires. Most everything in our homes, at our work, inside our vehicles or covering our bodies are made from very complex organic molecules. Consequently, most materials in a fire scene contain inherent organic chemicals. Clothes, carpet, bedding, upholstery, and even the human body contain large complex organic molecules. As these complex molecules burn, they may break apart into a variety of smaller molecules. Many of these same molecules also occur in ignitable liquids. These molecules are extracted during the process for recovering ignitable liquid residues, along with the ignitable liquid molecules. While the interference patterns are usually different in proportion and composition from those of ignitable liquids, the concentration of interference products in a sample of debris may be higher than the concentration of ignitable liquid residue. If this occurs, the ignitable liquid pattern may seem to be obscured and may be unrecognized on initial examination. This is where GC/MS is valuable. The utilization of

reconstructed ion chromatograms and the identification of particular target compounds can aid the analyst in distinguishing an ignitable liquid from a pyrolysis product created by the materials at the scene.

12. Once the appropriate techniques have been employed and quality assurance requirements have been met, the analyst enters the results of the analysis into STARLIMS and a report is generated. The digital case file is then reviewed by another qualified fire debris analyst. Both a technical (examination and interpretation of the data, appropriateness of the testing, and the presence of required technical information) and administrative (structure and wording of the report and completeness of documentation) review is completed. If discrepancies are found, suggestions for correction or additional information to be added are made to the original analyst. Once both the analyst and reviewer are in agreement, a report is released. Forensic Sciences Laboratory policies require the Laboratory Chief (if qualified in fire debris analysis) to act as a final arbiter if an agreement cannot be reached between the analyst and the reviewer. If the Laboratory Chief is not qualified in fire debris analysis, the FSL must reach out to a neighboring, accredited Forensic Science Laboratory to act as a final arbiter.
13. Your case belongs to you. The Forensic Sciences Laboratory will not release information about your case to anyone but you, someone you authorize, someone above you in your chain of command, or an appropriate officer of the court, while the investigation is still active. The Forensic Sciences Laboratory will strive to maintain confidentiality at all times. STARLIMS is utilized by the Forensic Sciences Laboratory has several levels of passwords and security controls. The facility is kept secured, and only authorized personnel may enter. The facility is further divided into areas or rooms that are more secure than others. All of these security requirements are in effect to provide quality service to its “customers.”

B. VIDEO EVIDENCE

1. Digital Images are accepted from only the Bureau of Fire, Arson, and Explosive Investigations (BFAEI). Video Media may be sent to the Bureau of Fire, Arson, and Explosives Analysis by any public law enforcement investigator. Items may be sent by mail, via courier service (i.e., Federal Express, United Postal Service, Airborne Express, etc.), or hand delivered. Digital Images are received, placed into an electronic folder, named with the appropriate agency number associated with the images, then assigned to the investigator of record. A separate digital image log-in form is maintained. When video processing requests are accepted, a case file with the case documentation will be initiated.
2. Digital images provided by investigators of BFAEI are posted by the investigator to the Department’s network via the PhotoDump folders. The field investigator will notify the Forensic Sciences Laboratory that the items

in their folder may be moved to secure storage and their folders emptied. On rare occasions, the BFAI field investigator may submit a CD, DVD, or other media for transfer of images to secure storage.

3. Forensic video processing uses equipment, including playback devices, such as video cassette recorders, CD / DVD players, digital media players, or monitors. The Forensic Sciences Laboratory has forensic video analysis system(s) for processing video that may only be used by properly trained personnel. Once received and documented, the process begins with the creation of a forensic video/audio worksheet.
4. The analysis of video evidence begins with the visual inspection of the evidence where the condition of the analog or digital media or equipment to be examined is noted. Conditions, as well as corrective actions taken, are noted. For the media, any record-protection, or write- protection device must be enabled, then the appropriate playback device(s) for the video evidence is selected.
5. At this point, it must be determined if the submission is an original or copy. If considered a copy, the Forensic Sciences Laboratory will contact the submitter and request the original. If the copy is the best available, the analysis will proceed. Because the media may archive considerable video information, the Forensic Sciences Laboratory must attempt to locate the video segment area of interest as indicated in the submitter's request for analysis. If audio evidence is recorded in conjunction with the video evidence, the Forensic Sciences Laboratory must ensure the audio evidence is noted, and, if possible, analyzed with the video evidence. The Forensic Sciences Laboratory will then generate an uncompressed or lossless compressed digital copy of the video segment area of interest for analysis. This maintains the original submission without affecting it.
6. When working with video evidence, it is necessary to note available details regarding the type of system used to generate the recording submitted. Available details include, but are not limited to:
 - a. Number of camera views
 - b. Time/Date stamp if available
 - c. Record mode if available
 - d. Type of compression used if available
 - e. Color mode
 - f. Processing equipment (e.g., multiplexer, split-screen)

7. The Forensic Sciences Laboratory will then process the digital copy using the appropriate tools available in the forensic video analysis system. The processes may include, but are not limited to:
 - a. Levels and contrast adjustments
 - b. Field de-interlacing
 - c. Camera view isolation
 - d. Real-time processing
 - e. Image stabilization
 - f. Magnification
 - g. Subject highlighting
 - h. Frame averaging
 - i. Channel isolation
 - j. Audio clarification
8. Once processed, the Forensic Sciences Laboratory will determine a suitable derivative output of the processed digital copy. The output may include, but is not limited to:
 - a. Analog videotape
 - b. Digital media
 - c. Print media
9. The Forensic Sciences Laboratory will also maintain an archive of the digital copy and electronic versions of the derivative output. These back-up devices include, but are not limited to:
 - a. Recordable only CDs
 - b. Recordable only DVDs
 - c. External hard drives
 - d. Digital media tape (enable any record-protection device)
 - e. Analog media tape (enable any record-protection device)

C. **REPORTING**

1. Forensic Sciences Laboratory reports for each case are scanned as Adobe™ documents and emailed to the original submitter and any other person identified on the submission document as being a key collaborator in the investigation. The Forensic Sciences Laboratory will work with the BFAEI's ACISS© database team to determine if there is a possible way to upload this report to the ACISS© files associated with the case. The Forensic Sciences Laboratory will include a copy of the original submission form and, for fire debris, a reference sheet giving examples of the eight classes of ASTM ignitable liquids. Reports will include details of the methods utilized in the analyses, which may vary depending on the type of case. The report will detail essential information required to answer the fundamental question: “what is in the sample?”. The report may not include all information available in the digital case file. Any submitter may request a copy of all documents in the digital case file. These documents may include the preparation form describing the extraction and preparation of the evidence, the date of preparation, the hand-written notes and comments by the analyst, the technical and administrative reviews, correspondence regarding the case, the intra-laboratory transfer log, the shipping labels for the evidence, and the data from the Forensic Sciences Laboratory’s instruments used by the analyst to make determinations, including the dates the data was collected or printed.

VI. **COMPLAINTS**

- A.** When any complaint is lodged against the Forensic Sciences Laboratory or Forensic Sciences Laboratory personnel, an investigation will be conducted by the next level of supervision. This investigation shall be documented on a Corrective Action Request (CAR) Form. Either the Laboratory Chief, the Quality Manager, or higher supervisory level manager will acknowledge receipt of the complaint and provide the complainant with progress reports and the outcome.
- B.** The outcomes to be communicated to the complainant shall be made by, or reviewed and approved by, individual(s) not involved in the original laboratory activities in question. Whenever possible, the Forensic Sciences Laboratory will give formal notice of the end of the complaint handling to the complainant.
- C.** The complaint process addresses acknowledgment of the complaint, progress reports, formal notice of the end of the complaint, or the outcomes being made, reviewed, or approved by an individual not involved in the original activities in question.

APPENDIX 1

I. GLOSSARY OF TERMS

- A. ACCELERANT – Anything that speeds up a process. In fire investigation, the term “accelerant” refers to ignitable liquids deliberately applied to speed up a fire. Most of these are products of petroleum refining. "Accelerant" is one of the possible uses of ignitable liquid in a fire.
- B. CROSS-CONTAMINATE – When materials from one sample contact material in another. This can be from either physical touching or the inter-mingling of vapors.
- C. EVIDENTIARY VALUE – The value of item as evidence.
- D. GAS CHROMATOGRAPHY– A chemical separations method employing a gas such as hydrogen or helium to cause a vaporized mixture of chemicals to pass through a specialized tube where the mixture of chemicals will be separated. This separation is based on each chemical's tendency to pass over the tube's coating. The resulting graphs are called chromatograms.
- E. IGNITABLE LIQUIDS – Mixtures of organic chemicals with a boiling range above normal ambient temperatures. The mixture may be considered flammable (Flash point below 100° C) or combustible (Flash point above 100° C). Ignitable liquids may be simple such as a single component or complex, such as gasoline (over 400 components).
- F. MASS SPECTROSCOPY – An instrumental technique that can be used as a detector for gas chromatography. As organic chemicals, which have been separated by gas chromatography, exit the gas chromatograph, they are bombarded with electrons. This causes them to fragment (break apart) into distinct patterns. Familiarity with ignitable liquid classes teaches the analyst the various classes of organic compounds contained in ignitable liquids. Re-construction of chromatograms by specific fragments allows the analyst to "see" ignitable liquids that may be otherwise obscured.
- G. OXIDIZERS – Materials that provide oxygen for chemical reactions either with slight heating or at room temperature. In contact with organic chemicals, they can react vigorously to ignite fires or explosions.
- H. PYROLYSIS – The breaking down of complex materials into simpler, smaller materials by oxidation or heating. The smaller materials may often re-combine, depending on conditions, to make different complex molecules.

- I. **TAMPER EVIDENT TAPE** – Specialty tape used to seal evidence that cannot be removed from the container to which it is attached without shredding or tearing.
- J. **VOLATILITY** – The ease that a substance passes from being a solid or a liquid to being a vapor.

APPENDIX 2

I. IGNITABLE LIQUID CLASSIFICATIONS

- A. Report Findings (Based on interpretations from ASTM E1618).
- B. Your report may contain one or more of the following findings. This document is intended as a guide in aiding you to associate the findings with common commercial products.

<u>Classification Name – Analysts must sometimes choose one classification over another by how the item best fits the ASTM description.</u>	<u>Examples – These examples are not exclusive. Marketing of refinery products often results in a single refinery product being sold under a variety of labels.</u>
<u>Gasoline</u>	<u>All grades and brands of automobile gasoline and gasohol (including E85).</u>
<u>Light Petroleum Distillate</u>	<u>Cigarette Lighter Fluid, some Camping Fuels, Stoddard Solvent, Petroleum Ether, Ligroine, and various light commercial solvents.</u>
<u>Medium Petroleum Distillate</u>	<u>Mineral Spirits, some Charcoal Lighters, some Paint Thinners, some Insecticides (as the vehicle for delivering the pesticide), some polishes.</u>
<u>Heavy Petroleum Distillate</u>	<u>Fuel Oil #1, Jet “A” Aviation Fuel, some Charcoal Starters, some Lamp Oils, some Paint Thinners, some Insecticides (as the vehicle for delivering the pesticide) or polish solvents, Kerosene Heater Fuel, Fuel Oil #2, Diesel Fuel, some Lamp Oils, some Tar and Asphalt Removers</u>
<u>Oxygenated Solvents – The laboratory reports the specific chemical(s) identified.</u>	<u>Alcohols (Methyl, Ethyl, Isopropyl), Ketones (Acetone, Methyl Ethyl Ketone).</u>
<u>Isoparaffinic Hydrocarbon Products</u>	<u>Some odorless Charcoal Lighters, some odorless Solvents, some odorless Paint Thinners, some Insecticide or polish solvents, some Lamp Oils.</u>
<u>Normal Paraffinic Products</u>	<u>Specialty Products, some Liquid Candles, some Lamp Oils, some Insecticides (as the vehicle for delivering the pesticide), some polishes.</u>
<u>Aromatic Solvents/ Products</u>	<u>Aromatic Naphtha solvents in paint and plastics, other specialty solvents.</u>

<u>Naphthenic/Paraffinic Products</u>	<u>Some Insecticides (as the vehicle for delivering the pesticide), some lamp oils, Industrial Specialty Solvents</u>
<u>Miscellaneous - Other</u>	<u>Some Blended Products, Some Specialty Products, Turpentine, Single Compounds.</u>
<u>No Ignitable Liquid Determined</u>	<u>There were either no ignitable liquid noted or the compounds seen could not be attributed to an ignitable liquid and may have been the product of pyrolysis of material burned in the scene or extracted from the matrix itself.</u>

- C. For an alternate, but very useful view of the types of ignitable liquids reported as an ASTM classification, please go to www.swgfex.com or <https://ncfs.ucf.edu/>. Select the “Databases” tab. Select the [Ignitable Liquids Reference Collection \(ILRC Database\)](#). Select “Search Database”. This takes you to a searchable database of over 500 commercial products that have been classified by the ASTM system. In the dropdown for the “Classification” box, select the ASTM Classification on your report and then select “Search”. You will have a list where you can scroll through and see all of the brand names of commercial products that fit that classification on the right. There will be variation in the chromatographic patterns depending on how light or heavy the mixture of compounds.

APPENDIX 3

I. COMPLAINTS

A. When any individual, customer, or citizen, wishes to lodge a formal complaint against the Forensic Sciences Laboratory or Forensic Sciences Laboratory Personnel, it shall require an investigation by the next level of supervision.

B. This investigation shall take the form of a Corrective Action Request and be recorded on the Forensic Sciences Laboratory's CAR Form. In order to efficiently process your complaint, the following information is required:

Your Name

Your Title (if you wish to include)

Your mailing address

Your email address

Your Telephone numbers

Date of the Complaint

Nature of the Complaint

When did this occur?

Is this a general complaint concerning the Laboratory?

Is this a complaint concerning an individual?

Please name the individual

Is this a complaint concerning the findings by the Laboratory on its report(s)?

Please indicate the specific laboratory report numbers

Is this a complaint concerning the Laboratory's Policies or Procedures?

Please indicate the specific Policies or Procedures

What resolution to the complaint do you seek?

C. Either the Laboratory Chief, the Quality Manager, or higher supervisory level manager shall acknowledge receipt of your complaint and provide the complainant with progress reports and the outcome of the investigation.

D. The outcomes to be communicated to the complainant shall be made by, or reviewed and approved by, individual(s) not involved in the original Forensic Sciences Laboratory activities in question.

E. Whenever possible, the Forensic Sciences Laboratory shall give formal notice of the end of the complaint handling to the complainant.

APPENDIX 4



Department of Financial Services

Criminal Investigations Division – Forensic Sciences Laboratory

38 Academy Drive, Havana, FL 32333, Phone: 850-539-2700, Fax: 850-539-9662

SAMPLE SUBMISSION FORM (Please complete all relevant blank areas.)			
Submission of samples relinquishes all decisions regarding analytical processing and choice of methods for extraction and analysis to laboratory. Because metal evidence containers will rust and expose the contents to weathering and/or contamination, the laboratory's extract of the debris on carbon membranes becomes the evidence of value. All Bureau of Fire, Arson, and Explosives Investigations' (BFAEI) samples will be stored by the laboratory on-site following analysis and reporting unless the submitter indicates in the remarks below or contacts the lab that it should be returned. All non-BFAEI submitted samples will be returned to submitter following analysis and reporting.			
☐ New Case	☐ Suspect Homicide	☐ Special Testing (explain in Remarks)	Lab Assigned #
☐ Additional Samples	☐ Fatality	☐ RUSH Request (explain in Remarks)	Submitting Agency Case #
Submitting Agent:		Email:	
Agency Name:		Tel. #	
Agency Address:		Cell. #	
Incident Address			
Nature of Incident (Please describe):		Incident date:	
List of Laboratory Tests (Choose one of the letter codes below to be put into the "Test Code" column:			
(A) Determine presence/identity of ignitable liquids	(C) Comparison Sample		
(E/I) Explosives/incendiaries **	(CL) Unidentified Chemicals/Clandestine Lab (no drugs) **		
(HO) Hold only - No test requested	(V) Video/Digital Analysis **		
List of evidence submitted (Container, content, location collected):			Test Code
1.			
2.			
3.			
4.			
5.			
6.			
7.			
8.			
Chain of Custody (Indicate who had possession, to whom or where it was transferred, and when it was done):			
	Print Agent Name	Agent Signature	Transfer
1.			
2.			
3.			
4.			
5.			
6.			
REMARKS (any specific precautions or notes concerning the submission?):			
For lab use only:	Received via:	Returned Via:	Destroyed on:



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** Services not included in accreditation scope

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