

WILTSHIRE POLICE



XXXX – Via email



Police Headquarters

London Road
DEVIZES
Wiltshire
SN10 2DN

disclosure@wiltshire.police.uk

Date: 22nd December 2025

Our ref: FOI 2025-1113

Dear XXXX,

I write in connection with your request for information dated 24th November regarding the documentation and reporting of digital evidence.

I am required by the Freedom of Information Act 2000 to handle all requests in a manner that is blind as to the identity and motives of the requestor. Any information released as a response to a request is regarded as being published and therefore in the public domain without caveat.

Following receipt of your request, research was conducted by South West Forensics.

Your request for information has now been considered, and I am able to respond as follows.

You wrote (and our response):

I would like to request the following information regarding the documentation and reporting of digital evidence. To support consistent interpretation, the terms used in this request are defined in the glossary below.

1. Is a Chain of Custody (CoC) and/or Audit Trail (AT) recorded when digital evidence is processed and analysed?

Yes. All continuity of the exhibit is recorded from the point of seizure in accordance with Sections 21 and 22 of the Police and Criminal Evidence Act 1984. Within the Digital Forensics environments, further records are retained to record the exhibit movements and equipment used to acquire data and the equipment used for the subsequent examination of the data. (hardware and software versions) in accordance with our accreditation standards to ISO 17025.

(If your force uses other documentation or logging mechanisms that perform the same or similar function to a CoC or AT, even if not labelled as such, please include these within the scope of the response.)

If yes, please provide:

Keeping Wiltshire Safe

- I. Details of the information that is recorded as part of the CoC and AT.

With regards to the continuity of evidence, this is compliant with Sections 21 and 22 of the Police and Criminal Evidence Act 1984. This includes but is not limited to: date and time of seizure. Location seized. Officer seizing. A full continuity label for any officer taking possession of the exhibit. Exhibit placed in a sealed, tamper proof bag.

- II. Details of any technical or procedural methods used to record or track the CoC and AT. Kindly specify if the process is automated, manual, or hybrid.

Once the exhibit is transferred into the possession of a DFU officer, our case management system and Quality Management Systems record information such as:

- DFU storage location.
 - Forensic workstation used to acquire the data from the exhibit.
 - Software and version used to acquire the data from the exhibit. (Validated software).
 - Dependent upon the exhibit type and/or data required, the next steps could be automated through MAGNET AUTOMATE or allocated to an investigator to examine. Either steps are recorded in our CMS to detail the equipment (hardware) and software used to conduct the examination.
- III. Has your force conducted any internal evaluations or comparisons regarding the efficiency, accuracy or reliability of automated, manual, or hybrid reporting methods? If yes, please provide copies or references.

All processes are validated and tested independently by UKAS every year and internally by our staff. Equipment and process validation checks are completed by our staff to meet the Forensic Science Regulators codes and requirements under 17025 – laboratory testing. This includes maintenance schedules and new equipment validation and testing before authorisation to use in live casework.

- IV. Please indicate whether any verification or validation procedures are in place to confirm that digital evidence, upon acquisition, is a genuine and unmodified record rather than a synthetically generated or manipulated.

All processes are validated and tested independently by UKAS every year and internally by our staff. Equipment and process validation checks are completed by our staff to meet the Forensic Science Regulators codes and requirements under 17025 – laboratory testing. This includes maintenance schedules and new equipment validation and testing before authorisation to use in live casework.

- V. Any guidelines, practice directions, or policies guiding the documentation of CoC and AT for digital evidence, including any templates or forms. Kindly attach or reference related documents.

The information you are requesting is exempt by virtue of Section 21 of the Freedom of Information Act 2000 – Information accessible to applicant by other means.

The following links will direct you to the relevant legislation:

[Exhibits | The Crown Prosecution Service](#)

Keeping Wiltshire Safe

[Police and Criminal Evidence Act 1984 \(S.21\)](#)

[Police and Criminal Evidence Act 1984 \(S.22\)](#)

VI. Is the maintenance of a CoC and AT managed in-house or outsourced?

Police officers and Police staff are competent and trained in the seizure and handling of evidence.

- a. If in-house, provide details of the responsible role(s) or department(s), including any training materials or internal guidance relevant to this task.

Police officers and Police staff in all operational roles are competent and trained in the seizure and handling of evidence. Exhibit handling is a core role for policing and embedded throughout induction training and ongoing CPD training in various courses, competency reviews, accreditation requirements and evidence production.

Please reference the College of Policing for police officer training syllabus. Forensic staff are trained as per the competency training documentation which is tested by ourselves and UKAS. See attached at the end of this document.

- b. If outsourced, please provide the name of the provider(s), a description of their role, and any related contract document(s).

I am satisfied that all the relevant information has been passed to me and considered in the light of your request within the time constraints applicable under the legislation.

Wiltshire Police would like to thank you for the interest that you have shown in the Force.

Yours sincerely

Force Disclosure Decision Maker

South-West Forensics

Data Forensic Unit

Exhibits

Standard Operating Procedure

DF-P-1



Document Reference: DF-P-1 Issue 25
Issue Date: 01/05/25
Authorised By: [REDACTED]
Change Request Number: 108-25

Uncontrolled if copied or printed

Contents

1	Purpose	4
1.1	Definitions	4
2	Procedure	5
2.1	Exhibit Receipt	5
2.1.1	Exhibit Hazards and Warnings.....	5
2.1.2	Booking Exhibits into DFU	6
2.1.3	Acceptance Issues.....	7
2.1.4	Rejecting Exhibits.....	8
2.1.5	Exhibit Tampering.....	8
2.2	Exhibits under DFU Control.....	8
2.2.1	Exhibit Handling	8
2.2.2	Continuity.....	8
2.2.3	Digital Exhibit References	9
2.2.4	Labelling.....	9
2.2.5	Movements.....	9
2.2.6	Seals	9
2.2.7	Storage.....	10
2.2.8	Sub-Exhibiting.....	10
2.2.9	DFU Generated Exhibits	11
2.3	Exhibit Return.....	11
2.3.1	Booking Exhibits Out of DFU	12
2.3.2	Exhibits Containing Illegal Material	12
2.3.3	Additional Considerations	12

Document Reference: DF-P-1 Issue 25

Issue Date: 01/05/25

Authorised By: [REDACTED]

Change Request Number: 108-25

Uncontrolled if copied or printed

2.4	Transferring Exhibits Outside of DFU	13
2.4.1	SWF Laboratories (Internal)	13
2.4.2	External Agencies (External)	13
2.5	Disposal of Exhibits	14
2.6	Legal Professional Privilege	14
2.7	Defence Examinations	14
3	Referenced Documentation	14

1 Purpose

To define the procedure for the correct receipt and safe handling of exhibits to ensure security, continuity, integrity, and storage within DFU.

1.1 Definitions

DFU	Digital Forensics Unit
FSM	Forensic Staff Member
SWF	South West Forensics
OIC	Officer in the Case
PPE	Personal Protective Equipment
DNA	Deoxyribonucleic acid

Document Reference: DF-P-1 Issue 25

Issue Date: 01/05/25

Authorised By: [REDACTED]

Change Request Number: 108-25

Uncontrolled if copied or printed

2 Procedure

2.1 Exhibit Receipt

Prior to being received at DFU, exhibits are submitted on FORTRESS and assessed following **DF-P-3.0 Gatekeeping**.

Once a submission has been accepted, exhibits shall be called to DFU. Any FSM can request and/or collect exhibits from their local evidential property store.

Exhibits are received into the laboratory individually or in sealed transit bags/crates by the following methods:

- Courier
- By hand
- Collected from Local Evidential Property Store
- Transfer from another SWF Department.

2.1.1 Exhibit Hazards and Warnings

Some exhibits may be submitted with potentially hazardous conditions present. Details of the hazards should have been brought to the attention of the gatekeeper during the submission process.

If the exhibit is known to have a biohazard (e.g. in a marked bag) and it is determined that hazards have not been discussed at submission, the case will be placed on hold. The exhibits shall be isolated and stored securely while the customer is contacted to discuss the submission. Details of any discussions and decisions made will be recorded on FORTRESS. The exhibit's biohazard status shall be recorded on the "Biohazard" field of the relevant exhibit.

All FSM's have access to PPE which shall be used.

Potentially hazardous exhibits may include:

- **Bio-Hazards**

Exhibits contaminated with any bodily fluids such as blood, semen or faeces or any other poor sanitisation risks.

- **Chemical Hazards**

Exhibits contaminated with/or have been near liquids such as acids, solvents or flammable liquids or chemicals such as Anthrax, fertilisers, or illegal/hallucinogenic substances

- **Other Hazards**

Exhibits subject to other personal risks such as broken and damaged components or known electrical interference

- **Preserve for Fingerprint**

Gloves shall always be used when handling fingerprint preservation exhibits. If the exhibit is required to be left unsealed (e.g. PIN decryption), the FSM shall protect the exhibit with the exhibit bag and clearly identify the device as preserved for fingerprints.

- **Preserve for DNA**

DFU is not configured for DNA preservation and DNA samples should be taken prior to DFU examination. **DF-P-1-Doc-8 Multi-Department Examination – Work Instruction.**

2.1.2 Booking Exhibits into DFU

On arrival to DFU, the receiving FSM shall check the exhibit against the following acceptance criteria:

- The exhibit is in a sealed exhibit bag (or clear bag with an exhibit label) and the packaging and seals are adequate to preserve integrity of the exhibit
- The exhibit continuity information is complete and legible with no conflicting information
- The bag/exhibit label information matches what is recorded on FORTRESS including exhibit number, seal number, property reference, exhibit description.
- Only one device is present in the bag. If an exhibit contains multiple devices, it is the OIC's responsibility to ensure they are separated and sub-exhibited accordingly prior to receipt into the DFU store, unless exhibits are for initial triage.
- The exhibit and/or case has been accepted on FORTRESS.

Document Reference: DF-P-1 Issue 25

Issue Date: 01/05/25

Authorised By: [REDACTED]

Uncontrolled if copied or printed

Change Request Number: 108-25

- Duplicate exhibit references are not present on any other exhibits for the same case
- Biohazards, DNA and Fingerprint warnings are reflected on the physical exhibit and FORTRESS where applicable
- If any additional safety concerns are identified e.g. blood, sharp pieces, this shall be recorded on FORTRESS

For exhibits that pass the acceptance criteria check, the FSM shall complete the following on FORTRESS:

- Update the exhibit “Movements” tab with the new location of the exhibit
If delivered directly to DFU, the FSM shall use the “Courier” field to record the time and date of delivery as well as the details of the person delivering the exhibit
- Change the exhibit status to ‘Received’
- Where all accepted exhibits for a case are now received, change the case status to ‘Received’

2.1.3 Acceptance Issues

When reviewing the acceptance criteria (2.1.2 Booking Exhibits into DFU), discrepancies between the physical exhibit and FORTRESS may be identified. In these situations, the exhibit status shall be changed to “on hold” while awaiting corrective action from the submitting officer.

The FSM shall contact the submitting officer and a record shall be made on FORTRESS.

Exhibits that are awaiting further information or corrective action cannot be allocated for examination. Instead, they shall be placed in the relevant secure store.

Once the requested information or action has been completed, the FSM shall update the status of the case from “On-Hold” and a note will be recorded on FORTRESS.

If the requested information or action has not been completed by the submitting officer within 14 days of notification, the exhibit(s) may be returned as rejected (unless the reason for the delay is agreed).

FSMs responsible for exhibits will regularly check those items placed on hold and progress any that remain outstanding.

Document Reference: DF-P-1 Issue 25

Issue Date: 01/05/25

Authorised By: [REDACTED]

Uncontrolled if copied or printed

Change Request Number: 108-25

Where there is doubt regarding the discrepancies (e.g., where something is clearly a typo), the FSM shall consult the Technical Manager to discuss rectification and justification to continue with the examination. Details of any discussions shall be recorded on FORTRESS.

2.1.4 Rejecting Exhibits

Exhibits shall be rejected for not satisfying any of the points listed in the acceptance criteria (2.1.1 Booking Exhibits in to DFU).

Rejected exhibits shall be returned following local policies and the procedures detailed in (2.4.1 Booking Exhibits Out of DFU).

The FSM shall record the reasons for rejection on FORTRESS and inform the submitting officer using the *“rejected exhibit email template”*.

Records of any communication shall be recorded on FORTRESS.

2.1.5 Exhibit Tampering

If there is any apparent evidence of tampering with an exhibit, it shall be recorded as a non-conformance **QMS-P-8 Non-Conformance** and investigated. If the outcome of the investigation indicates a deliberate attempt has been made to influence the results of the examination, the provider’s top management shall be informed to decide the appropriate escalation. This shall include notifying the Forensic Science Regulator.

2.2 Exhibits under DFU Control

2.2.1 Exhibit Handling

When handling any exhibit within DFU, all FSM’s shall wear the gloves provided.

2.2.2 Continuity

Any time an exhibit is to be removed from its sealed packaging; the FSM shall fill in the exhibit continuity information on the bag/label.

2.2.3 Digital Exhibit References

Within DFU, all records are stored digitally. This means that slashes (/) cannot be used in file naming conventions. Once an exhibit is under DFU control, slashes shall be replaced with dashes (-) for the purpose of digital referencing. Should an exhibit reference have no slashes or dashes, it shall remain the same. For example:

- ABC/1 = ABC-1
- ABC02 = ABC02

2.2.4 Labelling

All exhibits under DFU control shall have a label attached to the packaging that displays the case reference to always ensure unique identification.

When removing an exhibit from its packaging, the FSM shall attach a label displaying the case and exhibit reference to always ensure unique identification.

2.2.5 Movements

When moving an exhibit, the FSM shall update the FORTRESS “Movements” tab for the relevant exhibit to show the new location.

A check shall be made against FORTRESS to ensure the exhibit being moved is as described on FORTRESS.

Should there be a major discrepancy between FORTRESS and the exhibit being handled (e.g., FORTRESS says “computer” and the device is a phone) the FSM shall inform the technical manager and if necessary, contact will be made with the submitting officer.

2.2.6 Seals

Exhibits shall always be resealed using tamperproof tape by the FSM conducting the examination. The supplied tamperproof tape shall be uniquely referenced with a printed serial number. The tape should also leave a tamper void mark if peeled off. Where the tape/sticker does not completely seal the evidence bag, clear Sellotape shall be used, and tamperproof tape placed over the top.

If tamper proof tape is unavailable, brown box tape shall be used to seal the evidence bag. The FSM will write the date, their signature and collar number across the brown tape ensuring it overlaps both the brown tape and evidence bag. Where the above tamperproof tape method be unsuitable, zip tie seals shall be used ensuring they are printed/labelled with unique seal numbers. Previous seals/tape/tags/evidence bags shall be placed into the existing evidence bag and not disposed of. Details of new seal numbers shall be updated on FORTRESS – where brown tape is used, the FSM collar number will be the seal.

2.2.7 Storage

Exhibits received into DFU shall be stored within a secure store or within the laboratory itself. Under no circumstances shall exhibits be left unattended in an insecure area. Exhibits that are not actively being examined shall be stored in a secure store.

Whilst in the exhibit store, exhibits shall remain in sealed bags and will be assigned to exhibit bays.

In the event of an FSM having planned absence, it will be their responsibility to ensure that the exhibit is either reallocated to another FSM or stored away securely until their return. Should the absence be unplanned (e.g. sickness) it will be the responsibility of the relevant Technical Manager to ensure that the submission is dealt with appropriately.

If information is received to say that the examination is no longer required, the Technical Manager shall be informed. Arrangements will be made for the exhibit to be returned as appropriate, and FORTRESS updated to show the “Exhibit Status” field as “Completed”.

2.2.8 Sub-Exhibiting

Any FSM within DFU shall not create sub-exhibits. If an FSM identifies an exhibit that contains other items (e.g. money, credit cards) or devices that require exhibiting, they shall contact the OIC to attend the DFU who will be responsible for separating the devices into separate exhibits. Details of any newly created exhibits requiring a digital examination shall be updated on the relevant case on FORTRESS to reflect any changes. If the FSM is unsure whether an item requires exhibiting, they shall consult the Technical Manager.

There is an exception for multiple data bearing components. When a single exhibit contains multiple data-bearing components (e.g., a computer with multiple hard drives or USB sticks), the examiner shall sub-reference these components.

2.2.9 DFU Generated Exhibits

Where an FSM creates a physical exhibit within DFU (e.g., a USB containing examination reports), it shall be securely stored in a sealed exhibit bag. The FSM shall fill in the exhibit continuity information on the bag/label to include the following information as a minimum:

- A unique exhibit reference to include the initials of the recovering FSM and a sequential number.
- A date of production
- A description including the original exhibit reference of the item the data came from

The FSM shall create a record on the local force property tracking system where applicable.

A digital copy must still be retained on the DFU server with the rest of the case data.

DFU generated physical exhibits shall be issued to the OIC by following the steps in 2.3 Exhibit Return.

2.3 Exhibit Return

At the conclusion of the DFU examination, exhibits shall be resealed, and any new seal numbers recorded on FORTRESS.

The exhibit(s) will either:

- Be placed into the secure store awaiting collection at the conclusion of the case
- Returned to the Local Evidential Property Store

Submitted biohazard Items/exhibits shall be packaged and clearly marked with biohazard tape.

The FSM dealing with the return/collection shall update the “Movements” tab on FORTRESS.

~~Exhibits collected from DFU shall have the Authorisation field signed.~~ The Force’s Property Management System/NICHE shall also be updated where applicable.

2.3.1 Booking Exhibits Out of DFU

Before releasing an exhibit from DFU control, the FSM shall:

- Ensure the exhibit bag has been correctly resealed, and the seal number has been correctly entered onto FORTRESS.
- Ensure the exhibit and case statuses have been appropriately updated
- Update the “Movements” tab with the new location of the exhibit.

If collected directly from DFU, the FSM shall use the “Courier” field to record the time and date of collection as well as the details of the person collecting the exhibit

Any continuity or administration issues shall be referred to the FSM responsible for the physical examination to rectify.

2.3.2 Exhibits Containing Illegal Material

Exhibits that contain or are suspected to contain indecent/extreme/prohibited material must be clearly marked.

Exhibits shall be marked by attaching the following labels:

- **May Contain Illegal Material Label: DF-P-1-LABEL-1**

Indicating that the exhibit *may* contain Illegal Material. This is used often when an exhibit could not be examined fully however the intelligence on the FORTRESS submission alluded to the presence of illegal material.

- **Contains Illegal Material DF-P-1-LABEL-2**

Indicating that the presence of Illegal Material has been confirmed and the device cannot be returned to the owner.

The FSM completing the examination shall ensure details are recorded on FORTRESS by changing the exhibit status to reflect the content. The responsibility remains with the OIC to ensure items containing illegal material are not returned and disposed of.

2.3.3 Additional Considerations

The following considerations will always apply when returning exhibits:

Document Reference: DF-P-1 Issue 25
 Issue Date: 01/05/25
 Authorised By: [REDACTED]
 Change Request Number: 108-25

Uncontrolled if copied or printed

- The presence of bodily fluids on the exhibit may cause distress to family members on return. The OIC shall be informed so that they can arrange for fluids to be removed prior to return.
- Where files that may cause distress to family members have been located, this shall be brought to the attention of the OIC. DFU can “selective wipe” the files prior to return at the conclusion of a case. This is not standard practice and must be requested by the OIC.
- Any mobile devices that have been subject to destructive processes (e.g., repair, eMMC), shall have a “Do Not Return” label attached. While they may appear to function correctly, the process may have introduced additional risks (e.g, overheating).

2.4 Transferring Exhibits Outside of DFU

2.4.1 SWF Laboratories (Internal)

Cases may be transferred between any of the laboratories within South-West Forensics.

Details of the transferred exhibits shall be sent electronically prior to sending. These details shall be checked against the submitted items by the receiving laboratory prior to receipt.

See **QMS-P-5 Subcontracting** for details regarding Internal SWF Laboratories.

In cases where multiple department examinations are required (i.e. Fingerprints/DNA) the procedure set out in **DF-P-1-Doc-8 Multi-Department Examination – Work Instruction** shall be followed.

2.4.2 External Agencies (External)

Cases may be submitted by any of the data forensic units to an external agency to complete examinations on behalf of SWF.

Where there is a requirement to submit electronic images, these shall be placed on a clean, wiped and encrypted HDD and placed in a bag or box and sealed.

Details of the transferred exhibits shall be sent electronically prior to sending.

See **QMS-P-5 Subcontracting** for details regarding External Agencies.

Document Reference: DF-P-1 Issue 25

Issue Date: 01/05/25

Authorised By: [REDACTED]

Uncontrolled if copied or printed

Change Request Number: 108-25

2.5 Disposal of Exhibits

Where exhibits are to be disposed/destroyed by DFU **DF-P-1-Doc-11 Destruction Work Instruction** shall be followed.

2.6 Legal Professional Privilege

Where an exhibit or extracted data is subject to Legal Professional Privilege, **DF-P-1-Doc-9 Legal Professional Privilege** shall be followed.

2.7 Defence Examinations

Where an exhibit or extracted data is to be reviewed by the defence, **DF-P-1-Doc-10 Defence Examinations** shall be followed.

3 Referenced Documentation

DF-P-3.0 Gatekeeping

QMS-P-8 Non-Conformance

DF-P-1-LABEL-1 May Contain Illegal Material Label:

DF-P-1-LABEL-2 Contains Illegal Material

QMS-P-5 Subcontracting

DF-P-1-Doc-11 Destruction Work Instruction

DF-P-1-Doc-6 DFU Folder Structure and File Naming – Work Instruction

DF-P-1-Doc-7 Data Handling and OIC Review – Work Instruction

DF-P-1-Doc-8 Multi Department Examination – Work Instruction

DF-P-1-Doc-9 Legal Professional Privilege – Work Instruction

DF-P-1-Doc-10 Defence Examinations – Work Instruction