

## **EVIDENCE STORAGE & PRESERVATION**

### **An Explanation of Our Services**

During the course of any investigation, the investigator is likely to be responsible for locating, collecting, identifying, storing, examining, and arranging for testing of physical evidence.

The investigator should be thoroughly familiar with the recommended and accepted methods of processing such physical evidence.

Physical evidence, defined generally, is any physical or tangible item that tends to prove or disprove a particular fact or issue. Physical evidence at the fire scene may be relevant to the issues of the origin, cause, spread, or the responsibility for the fire (NFPA 921).

At MDE Inc. we take evidence storage and preservation very seriously.

#### **Storage**

Physical evidence should be maintained in the best possible condition until it is no longer needed. It should be protected from loss, contamination, and degradation. Heat, sunlight, and moisture are the primary sources of degradation of most kinds of evidence. Dry and dark storage conditions are preferred, and the cooler the better (NFPA 921).

At MDE Inc. evidence is stored in environmentally controlled areas that are alarmed for security and sprinklered for fire protection.

MDE's capabilities go beyond just storing evidence. MDE has the capability to determine

the best evidence preservation method. This would include drying evidence to prevent corrosion or the formation of mold and to preserve surface artifacts and/or fire patterns; freezing or refrigeration of debris or samples to prevent the loss of volatiles; and separation of sensitive materials to prevent contamination. MDE also constructs unique bracing and holding fixtures when needed to avoid damage to delicate or fragile evidence. MDE's capabilities also include flammable liquid containment and storage.

#### **Chain of Custody**

The value of physical evidence entirely depends on the investigator's efforts to maintain the security and integrity of that physical evidence from the time of its initial discovery and collection to its subsequent examination and testing. At all times, physical evidence should be stored in a secured location that is designed and designated for this purpose. Access to this storage location should be limited in order to limit the chain of custody to as few persons as possible. When it is necessary to pass chain of custody from one person to another, it should be done using a form on which the receiving person signs for the physical evidence (NFPA 921).

At MDE Inc. our chain of custody procedures are robust for both evidence received and for evidence requiring shipping to other experts or manufacturers. The receipt or release of evidence is fully documented with MDE's chain of custody process.

#### **Evidence Disposition and Disposal**

The investigator should not destroy or discard evidence unless proper authorization is received. Circumstances may require that

evidence be retained for many years and ultimately may be returned to the owner (NFPA 921). An Evidence Storage Agreement and Disposition form is immediately mailed to our client as soon as one of our investigators collects and recovers evidence.

Evidence storage and disposal fees are invoiced in advance and on a semi-annual basis. Evidence storage fees are based on volume and range from shoe box (1 cubic foot) to automobiles and heavy equipment. At MDE Inc. we are routinely faced with disposing of evidence after an investigation has been completed and pre-payment is intended to reduce the inconvenience of an invoice months or years after a file has been "closed." Written authorization is required for MDE to release or dispose of evidence.

At MDE disposal of hazardous/dangerous or non-landfill materials, such as computers, monitors, oils, tires, batteries, gasoline or paint products, can also be arranged.

Evidence storage and disposal fees reflect the costs associated with the safe and proper storage and disposal of evidence.

#### **Guides and Standards**

National Fire Protection Association (NFPA) NFPA 921, "Guide for Fire and Explosion Investigations," establishes guidelines and recommendations for the safe and systematic investigation or analysis of fire incidents.

American Society for Testing and Materials (ASTM) E1188-95, "Standard Practice for Collection and Preservation of Information and Physical Items by a Technical Investigator" provides guidelines for the collection and

preservation of information and physical items by any technical investigator pertaining to an incident that can be reasonably expected to the subject of litigation.

ASTM E1459-92 (reapproved 1998), "Standard Guide for Physical Evidence Labeling and Related Documentation" provides methods to be used for labeling physical evidence collected during field investigations; received in a forensic laboratory; or isolated, generated or prepared from items submitted for laboratory examination.

**Certifications**

MDE is currently certified by the U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA) for the transfer, storage, and analysis of federally controlled substances.