

RIVERSIDE COUNTY

LARRY D. SMITH, SHERIFF



Sheriff

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RIVERSIDE SUPERIOR COURT
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June 1, 1999

Presiding Judge Robert Taylor
Consolidated Superior/Municipal Courts
4075 Main Street, Suite 310
Riverside, CA 92501

RE: Grand Jury Report: Riverside County Sheriff's Department
Evidence Management

Dear Judge Taylor:

The Sheriff's Department has reviewed the Grand Jury's finding and recommendations concerning the management of the operations of property/evidence collection storage and disposition. In the findings section of the Grand Jury report, no examples were cited, however, two major areas of concern were identified: procedural problems, and the excess accumulation of property/evidence.

Property handling is regionalized to use the existing space available at Perris, Southwest and Jurupa Valley Stations. The recent approval by the Board of Supervisors to construct new stations in Hemet and Lake Elsinore will provide additional resources for the storage of property and evidence. The Sheriff's Department plans on the installation of a new Law Enforcement Evidence Tracking System (LEETS) in the FY99/00. This should provide additional methods of insuring compliance with all laws and department procedures concerning property. Since the department cannot restrict the number or types of items taken as evidence or found property, a continuous process is necessary to insure the legal and timely disposition of items. We have evaluated centralizing versus decentralizing evidence management, and believe the best method of handling evidence/property is a decentralized model. The current program is based on balancing security, timely release to the public, staffing and cost.

This response addresses the three recommendations present in the Grand Jury report of March 29, 1999.

1. ***Centralized management responsibility to insure uniform implementation and compliance with adopted procedures.***

Although we have uniform implementation of procedures, we do not concur with centralized management. Each of our two field operations divisions (East County and West County) is responsible for the operation for the collection, storage and destruction of property. East County Operations includes the Blythe, Indio, and Palm Desert Stations, and Special Investigations Bureau. West County Operations includes the Banning, Hemet, Lake Elsinore, Moreno Valley, Perris, Southwest and Jurupa Valley Stations. Forensic Services in the East (Indio) and West (Jurupa Valley) provides for the collection and examination of evidence at major crime scenes. Each commander is responsible for ensuring that the personnel within the station are trained in the collection, processing and disposition of property, in compliance with the appropriate requirements of the Penal Code, Department General Orders and Field Operations Manuals.

The Sheriff's Department uses a PC based program called Law Enforcement Evidence Tracking System (LEETS). This allows for the quick and expeditious management of property, held locally. The alternative of operating a large centralized warehouse would inconvenience the public, and increase costs to the county for storage. Property is either returned to the rightful owner or if one cannot be found, is disposed of by auction. The destruction of weapons and narcotics is centralized and coordinated through the Forensic Services West Property Division. This ensures the legal and lawful destruction of contraband items after adjudication of cases.

2. ***Provide audits on a random basis in addition to the regular audit.***

We perform these audits, although documentation could improve. The current field operations guidelines requires at least one annual inspection conducted under the supervision of a Division Chief. In addition, periodic inspections are conducted by station commanders and include a review of procedures used by station personnel on the handling of property. In the past, these periodic inspections have not been documented in a standard method. A new procedure is being developed and implemented to conduct random audits on drugs and guns, in addition to the biannual audit conducted as part of the destruction process. Random inspections will be documented and included in the inspection matrix maintained by each station.

3. ***Enforce the existing procedures for the collection, identification, storage and disposition of all evidence and property items.***

The existing procedures contained in the Field Operations Manual are specific, and enforced on the handling, identification, storage and disposition of evidence and property. Any deviations in the procedure are immediately addressed by the Sheriff's Service Officer who is responsible to the Investigations or Patrol Sergeant.

In the event of unique items, special handling is coordinated through either the Forensic East(Indio) or West(Riverside) supervisors to insure that all safety and security requirements are maintained.

Thank you for the opportunity to respond on this issue.

Sincerely,

Larry D Smith
LARRY D. SMITH, SHERIFF

cc: H.L. Wright, Foreperson
1998-99 Riverside County Grand Jury

Gary Orso
County Clerk/Recorder/Assessor

Tom DeSantis, Deputy County Administrative Officer
County Executive Office