



WISCONSIN STATE CRIME LABORATORIES

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Trace Unit FAQs

Q: Which lab do I submit it to if I have a case with evidence that needs to be examined by the Trace Unit as well as DNA, Identification, etc.?

A: You should send all the evidence to the lab you would normally submit to. If you are in the Madison Laboratory Service area, submit to the Madison Lab and they will forward the items that need Trace Unit work done to Milwaukee. If you ONLY need Trace evidence items examined, they should be submitted directly to the Milwaukee Laboratory.

Q: How do I submit a vehicle to the laboratory for processing?

A: You need to call the laboratory and they will inform you of garage availability and instruct you how to proceed. Be sure when transporting the vehicle that pertinent exterior areas are protected from wind, weather, etc. so evidence is not lost or damaged. This applies to evidence such as fibers, fabric impressions, DNA and fingerprints.

Q: Can I use lined paint cans for Fire Debris cases?

A: Yes, lined cans with a gray epoxy coating are suitable containers for fire debris. The coating does not interfere with the ignitable liquid testing. This applies ONLY to the gray epoxy coated cans (not the gold colored epoxy lined cans which have aromatic volatiles present). The lined cans also have the advantage of wet debris not rusting the can. Cans should be approximately 75% full when submitted to allow for proper analysis.

Q: How much known paint should I collect?

A: For known paint (auto or architectural), it is necessary to collect all layers down to the substrate (wood, metal, plastic etc.). Since known paints are generally not limited in amount available, it is recommended that you collect at least one or two nickel to quarter size pieces at a minimum.

Q: Where should I collect known paint?

A: For automobiles, known paint should be collected from all damaged panels near the area of damage since the chemical makeup of paint can be different on different body parts. This also applies to architectural paint. If damage in a forced entry occurs in a door jamb, collect known paint from the frame as well as the door.

Q: How should I package clothing being submitted for glass analysis from a burglary?

A: Items of clothing that ONLY need to be examined for glass (no DNA needed) can be packaged together in a paper bag with the exception of shoes. Shoes need to be packaged separately. When removing clothing from a suspect, be sure to include the paper they undressed on. Generally, only exterior clothing is submitted (no undergarments).

Q: Can you analyze oil to show that a stain came from a particular vehicle?

A: No. Our equipment does not allow us to test for oils. In addition to automotive oil, this includes cooking oils, linseed oil, etc.

Q: I have a suspected food tampering case, who should I send it to?

A: Prior to submitting any tampering case, you should speak with a Forensic Case Manager or Chemistry Supervisor to ensure we can analyze the substance and the necessary items are submitted.

Q: I have a gas can that needs fingerprints (or DNA) done on it but I also need ignitable liquid analysis. How should I submit this?

A: A small amount of liquid (about an ounce) should be packaged separately in a vial or jar for submission to the Trace Unit. Any remaining gas should be removed, and the gas container then packaged for submission to the Identification unit or DNA.

Q: Is there a limit on numbers of items I can submit in an arson case?

A: No, we currently do not limit the number of items. If a large number of clothing items are collected, the clothing most likely to have been exposed to an ignitable liquid should be submitted (exterior clothing vs. undergarments). This will expedite the analysis and turn-around times.