

THE PATROL STANDARD

OFFICER DEVELOPMENT SERIES

THEME: PROTECT. PRESERVE. PROVE.

DATE	ISSUE	READING TIME
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PURPOSE: Reinforce disciplined evidence handling from first observation through transfer. This week's brief focuses on making the scene safe, preserving an item's original condition and location, limiting unnecessary handling, and documenting a chain that another investigator, laboratory, and court can understand.

1. OFFICER SAFETY BULLETIN

Do Not Create a Second Hazard While Protecting Evidence

Evidence matters only after officers have controlled immediate threats, provided necessary medical care, and established a workable scene. A firearm, sharp object, unknown powder, bloodstained item, or damaged vehicle can remain dangerous after the primary confrontation ends. Slow down before anyone reaches, lifts, unloads, opens, or repackages an item.

Separate safety action from evidence processing. If an item must be moved or made safe, do what the threat requires, then document its original position, the reason for the movement, each action taken, and its condition afterward. Avoid handling evidence only to inspect it more closely or to show it to another officer.

Today's Officer Safety Focus

- Control suspects, weapons, traffic, fire, medical needs, and environmental hazards before beginning routine evidence collection.
- Establish an inner working area and an outer boundary so responders, witnesses, and bystanders do not unknowingly disturb the scene.
- Treat firearms and sharp objects as hazards. Use trained handling methods and preserve their condition whenever immediate safety permits.
- Use appropriate protective equipment and change gloves between unrelated items to protect both the officer and the evidence.
- Keep food, drinks, personal equipment, and unnecessary personnel out of the evidence area.
- Tell incoming officers what has been located, what has already been moved, and which safety or evidence responsibilities still need an owner.

PROFESSIONAL STANDARD: Make the scene safe first. Then preserve what you found without creating an unexplained change in its condition, location, or custody.

2. TACTICAL REMINDER

Freeze the Scene Before You Fill the Evidence Bag

The first patrol officer may be the only person who sees the scene before weather, medical treatment, traffic, witnesses, or emergency activity changes it. Protect the larger picture before concentrating on a single item. Identify likely entry and exit paths, keep a clean route for responders, and record who enters the controlled area.

Before collecting an item:

- Announce the item's location so other officers can avoid it and the team can decide who will document and collect it.
- Photograph or otherwise document the overall scene, the item's relationship to fixed landmarks, and its close condition before movement when circumstances permit.
- Assign one collector when practical; unnecessary handoffs create more opportunities for contamination and more witnesses who must explain the chain.
- Package separate items separately, use the container required by training and policy, and do not force wet, sharp, or biological evidence into unsuitable packaging.
- Record unavoidable changes immediately, including movement for safety, medical access, weather protection, or firearm handling.

REMEMBER: A perfect collection method cannot repair a report that never explains where the item was, what condition it was in, who handled it, and why it changed.

3. NATIONAL & TEXAS LAW ENFORCEMENT UPDATES**Official-Sources Briefing****Texas DPS - National Forensic Science Week**

OFFICIAL AGENCY DEVELOPMENT - Location and date: In Austin, Texas, the Texas Department of Public Safety recognized its statewide Crime Laboratory Division during National Forensic Science Week. **Source publication date:** September 21, 2026. DPS reported that its 16 accredited laboratories and programs processed 113,259 forensic-testing requests during the prior year and described current work involving DNA, firearms and toolmarks, digital evidence, toxicology, seized drugs, and other disciplines. The patrol lesson is foundational: laboratory results begin with the condition, documentation, packaging, and transfer of evidence at the scene.

[Official source: Texas Department of Public Safety, September 21, 2026.](#)

ATF - Ballistic Evidence Connected a Firearm to a Homicide

ACTUAL CRIMINAL CASE - Event date and location: On August 29, 2025, Angela Fuller was killed near Columbia, South Carolina. After Anthony Reese later fled a traffic stop and crashed in Lexington, South Carolina, officers recovered a loaded firearm from his vehicle. **Source publication date:** September 24, 2026. ATF reported that ballistic testing linked the recovered firearm to cartridge cases from the homicide and that Reese received a 15-year federal sentence for firearm possession related to the case. The operational lesson is not the technology alone: properly recognizing, recovering, and documenting the firearm and cartridge cases allowed later comparison to connect evidence from different locations and times.

[Official source: Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives, September 24, 2026.](#)

4. LEADERSHIP & PROFESSIONAL CHARACTER**Make Evidence Discipline a Team Habit**

Servant-minded leadership protects the next officer, the investigator, the victim, and the credibility of the case. An experienced officer does not merely point out a mistake after evidence has been disturbed. The officer slows the scene, gives a clear assignment, brings the correct equipment, and explains the reason for the standard.

Today's leadership challenge:

- Assign scene security, photography, collection, witness separation, and documentation instead of assuming someone else has each task.
- Stop unnecessary handling respectfully and early: 'Leave it where it is until we photograph and assign a collector.'

- Help a less-experienced officer correct an evidence entry or supplemental report before the uncertainty reaches an investigator or courtroom.
- Conduct a brief handoff before clearing: identify every collected item, every remaining item, every person who handled evidence, and every unresolved preservation need.

SERVANT-MOTIVATED LEADERSHIP: The leader who protects another officer's evidence work protects that officer's credibility and the public's confidence in the result.

5. ROLL CALL DISCUSSION

The Scene Is Changing Faster Than the Report

Training scenario: At 2210 hours, officers respond to reported gunfire at an apartment complex. One officer begins aid to an injured person near the stairwell. A second officer locates a handgun beneath a parked vehicle. A third sees one apparent cartridge casing on the walkway. Rain begins, residents gather outside, and fire personnel need the same walkway to reach the patient. No evidence technician has arrived.

Discuss

- Which hazards and life-safety needs take priority, and who should control each one?
- What boundaries and access route preserve the scene without delaying medical care?
- Which items may require immediate movement or weather protection, and what must be documented before or immediately after that action?
- Who should photograph, collect, package, label, seal, and transfer each item?
- What should officers record about the handgun's position, condition, magazine, chamber, and any action taken to make it safe?
- What facts will allow each officer to testify only to personal observations while still giving the report a complete chronology?

6. LEGAL WRITING & COURTROOM READINESS

Write the Foundation Before You Write the Conclusion

Texas Rule of Evidence 602 limits a witness to matters supported by personal knowledge. Texas Rule of Evidence 901(a) requires evidence sufficient to support a finding that an item is what its proponent claims it is; Rule 901(b)(1) identifies the testimony of a witness with knowledge as one method of authentication. For the patrol officer, that foundation is built with precise observations and a clear handling record, not with the phrase 'submitted into evidence.'

Describe the item, its exact location, its visible condition, the time first observed, and its relationship to the scene. Identify every action you personally took: movement, unloading, swabbing, packaging, sealing, labeling, temporary storage, and transfer. If another officer performed an action, attribute it to that officer instead of writing as though you saw or did it yourself.

Do not overstate the science. A patrol officer may describe an apparent cartridge casing, a firearm, a stain, or a suspected controlled substance based on observable facts and training. Unless qualified and supported by results, the officer should not claim that a particular firearm fired a casing, that a stain is blood, or that a substance has been chemically identified. Preserve the item and the foundation; let the appropriate analysis establish the laboratory conclusion.

Write the Chain

FOUNDATION FACTS	GAPS THAT INVITE ATTACK
Exact location and condition; time first observed; photographs or measurements; who handled the item; safety-related changes; packaging, seal, label, storage, and transfer; identity of each recipient.	'Near the scene'; no description of condition; unexplained unloading or movement; several officers handling the item; missing seal or label details; no transfer time or recipient; conclusions stated as laboratory facts.

Weak articulation:

"I collected a shell casing near the apartment and placed it into evidence."

Stronger articulation:

"At 2214 hours, I observed one brass-colored apparent spent cartridge casing on the concrete walkway approximately two feet east of the Building C stairwell. I photographed the casing in place with its position relative to the stairwell visible. Wearing clean gloves, I lifted the casing, placed it alone in a labeled paper evidence envelope, sealed the envelope, and wrote my initials across the seal. At 2302 hours, I transferred the sealed envelope directly to Evidence Technician Chen and documented the transfer in the evidence record."

SUPERVISORY REVIEW: Confirm that the report identifies the item, original location and condition, every material change, the collecting officer, packaging and seal, transfer time, and recipient. Resolve conflicting descriptions before reports are approved.

Courtroom Readiness

Expect direct questions: When did you first see the item? Where exactly was it? Who touched it before collection? Did you move or alter it? Why? Was it photographed? How was it packaged and sealed? Where did you keep it? To whom did you transfer it? Was the seal intact? Testify to what you personally observed and did. If you do not know what occurred during another part of the chain, say so rather than adopting another person's work as your own.

Legal references: Texas Rules of Evidence 602 and 901 (effective July 2, 2026).

7. THREE TAKEAWAYS

End-of-Brief Reinforcement

- 1. Protect the people and the scene.** Control immediate hazards, establish boundaries, and assign evidence responsibilities before unnecessary handling begins.
- 2. Preserve condition, location, and custody.** Document before movement when possible, use appropriate packaging, and record every material change and transfer.
- 3. Prove the foundation with personal knowledge.** Write exactly what you observed and did, attribute other actions accurately, and leave scientific conclusions to supported analysis.

"Evidence does not explain itself. The officer who first sees it begins the courtroom foundation."