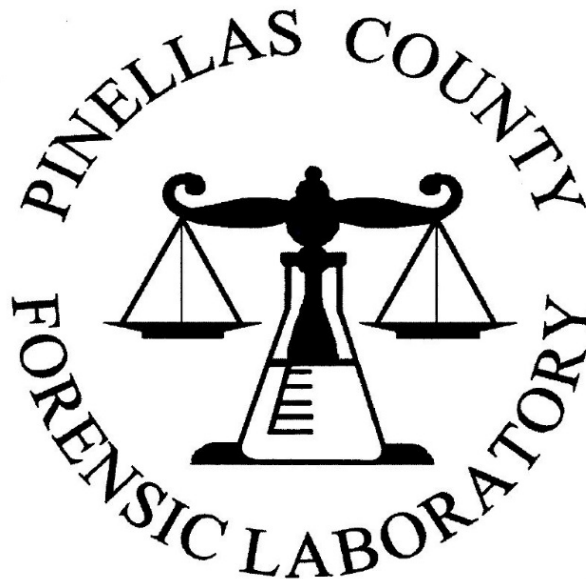


Pinellas County Forensic Laboratory

**1110D-1 EVIDENCE SUBMISSION
GUIDELINES**

Rev # 6



Director Reta Newman

10900 Ulmerton Road
Largo, FL 33778
Phone: (727) 582-6810
Fax: (727) 582-6822
www.pinellascounty/forensics.org

Evidence Intake
Monday - Friday 8:00 am to 4:00 pm
Appointments Recommended
(727) 582-6824
PCFLEvidence@pinellascounty.org

Introduction

The Pinellas County Forensic Laboratory (PCFL) is an accredited public forensic laboratory providing analytical services to the Pinellas County criminal justice system and the District Six (Pinellas/Pasco) Medical Examiner.

The mission of the Pinellas County Forensic Laboratory is to provide impartial scientific support, professional training, public relations, and other forensic related services.

The Pinellas County Forensic Laboratory objectives are as follows:

1. To perform chemical analyses to determine the presence or absence of controlled substances.
2. To perform chemical analyses of fire debris and suspect liquids to determine the presence or absence of ignitable liquids.
3. To provide chemical identification of suspect substances as required by the needs of an investigation.
4. To provide toxicological analysis for the presence of ethanol and controlled substances in DUI investigations.
5. To perform post mortem toxicology analysis to assist the Medical Examiner in the determination of cause and manner of death.
6. To provide serological and DNA analysis of biological fluids, stains, and materials in relation to various criminal investigations.
7. To provide impartial expert testimony on the results of analysis and their scientific implications.
8. To provide related continuing education and training to the criminal justice community.
9. To maintain ANAB (formerly ASCLD/LAB International) accreditation in compliance with the ISO/EIC 17025 Standard.

Accreditation

The laboratory maintains the highest level of accreditation in conformance with **ISO/IEC 17025:2017 General Requirement for the Competence of Testing and Calibration Laboratories, ANAB Forensic Science Testing Laboratories Accreditation Requirements, and the FBI Quality Assurance Standards for Forensic Testing Laboratories:2020**. PCFL is currently accredited in the forensic disciplines Biology, Fire Debris and Explosives, Seized Drugs, and Toxicology. Certificate number FT-0064.

The laboratory's current scope of accreditation and accreditation status is published at:
<http://search.anab.org/>

Evidence Submission Policies and Procedures

These are general policies for evidence submission. Evidence that meet these criteria do not need further laboratory approval and may be submitted at any time. Exceptions can and will be made to meet the logical needs of an investigation. All exception requests must be pre-approved by laboratory management.

Lab Determination of Methods

By submitting evidence to the laboratory, you agree that PCFL shall select the appropriate methods necessary to perform the services requested. PCFL shall inform the submitting agency if any agreed upon service cannot be completed or deviations from testing must be made.

PRIORITY and RUSH Analysis Request

All Priority and Rush Analysis Request must be pre-approved by laboratory management prior to submission to the laboratory. While the laboratory will make every effort to meet any reasonable requests, there must be extenuating circumstances to give any case priority over others. Unsolved violent crimes submitted in a timely manner will **always** take precedence over all other cases. It must be noted, however, that some analysis processes are time consuming and failure to submit evidence in a timely manner for court or investigative purposes will hamper the laboratory's ability to operate efficiently and may not be possible depending upon the time constraints of the request.

Rush/Priority analyses are generally analyzed outside of typical laboratory efficiency processes; thus a single rush request can impact the turnaround time of as many as 20 routine cases.

Sexual Assault Victim Examination Kits (SAVE Kits)

Per FSS 943.326, all SAVE kits with a reporting victim must be submitted to the laboratory within 30 days of receipt by law enforcement. The analysis of SAVE kits is given an automatic "Priority" status to ensure compliance with the analysis requirements of this statute.

Discovery and Public Records Requests

PCFL shall comply with all Court Ordered Discovery requests and Public Records request as required by law.

General Evidence Acceptance Policies

Analysis is provided for cases in which:

- Evidence has been obtained as the result of a criminal investigation or a medical examiner death investigation.
- Related offense(s) occurred within Pinellas County or is a part of an investigation/task force that includes Pinellas County law enforcement participation. Note: Analyses for any agency/investigation outside of Pinellas County may be provided on a fee for service basis, but require pre-approval from laboratory management and are dependent upon available resources.
- Death investigations are within the jurisdiction of the District Six Medical Examiner.

Analysis requests are generally not provided for:

- Private individuals or corporations.
- Non-criminal investigations or non-MEO jurisdictional death investigations.
- Evidence that has been knowingly compromised rendering scientific examination invalid.
- Evidence that has been previously analyzed by another laboratory
 - Exceptions may be made for court ordered examinations and examinations that involve the use of techniques/methods/services that are not available at the originating laboratory.

Evidence Seals

- All evidence **must** be submitted in a sealed condition. Seals must be tamper-evident and prevent deleterious changes (i.e. loss, cross contamination). In order to expedite the analytical processes, the following seal types are recommended/accepted:
 - Evidence tape
 - Heat sealed evidence bags
 - Evidence envelopes/bags with built-in tamper-evident seals
- All evidence seals must contain initials of the person who sealed the package.

Evidence Labeling

- Each item of evidence must be labeled to include, at a minimum:
 - Agency
 - Agency case number
 - Agency item number
 - Associated individuals
 - Date/time of collection or incident
 - Brief description of the item

Requests for Analysis

Completed documentation of the case must accompany each evidence submission. Case documentation may be provided using a paper form (Request for Analysis Form) or through electronic pre-submission (JusticeTrax Portal) or a combination of both.

Required case level information:

- Case (Originating Agency)
- Agency Case Number (ACN)
- Case Officer Name
- Case Officer Contact information (phone number and/or email)
- Offense(s)
- Offense date
- Offense time (toxicology cases only)
- Fire Debris ONLY: Offense address (including city)
- Analysis requested (Seized Drug, Toxicology BAC, Toxicology Drugs, DNA, etc)
- Reference to any existing laboratory cases

Required individual information:

- Individual type (suspect, victim, elimination, etc.)
- Name (minimum first and last)
- Date of birth
- Gender
- Race

Required evidence information:

- Agency item number
- Brief description
 - For example:
 - White powder
 - Blue pills
 - Buccal swab from Joe Smith
 - SAVE Kit
 - DUI Kit
 - Urine from Jane Doe
 - Association between individual and evidence (may be included on the submission documentation or evidence label)
- Date of collection
- Time of collection (required for toxicology cases only)
- Any special instructions

Changes in Case Status

If the status of a case or the progress of an investigation changes and there is no longer a need for the evidence to be analyzed, please advise the Laboratory of the change as soon as possible. Prompt notification that the analysis is no longer needed will free valuable analysis time for other cases.

Case Discrepancies

Requests to correct erroneous information after submitting the original Request for Analysis may be made via email (PCFLEvidence@pinellascounty.org) by the case or submitting agency. The request must refer to the erroneous information provided in the submission and clearly specify the appropriate change(s).

In the event that minor discrepancies (spelling of names, etc.) exist between the information on the evidence label and the information on the submission documentation, the information on submission documentation will take precedence. Major discrepancies must be resolved through documented communication with the laboratory prior to issuance of the final report.

Method Deviations

PCFL shall determine when technically justified deviations from its own methods must be made to complete contracted testing.

Hazardous Items

All hazardous items must be properly labeled and, whenever possible, neutralized in a manner that minimizes risk to laboratory personnel.

All firearms must be unloaded and clearly rendered safe prior to submission.

Unexploded security dye packs and explosive devices are not accepted into the laboratory.

Vapor pens are not accepted into the laboratory. Vapor cartridges may be submitted if separated and properly packaged.

Syringes must be packaged in tubes or containers specifically designed for the safe packaging and transport of biohazardous sharps (OSHA approved for example).

Evidence Submission Process

Most evidence is submitted directly to evidence technicians at the laboratory. Evidence can be submitted Monday through Friday (8am-4pm). Appointments are recommended. DUI/BUI evidence *only* may be submitted to the DUI lockers located in the Sheriff's

office administration building. Evidence may also be mailed/couriered to the laboratory through a courier with package tracking and secure signature requirements.

All evidence must be accompanied by a completed case submission form or preceded by an electronic pre-submission (JusticeTrax Portal) Request (with the exception of District 6 Medical Examiner specimens and Decedent Medications submitted after January 1, 2021).

JusticeTrax Portal Evidence Submission

Portal is a web-based, secure pre-submission software program that allows the case/submitting agency to complete all documentation requirements of laboratory submissions prior to delivering the evidence to the laboratory. The process allows for expedited submission and pre-review of cases to ensure complicity with laboratory submission policies. Additionally, Portal allows for the secure release of laboratory reports through electronic means and allows case officers the ability to monitor the case status.

User Access

Each participating agency provides access (login ID and passwords) to each authorized user through a Portal Administrator. The agency's Portal administrator determines the level of access based on the agencies own policies and procedures. PCFL cannot provide access to individuals within an agency. Contact your Portal Administrator with questions and access requests.

Pinellas County Sheriff Property and Evidence Contributory Agencies

For ALL cases/evidence in which PCSO Property and Evidence units manage laboratory submissions, the submission of cases through the JusticeTrax portal process is conducted by the PCSO P/E Unit staff **only**.

For direct submission of evidence by the case agency to the laboratory (by-passing PCSO Property and Evidence); Portal or paper forms may be used for pre-submission.

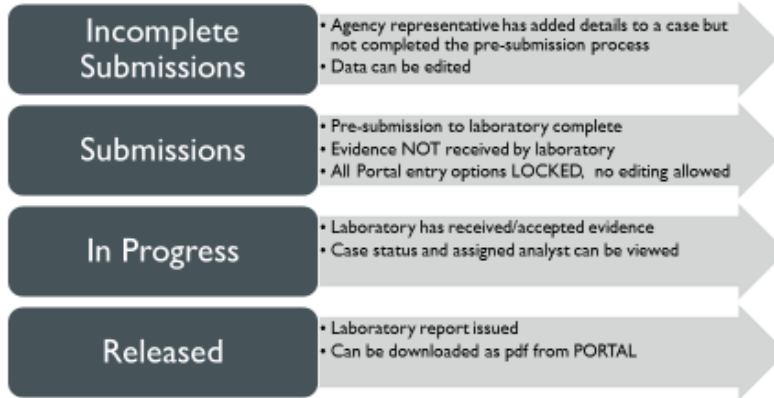
Case Restriction

Analytical reports for all cases are available to all authorized portal users at the case agency, submission agency, and State Attorney's Office. Cases may be restricted to the case agency or the case officer for sensitive cases. Contact the laboratory to restrict the release of case information and report release.

Portal Dashboard

From the Dashboard the Portal user can pre-submit laboratory case information, monitor case progress and view released reports. Authorized case agency representatives, submitting agency representatives and State Attorney Staff will have access to Portal information associated with every case associated to their assigned agency.

PORTAL DASH BOARD



Portal Case Entry – New Cases or Supplementing Previously Submitted Case

New Case

Create New Case Request

Enter Case Information

* Agency Case Number
MN17-000292

Case Type
Routine

* Lab
Pinellas County Forensic Labo

* Agency
Midnight Police Department

Notes
Recovered stolen vehicle. Swabs taken from steering wheel and gear shift. Eliminations samples from owners and all routine users of the vehicle included.

Cancel Save

ACN- Agency defined format; Include all leading zeros.

Case Type: "Routine" for all cases unless prior laboratory management authorization is obtained.

Agency: Defaults to the user's member agency. This represents the SUBMITTING agency. Not necessarily the case agency.

Notes: Case synopsis and any special instructions. May be copy/pasted from RMS or may be attached as a separate document.

Toxicology date/time of incident should be entered here

Additional information, additional evidence, or additional request for an existing or previous submission is made the same way as a new case initiation/submission. JusticeTrax LIMS will automatically supplement the existing case. However, the laboratory must be notified (PCFLEvidence@pinellascounty.org) to ensure the new information is imported to LIMS, *especially if no new evidence is being submitted*.

After entering the general case information Portal will display a 5-tab Case Details Screen that will allow for the entry of the detailed case information. The data entry flow is as follows:



Portal Entry: Evidence

Add/Edit Evidence	
Evidence Type Select... ▼	Evidence Type (REQUIRED): Seized Drug, Toxicology, DNA, Fire Debris, General Chemistry (all others are lab internal evidence types)
Description	Description (REQUIRED): Very brief description of item <i.e. white powder, swab from Jane Doe, SAVE kit, DUI kit, urine>. This is the description that will appear on the chain of custody report.
Note	Note (REQUIRED): Agency Item Number (note: future Portal version will have separate field for Agency Item number). Special instructions specific to an item of evidence.
Submitting Rep Test1 Test1 ▼	Seized drug cases – estimated weight/count and suspected drug should be entered here. Toxicology cases – Date and Time of Collection must be entered here
Save Save & Add Another Cancel	Submitting Rep: Generally the person that will be bringing the evidence to the laboratory. Not a required field, but is recommended for communication.

Portal Entry: Individuals

Add Individual	
Individual Type Select... ▼	Individual Type (Required): Suspect, Victims, Elimination, Decedent, Alleged Mother/Father, Witness. All individuals potentially associated with the evidence. Name (Required) First, Middle, Last and Suffix (where applicable) DOB (Required) Gender (Required) Ethnicity (Required) All other fields can be left blank.
Title Select... ▼	
Suffix Select... ▼	
First Name	
Middle Name	
Last Name	
Date of Birth	
Gender Select... ▼	
Ethnicity Select... ▼	
Company	
Email	
Phone	
Address	
Address (cont.)	
County Select... ▼	
Country Select... ▼	
State Select... ▼	
City Select... ▼	
Zip Code	
License Number	
License State Select... ▼	
Save Save & Add Another Close	

Portal Entry: Offenses

Add Offense		
Offense Date 	Category Select...	* Offense Code Select...
Country Select...	State Select...	City Select...
Location 	County Select...	Zip Code
✓ Save ✓ Save & Add Another Cancel		

Offense Date (Required)

Category (Required)

Offense Code (Required)

City (Required)

Location (Address) Required for Fire Debris Cases Only

County (REQUIRED FOR ALL CASES)

Portal Entry: Requests

This is where the analysis type(s) are requested. There can be multiple request types (i.e. DNA, Toxicology, and Seized Drugs) on a given case as long as the evidence and request meet the submission and acceptance requirements of the laboratory.

Add Request		
Discipline Select...	Service Type Select...	Requesting Rep Select...
Complexity Select...	Reason Select...	Due Date
Notes 		
✓ Save ✓ Save & Add Another Cancel		

Discipline (Required): Chemistry, Toxicology, or Biology.

Service Type (Required): List will filter based on Discipline Type

Requesting Rep (Required): This is the investigator/detective etc who will receive the final report.

Notes (Not Required); Any special request information (i.e. comparison to other cases; court request information)

All other fields (Complexity, Reason, Due Date) – Not required and may be left blank.

Portal Entry Relationships

The relationship between the evidence and the request must be established. After entering the Request(s), select the request and activate the “Relationship Icon” under the Options column.

Options

Relationship Icon

Case Information

ACN: 17-00222

Lab: Pinellas County Forensic Laboratory

Type: Routine

Requesting Agency: Midnight Police Department

Requesting Rep: Sharon Stone

[Edit](#) [Submit to LIMS](#) [Print Evidence List](#)

Case Details

Evidence Individuals Offenses **Requests** Attachments

10 records per page

Search

#	Discipline	Service	Complexity	Due Date	Options
1	Chemistry	Seized Drugs			  

Request Relationships

Select all relationships for this request

Available Relationships

EVIDENCE

(116) - DUI Blood Kit



Related to this Request

EVIDENCE

(113) - white powder

✓ Save

Close

Submit to LIMS

After completing all the required information “Submit to LIMS” will forward the data and request to the laboratory for review. Laboratory staff will review the request to ensure completion of required information and compliance with laboratory submission policies. Agency representatives will be contacted (generally through email) if additional information is required to process the case/request. After a minimum of 3 attempts and 30 days without resolution, the request will be rejected and removed from LIMS. The data will have to be re-entered as a new case from the Portal dashboard prior to re-submission attempts.

Once ‘Submit to LIMS’ is selected the data cannot be edited on the Portal side of the program. Laboratory staff can make request changes on the internal side of the program.

Each submitting agency has its own internal policies/work flows as to who is authorized to “Submit to LIMS”.

 Case Information

ACN: 17-00222

Lab: Pinellas County Forensic Laboratory

Type: Routine

Requesting Agency: Midnight Police Department

Requesting Rep: Sharon Stone

 Edit

 Submit to LIMS

 Print Evidence List

Once “Submit to LIMS” is selected the case will move from the Incomplete Submission File to the “Submission” file on the Dashboard. Once the approved evidence is physically submitted and accepted into the laboratory, the case will move to the “In

Progress” file. Agency representatives of all agencies associated with the case and the State Attorney’s Office will be able to monitor the laboratory progress.

Laboratory Reports

When a laboratory report is completed and released, the requesting agent and other designated personnel will receive an email from the laboratory notifying them of the report. The report can then be downloaded, as a pdf, from the “Released” folder in LIMS. Additionally, reports can be downloaded daily from LIMS based on the “Date released” and uploaded to the case/submitting agency’s RMS.

Results

5 records per page

Search:

ACN	Lab Case Number	Service	Status	Last Updated	Report
17-8964	17-000203	0002 - Seized Drugs	Released	11/29/2017	

← Previous

1

2

Next →

CASE/EVIDENCE ACCEPTANCE POLICIES

DNA/Serology

PCFL is a CODIS participating laboratory that performs DNA and serological analysis of suspected biological fluids.

CODIS

Eligibility/Documentation

As a CODIS participating laboratory, PCFL is required to assess all forensic samples for CODIS eligibility. This process requires a high level of documentation/communication with the investigator and/or case agency. For a forensic sample the following information must be clearly documented in the case record:

- 1) Documentation that crime has been committed (generally established by the “offense” entered into Portal or on the case submission form).
- 2) Documentation as to how the evidence is associated to the crime. (i.e. “gloves found at scene, does not belong to victim”, “used to pry open door”, “swabbed from victim’s wrist where grabbed”, etc.)
- 3) Documentation as to how any DNA developed from the evidence is attributed to the perpetrator (and only the perpetrator). “Tool used by perpetrator to open door, does not belong to victim”; “Swabbed from steering wheel of stolen car, all elimination samples of routine users submitted”; “Swab of beer bottle, video shows suspect drinking from it at the scene”, etc.
- 4) Documentation that elimination samples have been requested, if applicable.

DNA requests **cannot** be released until all CODIS eligibility information is provided.

Relatives of Missing Persons Samples Documentation

For relatives of Missing Persons Samples to be eligible for CODIS the following information must be clearly documented in the case record:

- 1) Law enforcement involvement in the collection of a DNA profile.
- 2) A consent agreement/form documenting the sample(s) were voluntarily contributed to law enforcement.
- 3) Law enforcement verification of the identity of the close biological relative providing the DNA sample (e.g., through presentation of an appropriate government-issued identification card).

CODIS HITS

CODIS HITS are not (typically) admissible in court. Furthermore, the state database does not maintain “chain of custody” on buccal samples submitted for inclusion in the offender or arrestee database; therefore, upon receiving a hit notification and prior to trial; the case agency or state attorney’s office must collect and submit a buccal swab from the suspect for analysis by this laboratory. Statistical significance of findings cannot be determined/reported until the buccal swab is analyzed.

DNA/Serology Acceptance Policies

In order to provide the most expeditious analysis, the following are acceptance policies for the ***initial submission*** of evidence on a case. Many cases, notably cold cases and violent crimes, may have many items of interest; by limiting the initial submission to the most probative samples, the laboratory will be able to get results to the investigator in a timelier manner. Supplemental submission of additional evidence may be requested based on the nature of the evidence and the nature of the crime. All such request must be pre-approved by laboratory management prior to submission.

Homicide/Violent Assault

Homicide cases without a suspect will always be assigned priority status. The laboratory strongly recommends that the investigator contact the laboratory to discuss the case and prioritize the evidence.

If the investigator elects to send evidence without a pre-submission conference, the initial submission is limited to 8 forensic items. This does not include elimination samples for victims or other non-suspects who may have incident DNA at the scene.

Sexual Assault

In most cases, when a SAVE kit is collected, the initial submission should be limited to the SAVE kit. If a SAVE kit was not collected, or was not collected within 5 days of the incident; other potentially probative evidence (used condom, underwear, etc), not to exceed 3 items on the initial submission, may be submitted without prior approval.

Note: per Florida Statute all SAVE kits must be submitted to a CODIS reporting laboratory within 30 days of receipt by the law enforcement agency.

Residential Burglary/Robbery

The most probative items should be submitted in the first submission. This may include up to 5 items (not including buccal swabs from suspects, victims, or eliminations), however, should be limited to fewer whenever logical. For example, if a suspect left blood samples at the point of entry, touch samples from other areas of the scene should not be submitted.

Touch samples taken from exterior doors and public entryways should not be submitted and will not typically be analyzed.

Note: Cases cannot be analyzed until the laboratory has buccal swabs from all victims/residents/routine users associated with the item AND documentation that all victim/residents/routine users swabs have been collected or reasonably attempted.

Commercial Burglary/Robbery

Up to 2 samples of potential blood attributed to the suspect or items conclusively shown (witnessed/videoed/etc.) to have been left by the suspect may be submitted at any time. However, due to the public nature of commercial property, touch DNA samples are not generally accepted/analyzed and are not typically CODIS eligible. There are exceptions and therefore, the investigators must contact laboratory management to discuss the evidence and eligibility to obtain pre-approval prior to submission.

Stolen vehicles

Up to 2 items of evidence may be submitted in the initial submission. The evidence submission must be accompanied by buccal swabs of the owner and routine occupants of the vehicle. The following collection/submission priority is recommend:

- 1) Any blood attributed to the suspect
- 2) Any items left in the vehicle by the suspect
- 3) Swab of steering wheel
- 4) Swab of gear shift

Note: touch DNA swabs from exterior portions of the vehicle are not accepted and are not CODIS eligible.

Vehicle Burglary

The transitory nature of contact between the perpetrator and the vehicle does not typically lend to sufficient DNA for identification. DNA case submission is limited to 2 initial samples where at least one of following criteria are met:

- 1) A firearm was stolen from the vehicle
- 2) Blood/body fluid attributed to the suspect was collected
- 3) Any item left in the vehicle by the suspect

Exceptions will be made for other special circumstances including significant loss of property and task force investigations. Contact laboratory management for pre-approval prior to submission.

Felon in Possession of a Firearm

These cases are not CODIS eligible. The laboratory will analyze the weapon or swabs from the weapon if a buccal swab can be obtained from the suspect.

Identification of Skeletal Remains

Skeletal remains will be accepted on a case-by-case basis and CODIS eligibility will be determined. A full tooth and/or femur should be submitted for analysis.

Other crimes

Evidence associated with other crimes will be accepted on a case-by-case basis as long as CODIS eligibility is established or a suspect buccal can be obtained. These submissions are limited to 2 items unless a pre-submission conference with laboratory management is conducted.

CONTROLLED SUBSTANCES (Seized Drugs)

PCFL performs analysis of suspected controlled substances through the use of advance analytical instrumentation. All procedures meet or exceed industry recommendations for controlled substances identification.

Acceptance and Packaging Requirements

One item per suspect, per suspected drug, per felony charge, per offense date may be submitted without prior approval. The definition of an item is the drug contents of a uniquely self-contained (zip bag, glycine fold, pill bottle, etc) suspected controlled substance.

- For example:
 - Suspected alprazolam (Xanax) and cocaine seized from suspect A – both items can be submitted for analysis as each drug represents a different charge.
 - Three items of suspected hydromorphone (Dilaudid) tablets with an estimated total weight of less than trafficking threshold– one item may be submitted/will be tested
 - Three items of suspected hydromorphone (Dilaudid) with and estimated total weight exceeding the trafficking - all items should be submitted and will be tested
 - Three “buys” of suspected heroin made over the course of multiple days. All items should be submitted and will be tested.
- All items must be associated with a chargeable offense and with an individual; however, with “buy/sale” case investigations the name of the individual may be unknown. “Found” items will not be tested.
- Misdemeanor drug cases (i.e. Cannabis less than 20g; misdemeanor drug paraphernalia) will only be accepted when analysis is requested by the State Attorney’s Office.
- Drug paraphernalia will only be accepted/analyzed if it is the only suspected controlled substance associated with the case and suspect.
- Non-controlled marked pharmaceutical preparations will not be accepted/tested. Exception: tablet/capsules suspected to be “fake” pharmaceutical preparations.
- Latent prints processing: PCFL does not perform latent print processing or analysis. Items should be separated/processed prior to laboratory submission of the suspected controlled substance whenever possible/practical. The laboratory will separate packaging when necessary.

- All items, with the exception of fresh plant material, should be submitted in 4ml polypropylene/polyethylene (i.e. Kapak or equivalent) heat sealed evidence bags.
 - Heat sealed plastic bags allows interested parties (property/evidence staff, laboratory personnel, state/defense attorneys, and jurors) to safely and easily observe the contents.
 - Static electricity can make it difficult to remove powders and plant material and obtain an accurate weight. It is recommend that powders and plant materials remain in original container(s) or placed in a smaller ziplock plastic bags prior to placing it in the heat sealed evidence bags. It is also important to remember plastic will trap moisture and cause wet or damp evidence to mold. **Only package dry materials in plastic bags.**
- Items should be contained within the innermost proximal containers in which they were found (zip bags, etc).
- Powders should NEVER be dumped directly into evidence bags. This will not only restrict the laboratory's ability to obtain an accurate weight, but presents significant exposure hazards (especially from fentanyl derivatives) for officers and laboratory staff.
- Whenever possible and practical, each item should be packaged in a unique evidence bag – multiple items should not be combined in the same bag.
- Fresh and/or wet plant material should be loosely packaged in paper bags to prevent molding and degradation.
- Extremely large amounts of suspected Cannabis should be separated for submission. The sub-item/submitted specimen should be limited to the lowest weight necessary to establish the chargeable trafficking threshold.
- Roots and dirt must be removed from plants prior to submission.
- Non-drug items must be removed/separated prior to laboratory submission.
- Multi-packet submissions (zip bags, glycine envelope, foil folds, etc. containing the same suspected material) that have the potential to exceed a threshold weight (felony or trafficking levels) should NOT be combined prior to laboratory analysis (*Greenwade vs. State of Florida*).
- When multi-packet items (zip bags, glassine envelope, foil folds, etc. containing the same suspected material) do not have the potential to exceed a threshold level weight (felony or trafficking levels), a single packet (zip bag, glassine envelope, foil fold) should be separated and submitted for laboratory analysis.
- Where multiple suspects exist, each item of evidence should be clearly marked to indicate the associated individual.

- Field test kits can pose serious safety hazards and, in the case of trace amounts, compromise the ability of the laboratory to complete an analysis. Therefore, field test kits should **NEVER** be used directly on items submitted to the lab (a small aliquot/sample should be removed for field testing). Used test kits should not be placed into the evidence container. Any items with used test kits will be refused/returned for safe packaging. Items with field test “staining” may be refused/returned.
- Evidence seized from body cavities or evidence contaminated with blood, body fluids or biological waste should be avoided and will be accepted on a case-by-case basis; they must be clearly marked “BIOHAZARD” and notations concerning this evidence should be made in the request. Efforts should be made to separate the drug evidence from the contaminated packaging prior to submission.
- U.S. currency may be contaminated with minute, but identifiable, amounts of controlled substances; therefore, currency will only be accepted if there is visible residue or solid material present.
- The inherent dangers of hypodermic syringes, including the transmittal of disease (HIV, hepatitis, etc.) are significant. Syringes and/or syringe contents will only be accepted for analysis with pre-approval from laboratory management, and then if it is the **ONLY** potential controlled substance associated with the case/suspect.
 - Syringes must be packaged in tubes or containers specifically designed for the safe packaging and transport of biohazardous sharps (OSHA approved for example).
- Due to the recent legalization of hemp and hemp related products, additional testing will be necessary to differentiate illegal Cannabis from Hemp in plant material and related products. This additional testing requires larger samples sizes. The following policies apply to suspected Cannabis cases only and are effective immediately:
 - **Plant Material:**
 - Felony cases only. Misdemeanor cases will be considered on a case by case basis but must include Division Lead State Attorney request and have explicit permission for submission by the Laboratory.
 - Minimum net weight per item/sub-item: 1 gram.
 - No residue or trace items.

- **Oils, Waxes, and Concentrates (resins)-includes vape pen cartridges:**
 - Felony cases only
 - Minimum net weight per item/sub-item: 1 gram
 - No residues; vape pen cartridges must contain at least 1 milliliter of liquid.
- **Edibles (including suspected infused candies, brownies and sodas):**
 - Not routinely accepted at this time. The new testing procedure will not be initially be suitable for this type of sample; please contact the laboratory for assistance if testing of these items is necessary. Additional testing protocols are planned for a later date.
 - Any laboratory testing would be to rule out hemp related products (high CBD content) but not compliance with the 0.3% THC content legal requirements for non-hemp products.

TOXICOLOGY

PCFL performs analysis of biological fluids (typically blood and urine) to determine blood alcohol levels and to identify any controlled substances in DUI/BUI investigations; analysis of various body fluids and/or tissues for drugs and toxins needed to assist the ME in the determination of cause and manner of death; and, analysis of samples (blood and or urine) collected from sexual assault victims for the presence of impairing drugs.

Sample storage/preservation

Items should be stored in a manner to prevent loss or degradation. Samples should be refrigerated as soon as practical and always within 7 days of collection (Florida Administrative Code 11D for Blood Alcohol samples) of samples that contain a preservative. Many drugs are unstable in biological fluids; preservatives and refrigeration will retard the loss of drugs in these specimens.

Unless other arrangements are made, PCFL will retain toxicology specimens (frozen and in a secure environment) for a period of not less than two years after submission. Samples may be retained longer upon the written submission of a HOLD request. Only HOLD requests with an end date (typically “5 more years”) will be accepted.

Law Enforcement Toxicology Requests

DUI/BUI – Drug analysis (if requested) will only be conducted on samples in which the blood alcohol level (BAC) is less than 0.10g/dL.

Crash Investigations – Investigations in crash cases that result in death or serious bodily harm, both BAC and drug analysis (if requested) will be conducted.

Urine alcohol does not correlate to blood alcohol levels, therefore, urine alcohol analyses will not be conducted in DUI/BUI or crash investigation cases.

Blood drug levels are more indicative of impairments than urine drug presence; thus the submission of both blood and urine specimens is recommended.

Sexual Assault investigations – The victim’s blood and/or urine will be tested for alcohol and any potentially impairing drugs.

Retrograde alcohol extrapolation will be conducted by written SAO request and only when the initial BAC level is greater than 0.08g/dL and less than 0.15 g/dL

Acceptance and Packaging Requirements (Blood collected for DUI/BUI/Crash Investigations) should be collected and packaged in accordance with Florida Administrative Code 11D-8.012: Implied Consent.

- Blood vials should be packaged within a rigid container (cardboard box) to prevent breakage.
- Two vials should be submitted for each collection time/date. Both vials should contain at least 5 mL of blood.
- Urine specimens must be collected in clean specimen cups or tubes. Caps should be taped to ensure that they do not loosen and leak during transportation/handling.
- The minimum recommended volume of urine is 20mL.
- Urine specimens must be placed in a leak-proof sealed bag prior to submission to the lab or the DUI lockers.
- ***DO NOT submit gloves used in sample collection to the lab or place them in DUI lockers. They will be returned to the case agency.***
- Every specimen must be labeled with the subject name and date/time of collection.
- All outer containers (boxes, plastic bags) must be labeled in accordance with evidence labeling policies (agency case number, item number, associated individual, date and time of collection).

Post Mortem Toxicology Requests

The ability to collect specific samples for post mortem toxicology is dependent on the case circumstances. The extent of qualitative and quantitative analysis will ultimately be based on the types and amounts of samples submitted.

- Whenever possible and practical the following samples and minimum sample volumes should be collected and submitted:
 - One – 20mL (large tube) NaF preserved heart blood
 - One -10 mL (medium tube) NaF preserved heart blood
 - Two – 15 ml (medium tube) NaF preserved peripheral blood
 - One – 10ml (medium tube) EDTA preserved heart or peripheral blood
 - One- 7 mL (small tube) non-preserved heart blood
 - One - 5 mL non-preserved vitreous fluid
 - One - 50 mL tube/cup of non-preserved urine.
 - One - 50 mL tube/cup of gastric contents.
 - One tube/cup of liver tissue (approximately 30 grams).
 - Other samples pertinent to toxicological findings including (if applicable):
 - Hospital Specimens.
 - Lung, Brain, Muscle, Injection site, etc.
- Each collection container label should include (where known) the decedent name, the ME case number, and sample type (iliac blood, heart blood, liver).
- Specimens should be combined in large plastic evidence bags by collection source (autopsy, hospital admission, hospital-other, donor specimens) for submission to the laboratory.

Analysis Policies

- The laboratory will perform appropriate tests based on the type of death, type of specimens, requirements of law and doctor request. In general, cases will be classified and analyzed as follows and where sample size permits:
 - Level 1: Known cause of death at the time of submission
 - Ethanol - (blood and vitreous fluid)
 - Immunoassay screen for common drugs – Blood (confirmations performed as needed)
 - Level 2: Unknown cause of death where overdose not suspected; all infant deaths; all in-custody deaths; all OSHA and FAA investigations
 - Ethanol – Blood and Vitreous Fluid
 - Immunoassay screen for common classes
 - Basic/Neutral Drug Screen with GC-MS Screen/Confirmation
 - Blood quantitations as needed
 - Level 3: Unknown cause of death where overdose possible/likely
 - Ethanol – Blood and Vitreous Fluid
 - Immunoassay Screen for common drugs classes
 - Basic/Neutral drug screen and confirmations
 - Blood drug quantitations as needed
- Carbon monoxide, inhalants, and seized item analyses are performed when indicated in the course of the investigation.
- External/reference laboratories may be used for analysis of tissues and quantitation of drugs not within the laboratory's scope.

Evidence Return

- After the retention period is met, PCFL will return one blood tube for any future potential identity/relationship testing.

Decedent Medications

Drugs and paraphernalia collected by ME staff in the course of an investigation will be inventoried and, when necessary analyzed. Items should be submitted in sealed and labeled evidence bags. Like substances may be combined in one bag (i.e. prescription pills in bottles; paraphernalia). Loose pills/items should be placed in individual zip bags prior to consolidation into the evidence bags. The location of where paraphernalia was found should be clearly noted. No insulin or suspected insulin should be submitted for analysis.

Fire Debris Analysis

Fire Debris analysis is the analysis of items, including debris and liquids for the presence of ignitable liquids.

Analysis Policies

- Unless otherwise requested, analysis will be limited to volatile ignitable compounds within the boiling range of hexane (C6) through eicosane (C20); which includes but is not limited to lighter fluids, gasoline, diesel fuels and most common commercially available ignitable liquids products.
- Analysis for the presence of highly volatile oxygenated compounds (acetone, alcohol, etc.) will be done by request; and only if indicated in the course of the investigation.

Evidence Packaging and Labeling

- Solid samples collected from a fire should be packaged in lined paint cans (quart or gallon size).
 - Cans should not be more than ½ full to allow for sufficient headspace for testing
 - In addition to the required general evidence labeling; the location of where the sample was collected should be included on the container
- Soil samples should be stored frozen prior to submission to the laboratory. The submission of comparison samples of soil proximal to the questioned soil is recommended.
- Large non-debris sample (i.e. suspect/victim clothing) may be packaged in fire debris evidence bags as long as an empty control bag is submitted with the item (note: ignitable liquids are used in the manufacture of some evidence bags)
- Liquid samples (suspect accelerants) should be sampled into a small glass vial or jar for submission to the laboratory. The lid should be taped to ensure that it does not loosen/leak during transport. Bulk liquids/liquid containers will not be accepted. Any information from the originating container should be included in the request documentation or on the evidence label. The vial/jar may be placed in a clean paint can or in a heat sealed evidence bag for submission.

General Chemical Analysis

PCFL will analyze/identify chemicals/substances by special request and only when the compounds of interest are within the scope/abilities of current laboratory instrumentation and protocols.

The most common requests are for the analysis of inhalants

Investigators should contact the laboratory for pre-approval and assistance with packaging and submission.

Please contact the laboratory staff for assistance and pre-approval of evidence outside of these guidelines. The laboratory contact information is as follows:

Evidence and Evidence Submission

**PCFLEvidence@pinellascounty.org
727-582-6810**

**Reta Newman, Director
rtnewman@pinellacounty.org
727-582-6810**