



REPORT HIGHLIGHTS

Friday, Dec. 18, 2020

Seattle Office of Inspector General Issues Audit Report on SPD DNA Evidence Management

Audit recommendations include steps to prevent errors in DNA evidence storage and tracking

On September 19, 2019, the Seattle Police Department (SPD) notified OIG that SPD had mistakenly destroyed 107 DNA samples and requested OIG review the policies and practices surrounding this incident. This audit report discusses SPD's handling of 654 DNA samples collected from individuals convicted of certain crimes in accordance with Seattle Municipal Code. These DNA samples are entered into the Washington State Combined DNA Index System (CODIS), which feeds into the National DNA Index System. Together, these databases allow investigators to check DNA of an unknown perpetrator against known samples in the database.

OIG Findings

During a five year time period (September 2014 – September 2019), SPD stored 654 post-conviction DNA samples for the City Attorney's Office (CAO) while the CAO resolved a legal issue preventing the Washington State Patrol from processing the samples and entering them into the state database. In 2018, in response to capacity issues at the Evidence Warehouse, SPD bypassed standard protocols controlling evidence disposal. As a result, SPD mistakenly destroyed 107 (16%) of the DNA samples. OIG also identified evidence storage risks at an SPD precinct.

OIG Recommendations

OIG made three recommendations in this report:

1. SPD should finalize a manual for the Evidence Unit that addresses all aspects of evidence collection, security, storage, and disposition, in coordination with the CAO and the King County Prosecuting Attorney's Office.
2. SPD should take immediate steps to address capacity issues at the Evidence Warehouse, which is 94% full and the vehicle storage facility, which is at 100% capacity.
3. SPD should take immediate steps to establish consistent and secure evidence storage requirements for all precincts. The requirements should be determined by the Evidence Unit and in alignment with industry standards. These requirements should be codified in the

Evidence Unit manual and the SPD Manual to ensure all personnel are aware of the requirements. Given the importance of secure evidence storage, SPD should not wait to finalize the manual before taking remedial action.



*PHOTO: SPD evidence warehouse in early 2018.
Photo taken by SPD.*



PHOTO: Envelopes containing post-conviction DNA samples that were stored at the SPD Warehouse. Photo taken by SPD.

The full report is available on the Office of Inspector General website at [https://www.seattle.gov/Documents/Departments/OIG/Audits/Audit of Destruction of Post Conviction DNA Evidence.pdf](https://www.seattle.gov/Documents/Departments/OIG/Audits/Audit%20of%20Destruction%20of%20Post%20Conviction%20DNA%20Evidence.pdf).

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The Seattle Office of Inspector General provides systemic oversight to help ensure the fairness and integrity of Seattle's police system. The Office of Inspector General is part of Seattle's independent police oversight system, and works in tandem with the Community Police Commission and the Office of Police Accountability.

FOR MORE INFORMATION, CONTACT:

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