



Home Office

Tamper evident bags

Version 4.0

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About this guidance

This guidance explains the procedure to follow for securing seized or detained items in a tamper evident bag (TEB), how to use the bag and how to record information about its contents.

It tells you:

- why you use TEBs to secure items
- the procedure for issuing TEBs
- the correct way to use a TEB
- how to complete the exhibit label correctly
- when to use a TEB
- how to return or dispose of TEBs
- about health and safety considerations for using TEBs

Contacts

If you have any questions about the guidance and your line manager or senior caseworker cannot help you or you think that the guidance has factual errors then email the CFI Modernising Guidance Project team.

If you notice any formatting errors in this guidance (broken links, spelling mistakes and so on) or have any comments about the layout or navigability of the guidance then you can email the Guidance Rules and Forms team.

Clearance

Below is information on when this version of the guidance was cleared:

- version 4.0
- published for Home Office staff on 06 September 2017

Changes from last version of this guidance

- Transfer to new template
- House keeping changes

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Why tamper evident bags are used

This page explains why criminal investigators in Immigration Enforcement Criminal and Financial Investigation (CFI) teams must use tamper evident bags (TEBs) and what they are used for.

Why you must use a TEB

As a Criminal Investigation Officer you must use TEBs supplied by the Home Office.

All TEBs are used to:

- preserve evidence
- produce that evidence as exhibits in court

You must use them to secure and protect items you have seized from a suspect that may be of 'evidential value' to any future investigation.

General rules for using TEBs

TEBs combine a bag, seal and label that:

- can be used to safely transport or store the exhibit in a controlled way
- cannot be opened without leaving an obvious trace
- are bar coded so they are easily traced
- make sure the items kept to use as evidence keep their integrity (reliability), as they are sealed with a special adhesive that displays the word 'void' if it is tampered with

It is important you make sure as far as possible any bags you use for exhibiting items are free from possible contamination. You must follow the procedures your team has put in place for:

- storing and handling all bags to be used for property or exhibits properly
- recording the unique reference numbers of all TEBs to make sure you maintain a chain of evidence

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Issuing tamper evident bags

This page tells criminal investigators in Immigration Enforcement Criminal and Financial Investigation (CFI) teams how tamper evident bags (TEBs) are issued to teams and how to store them.

TEBs come in a variety of sizes and are all numbered in sequence. New batches of bags are issued in a sealed bag to protect the bags' evidential and forensic value when securing seized exhibits.

How criminal investigation teams record and store TEBs

If, as a team leader, you receive a new batch of bags, you must check the local procedures for issuing TEBs. This may include recording:

- the bags unique numbers to maintain an audit trail
- how they have been issued, for example, 'stored in a clean property cupboard for general use' or 'issued to officer Smith'

You must put the bags in either:

- a team premises search kit containing the forms and bags investigation teams need in their work
- the manufacturer's box or sealed bag, in a clean environment, until they are used

They must not be left loose in the:

- office
- boot of an office car

How long a team must keep unused TEBs

You must not keep unused TEBs beyond the 'use by' date displayed on the bag. It is the individual office's responsibility to:

- manage issuing the bags
- destroy bags
- replace bags where necessary

This and the storage and handling of bags, must be included as part of an assurance (checking) program run by a Her Majesty's inspector.

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Using tamper evident bags

This section tells criminal investigators in Immigration Enforcement Criminal and Financial Investigation (CFI) teams how to use, seal and label a tamper evident bag (TEB) correctly.

How to use a TEB

A TEB is a transparent plastic and leak-proof bag with a strong adhesive seal.

When you seize an item, you must always wear a fresh pair of nitrile gloves. If you seize an item that may need to be forensically tested or analysed you must always handle it:

- in a clean environment
- on a clean surface

You must never handle the bag in any way that may contaminate the interior, by:

- turning the bag inside out when you are preparing it for use
- blowing into the bag
- putting your hands or arms into the bag

You must place the item in the bag at an angle so others can view the contents without needing to open the bag. For instance, you must place a piece of paper that contains writing that could be evidence of a crime into the bag so the writing is visible.

How to seal a TEB

The TEB seal is an orange adhesive strip covered with a blue 'tear off' strip, you can see both coloured strips. You must make sure the contents of the bag do not touch the blue area of the seal because when removed, the blue strip sticks to a green security patch.

To seal the bag, you must:

- place the TEB on a flat surface
- hold one corner of the orange strip with one hand
- pull away the corner of the touching blue strip with another hand
- 'smooth down' the orange strip in the normal way
- make sure you keep contact with the adhesive strip to a minimum

For information on completing the TEB exhibit label see: [Completing the tamper evident bag exhibit label](#).

For information on opening and re-sealing a tamper evident bag see: [Opening and re-sealing tamper evident bags.](#)

When not to use a TEB

You must use a TEB for all non-bulk items of property taken during investigations except the items listed below:

- items kept for forensic analysis (fingerprints or DNA)
- documents kept for electrostatic document analysis (ESDA)
- sharp or sharply pointed articles
- clothing kept for forensic examination
- wet items
- items weighing over 6 kilograms
- large or irregular shaped items where it is difficult to seal the mouth of the bag

You must place clothing in a paper sack, seal it and attach an exhibit label. Wet items must be placed in an open polythene bag inside a paper sack. You must place items over 6 kilograms and large or irregular shaped items in a clear polythene bag and secure it using a numbered seal.

Advice on items of forensic interest

Forensic practitioners on secondment from the police are available to give advice to criminal investigation staff. They give answers to any questions on the preservation of evidence and the best way to secure each item. If you need further information you must ask your line manager.

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Completing the tamper evident bag exhibit label

This page tells criminal investigators in Immigration Enforcement Criminal and Financial Investigation (CFI) teams how to complete a tamper evident bag (TEB) exhibit label and what information to put in each section of the label. For information on opening and re-sealing tamper evident bags see: [Opening and re-sealing tamper evident bags](#).

You only need to complete a TEB label (you do not need to complete a separate 'paper exhibits' label as well). On every TEB there is a single sided pre-printed label. You must:

- complete the front side at the time you seal the bag when you seize an item
- use a ballpoint pen
- not fold the bag over in any way where writing the label will leave any indentation on the internal contents

The TEB labels contain the following key information. The table below tells you how you must complete the sections:

Section heading on the bag	What information it records
Authority	Home Office.
Identification Ref. No	This is made up from the initials or surname of the officer seizing the item and a sequential number. For example AB0001.
Court Exhibit No	This is sometimes allocated to an exhibit during the trial at court.
R-V	You must put in the name of the suspect that evidence relates to.
Property Ref No	You must put in here the reference number given to the tamper evident bag by the property officer.
Description of exhibit	You must complete this with enough detail to identify the seized item. For example, instead of 'correspondence' write 'Barclays bank letter in the name of (account holder)' and write the details of who the letter is addressed to.
Time/ Date Seized/ Produced	You must put down here the exact time and date the item was seized.
Where Seized/ Produced	You must describe the exact location where the item was found. For example, second drawer of 4 drawer filing cabinet, in first floor rear bedroom number 4. The room number must correspond to the

Section heading on the bag	What information it records
	numbers you give to the rooms in the sketch plan in your notebook.
Seized/ Produced by	If you seized the item you must put your name here.
Signed	If you seized the item you must put your signature here.
Incident/ Crime No.	If allocated an incident or crime number you must include this here.
Major incident Exhibit No.	If allocated a major incident exhibit number you must include this here.
Laboratory Ref.	The forensic provider completes this if the seized item is later sent for analysis.

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Opening and re-sealing tamper evident bags

This page tells criminal investigators in Immigration Enforcement Criminal and Financial Investigation (CFI) teams how to open and re-seal a tamper evident bag (TEB) correctly, when it has been sealed. For information on completing a tamper evident exhibit label please see: [Completing the tamper evident bag exhibit label](#).

Opening a sealed TEB

If you need to open a TEB, for example to examine or split an exhibit, you must slit the bag at the opposite end to the adhesive seal. You must be careful not to damage the contents.

Re-sealing a TEB

To re-seal an item, you must:

- re-seal it in a new TEB
- include in the new TEB the original TEB, folded so the labels can be clearly seen

It is not enough to just keep the label of the original bag. You need to do it this way to:

- prove the integrity of the system
- give continuity in the chain of evidence
- dispel (eliminate) any allegations the bags have been tampered with

In every case, you must:

- record the reason for opening the property or exhibit bag in:
 - your notebook
 - the property control register
- inform the case officer
- complete the TEB and make sure the opening of the TEB is witnessed by another officer

You must include in the record:

- the fact you opened the bag
- an explanation of why you opened it
- what you did to the exhibit
- whether you re-sealed the item
- the new seal number
- the original identifying mark or any new identifying marks

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Returning, re-using or disposing of tamper evident bags

This page tells criminal investigators in Immigration Enforcement Criminal and Financial Investigation (CFI) teams about returning unused tamper evident bags (TEBs) and how and when to dispose of them correctly.

Returning unused bags

Once you have completed a search of premises or the examination of property or exhibits, you seal any unused bags in a fresh bag and return to the issuing officer.

It may be possible to use these bags again, but you must not use them for items submitted for forensic examination.

Keeping unused bags as a control sample

If you have already taken sensitive forensic crime scene exhibits for analysis you must keep any unused TEBs as an 'unused material' control sample.

When not to use TEBs and how to dispose of them

To maintain the integrity of exhibit bags used in sensitive crime scenes, you must discard or destroy any exhibit bag if, for any reason, you:

- consider it to be compromised (contaminated)
- cannot prove it to be free of contamination

You must not leave spoilt bags on the premises you have searched. You must put them into a plastic bag and return them to the issuing officer for disposal. The issuing officer must record the bag numbers and then destroy the bags.

Disposing of TEBs at the end of investigation

To protect personal information you must dispose of TEBs appropriately, making sure personal information on the TEBs are not put in the public domain.

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Health and safety for using tamper evident bags

This page gives criminal investigators in Immigration Enforcement Criminal and Financial Investigation (CFI) teams health and safety advice for handling items to be stored in a tamper evident bag (TEB) and on the best way to secure the items you are keeping.

Things to consider when you handle property and exhibits

You must:

- wear a fresh pair of nitrile gloves (and liners) at all times when you handle property or exhibits
- consider wearing a forensic suit or mask in each situation
- if you have a cold or recent cut which has bled, let someone else package items requiring DNA analysis
- always wash your hands thoroughly before and after handling property and exhibits
- always beware of sharp objects before and during packaging
- if you find firearms or explosives on the premises, follow the firearms and explosives safe handling instructions, see: Firearms and explosives – safe handling procedures
- report all accidents, however minor, to the case team or line manager and complete an online form, see: Accident and incident reporting

You must not:

- smoke, eat or drink when you handle property or exhibits
- bite or tear the plastic bag using your teeth, always use a knife or scissors
- remove the air from a package towards your face, the correct way is to:
 - place the bag with the end to be sealed facing away from your body and face
 - apply the seal

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