



FORENSIC RECOVERY WITHIN CONTAMINATED ENVIRONMENT

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The Exhibit Handling System, operated by the Anti-Terrorist Branch, has evolved from experiences whilst dealing with long term domestic terrorism and the subsequent prosecution of the offenders. Stringent U.K. criminal law in regard to exhibits and forensic evidence required a strict system in order to provide continuity and integrity to every item that came into possession of the Police. This system also applies to items that are eventually deemed 'unused', as nearly all evidence is disclosed to the defence. I believe that if a system can withstand the close examination that British Criminal Law provides, it will probably be suitable in most countries.

The system relies on each item being supplied with a documented trail of all persons who have had possession of it and who have opened the security packaging for examination purposes.

In contaminated environments the initial process within the system has to be adapted in order that strict monitoring of the items can be carried out during the packaging process. It is also recognized that access to many exhibits will be heavily restricted and therefore protocols are in place to interrogate the evidence at the packaging stage in order to avoid unnecessary spread of contamination. The protocols are similar for both radiological and nuclear incidents as well as chemical and biological. Regardless of the type of incident the system can be adapted on the advice of the relevant scientific authority. In the U.K. for radiological and nuclear incidents that authority would be the A.W.E. Aldermaston.

The integrity and continuity regime should be continued within laboratories which are conducting examinations of exhibits recovered. It is also important that Nuclear Forensic Laboratories do not overlook possibilities of traditional evidence, such as DNA, Fingerprints and fibre traces. Good record photography of items which are unlikely to be released by the laboratory is essential.

Finally, cross-contamination has in the past been a major issue in terrorist trials. Every effort should be made to avoid this occurrence at all stages of a forensic investigation. This requires adherence to strict protocols at both recovery and at subsequent examination.