

Latent Print Packaging

The following are the recommended guidelines for packaging evidence for “Latent Fingerprint Development” by the Division of State Fire Marshal (SFM) Forensic Laboratory. Please keep in mind this information is based on the assumption that the sample is **only** being submitted for Latent Prints. Multiple tests may impose other restrictions. A priority list may be necessary to determine which test(s) is more important. In this case, please discuss with lab staff before package and transport.

General Guidance

Package each exhibit separately. **Do not** send *loaded* firearms, *live* explosives or fireworks, as the lab is not equipped to safely handle these items. Cleared firearms, spent fireworks and explosive devices that have been rendered safe are acceptable. Air dry all wet latent print evidence before packaging. Use cardboard boxes or paper bags for transport and place evidence tape over top. **Do not** use metal cans, fire debris bags or plastic bags for transporting unless there is no water present. Mold and bacteria will ruin latent prints.

I. Packaging Nonporous Items

These surfaces are usually smooth and hard, which makes it difficult to prevent latent prints from being rubbed off by handling, packaging and shipping (or transport). Items may be super glued in the field and submitted to the lab for development.

If you would prefer the lab to super glue or otherwise process the item, it needs to be packaged so there is minimal contact of the latent print with the sides of the package. **Do not** use plastic bags. Additionally, paper bags should only be used if the print is protected from the sides of the bag or no boxes are available. In boxes, the item should be suspended with string or wire from the top, the sides and/or the bottom of a cardboard box. If it cannot be tied, try to block the piece into a position where it does not move or contact the sides of the container (see examples on next page). In this case (of blocking), the item should be hand carried to the lab and not shipped. Also, do not pack the evidence with styrofoam chips (“peanuts”) or other loose packing (shredded paper, vermiculite, etc.) as these materials tend to rub off or smudge fingerprints.

II. Porous Items

Porous materials are much easier to handle. The fingerprints are partially absorbed into the surface and less likely to be completely rubbed off. To package these items, place them into paper bags, manila envelopes, or boxes (stabilize to prevent movement). Plastic bags are not recommended. Again, please seal with evidence tape.

III. Adhesive Tapes and Labels

Duct tape, black electrical tape, and scotch tape are usually wrapped around items and yield a wealth of good latent prints. This type of item should generally be sent to the lab. Therefore, lab staff recommend leaving the tape on the object and packaging it as a *nonporous* item for shipping or transport. Free pieces may be pinned or taped onto a piece of cardboard and then placed into a box and transported.

Packaging Ideas



Here, the bottom is blocked in position with cardboard strips. The top is wired so as not to hit the side of the box.



Tape can be mounted onto a piece of cardboard using pins or tape. The cardboard piece can then be taped into a box to prevent contaminating the adhesive and to prevent shifting during transport.



Convenient transport of light bulbs



Melted plastic container wired on cardboard and placed in a box.