

Germantown Police Department

Policies and Procedures

Number: 4-3
Effective Date: January 21, 2009
Subject: Digital Media
Previous Revisions:

I. PURPOSE

The purpose of this policy is to establish a formal procedure for photography processing and the storage, retrieval, and retention of photographic images for evidentiary purposes.

II. POLICY

It shall be the policy of the Germantown Police Department to capture photographic images as an important component of criminal investigation and prosecution. Images may be captured and archived using various imaging technologies including, but not limited to, conventional film and digital imaging. Image integrity is maintained to ensure images will be admissible in a court of law.

III. DEFINITIONS

1. Archival storage media: Storage media well suited to long-term storage of archive images.
2. Capture: The process of recording an image.
3. Compression: The process of reducing the size of a data file.
4. Digital image file: A record that includes image data and related data objects.
5. File format: The structure by which data is organized in a file.
6. Hybrid imaging: The method or process of creating a digital image file from an analog picture, negative or slide.
7. Image enhancement: Any process intended to improve the visual appearance of an image.
8. Image output: The means by which an image is presented for examination or observation.
9. Image processing: Any activity that transforms an input image into an output image.
10. Image processing log: A record of the steps used in the processing of an image.
11. Native file format: The file format of the primary image.
12. Original image: An accurate and complete replica of the primary image, irrespective of media.
13. Primary image: Refers to the first instance in which an image is recorded onto any media that is a separate, identifiable object.
14. Processed image: An image output (see Image Processing).
15. Removable storage media: Storage media that can be removed (and replaced) from a camera or other digital device.

16. Storage: The act of preserving an image.
17. Storage media: Any object on which an image is preserved.
18. Working image: Any image subjected to processing.

IV. PROCEDURE

A. Image Capture

Photographs will be taken when a department member believes that visual documentation will assist to further the investigation or prosecution of criminal acts, incidents, or traffic accidents. The photographs should be of high quality and accurately represent the scene as it appeared at the time it was photographed. Images will be captured with a camera with a resolution that meets the guidelines set forth by the Scientific Working Group on Image Technology (SWGIT)

1. If a digital camera is used to capture images, the file format and compression ratio will be appropriate to ensure high visual quality when viewed or printed.
 - a. After photographs are captured and stored as primary images on the removable storage media, the images will not be opened and/or viewed with a device that enables editing of digital images. Reviewing the photographs on the camera's integral viewing screen to ensure proper exposure and composition and to verify date and time stamp is acceptable. Images will not be deleted from the removable storage media until all images are transferred to archival storage. Any photos taken by mistake must not be deleted and must be transferred to storage along with the intended images to ensure incremental numbering of the images.
 - b. The removable storage media may only contain images from one crime/incident. Once the images are captured, the department member will remove the storage media from the camera. The storage media will be kept in the department member's direct control until such time the storage media is logged into Property and Evidence.
 - c. Existing procedures will be used when entering the storage media into Property and Evidence, including the use of appropriate packaging and completion of a property and cover sheet.

B. Image Transfer and Archiving

1. After the removable storage media is logged into Property and Evidence, the Evidence Custodian will transfer the primary images in their native file format onto two recordable compact discs (CD-R), using a "stand alone" CD writer without the use of image editing software.
 - a. This process occurs before the primary images are opened or viewed (other than on the camera's integral viewing screen).

- b. After the primary images are written onto the CD-Rs, the original images, now contained on the CD-Rs, will be opened to ensure successful data transfer to the archival storage media. After the digital file data transfer is confirmed, the evidence custodian will format the storage media and the storage media returned to service. The digital image files contained on the removable storage media have evidentiary value, not the reusable storage media. Thus, once the digital data files are transferred to archival media, the property number will associate with the archival media.
 - c. Only CD-Rs with unique serial numbers will be used for archiving purposes.
 - d. A record is kept of the following information:
 - i. The brand and serial number, located around the center hole of the CD-Rs used as the archival media for a specific case number and item numbers;
 - ii. The date and time that the digital image file was transferred; and
 - iii. The operator's name.
 - e. A CD-R will only contain original images from one crime/incident. Placing subsequent images from the same case report number on the CD-R is acceptable.
 - f. The original CD-Rs to which the primary images were transferred will be archived in Property and Evidence, and will not be released. Should new digital image storage technology become available which would increase the shelf life of the images, they will be transferred to the new archival storage media.
 - g. If working images are created, these images will not be written onto the CD-Rs containing the original images. Working images may be stored on the computer hard drive, a magnetic storage media, or written onto another CD-R.
2. All digital image file transfer from one media type to another will be done on a "strand alone" CD writer. All image enhancement and output-for court purposes will be done on a computer workstation dedicated to digital and hybrid imaging.
- a. This workstation is not connected to any type of network device or the Internet, except in cases involving system diagnostics or upgrading of firmware and/or software.
 - b. The Evidence Custodian determines who is authorized to use the CD writer and digital imaging workstation and perform the described procedures. The CD writer and workstation access is limited to authorized system users.
3. It will be acceptable for an authorized user to photograph a scene and transfer the images onto a CD-R following the procedure outlined above

without entering the removable storage media into Property and Evidence. The CD-Rs, which contain the original images, are entered into Property and Evidence.

C. Image Processing

If a department member, or other authorized person, requests copies of images, the request will be completed in writing. The written request serves as a record to assist in tracking the images. Images can be output (processed) as contact sheets or large images as requested. Additionally, images may be copied onto a CD-R.

1. A printed image is a true and accurate representation of the scene. Techniques, such as cropping, contrast adjustments, dodging and/or burning, un-sharpen/mask, and color balance are acceptable enhancements, and are synonymous with existing darkroom techniques. Specific digital techniques, including resizing (with or without interpolation), may be utilized to improve the image quality and accommodate the processed images printed size.
2. Scanning negatives and other analog images is acceptable, thus creating a digital image file that can be processed and output. The negatives will be retained as the original images.
3. For introduction in a court of law, each image has documentation regarding any changes made from the original digital image's file. The image processing log is specific enough to allow an independent operator to produce a similar output if provided a copy of the original digital image file and the image processing log.

V. REVIEW PROCESS

An annual review of this policy shall be conducted to determine if it should be revised, canceled or revoked in its present form.

This order shall remain in effect until revoked or superseded by competent authority.