

Performance Audit
Police Department Property and Evidence

February 2006

City Auditor's Office

City of Kansas City, Missouri

February 7, 2006

Honorable Mayor, Members of the City Council, and Members of the Board of Police Commissioners:

This performance audit of the property and evidence unit of the Kansas City, Missouri, Police Department was initiated by the City Auditor pursuant to Article II, Section 13 of the city charter. The audit focuses on the internal controls for property and evidence management and the potential health risks to police staff associated with working in the property unit.

Property and evidence management is the processes and procedures the Police Department follows when collecting, maintaining, preserving, and disposing of evidence and recovered property. Having effective procedures helps to maintain the chain of custody and integrity of evidence when used in court, allows illegal guns and drugs to be properly processed and destroyed, and allows property, when recovered, to be easily returned to its proper owner.

Tests conducted for the audit indicate that controls over property and evidence are adequate. After police executive staff expressed concerns about the internal controls of property and evidence management, we reviewed police procedures for recovering property and inventoried a random sample of 1100 pieces of property. We were able to account for all 1100 items, which included guns, drugs, blood samples, and documents. Most of the property we inventoried was stored in the department's property room, warehouse, and crime lab, but some had been disposed.

Both police management and staff expressed concerns about air quality in the property storage facilities. Poor air quality can lead to problems such as allergies, coughing, and fatigue. We researched employee sick leave for all civilian staff working in the property facilities and compared them to those of all civilians across the department. Police data shows civilian employees of the property unit used slightly more sick leave than civilians across the department, 6.1 days per year to 5.7 days.

We did find problems with the storage and tracking of recovered property. Police warehouse staff told us the roof of the warehouse leaks into the storage area. We saw where staff placed large tarps over a section of shelving to protect property from possible water damage. Information problems slowed our tracking of property. The Police Department's computer network was affected by a virus and property room and warehouse workstations could not be operated. An incorrect entry into the property database as well as a property master log at one of the patrol stations caused a delay in

tracking some property. In addition, the property unit is storing more property possibly leading to a decrease in storage space.

To strengthen controls over property and evidence, the City Manager should ensure that the warehouse roof is repaired and the Chief of Police should allow the city to provide them with network and PC support services. In addition, the department should develop an indoor air quality plan to protect staff from the effect of poor indoor air quality.

We provided a draft of the report to the Chief of Police and the City Manager on December 30, 2005. Their responses are appended. We would like to thank the Kansas City Police Department's administration, officers, and staff for their courtesy and cooperation. The audit team for this project was Brandon Haynes, Amanda Noble, and Mike Eglinski.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Mark Funkhouser', with a long horizontal line extending to the right.

Mark Funkhouser
City Auditor

Police Department Property and Evidence

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Introduction

Objectives

We conducted this audit of property and evidence management by the Kansas City, Missouri, Police Department under the authority of Article II, Section 13 of the Charter of Kansas City, Missouri, which establishes the Office of the City Auditor and outlines the City Auditor's primary duties. We also conducted this audit under the authority of Chapter 84, Section 350 Revised Statutes of Missouri, which authorizes the City Auditor to audit the Police Department.

A performance audit systematically examines evidence to independently assess the performance and management of a program against objective criteria. Performance audits provide information to improve program operations and facilitate decision-making.¹

This report is designed to answer the following questions:

- Are the Police Department's procedures adequate to accurately collect, maintain, preserve, and dispose of property and evidence?
- Do procedures for the storage and handling of drugs and biological evidence limit health risks to staff?

Scope and Methodology

Our review focuses on the Kansas City, Missouri, Police Department's controls over property and evidence as well the possible health risks associated with the handling and storing of property and evidence.

We interviewed police staff; reviewed policies, procedures, and other related documents; and visited the police property room, warehouse, crime lab, headquarters, and patrol stations to understand how property is recovered, maintained, stored, and disposed. We used records of recovered property to inventory police property storage facilities. We also asked police staff working in the property unit whether they had any

¹ Comptroller General of the United States, *Government Auditing Standards* (Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office 2003), p. 21.

health concerns. We compared sick leave data from civilians in the property unit to all civilians across the Police Department.

We conducted this audit in accordance with generally accepted government auditing standards. No information was omitted from this report because it was deemed privileged or confidential.

Background

Property and evidence management is the processes and procedures police departments follow when collecting, maintaining, preserving, and disposing of evidence and recovered property. Having effective procedures helps to maintain the chain of custody and integrity of evidence when used in court, and allows property, when recovered, to be easily returned to its proper owner.

The property and evidence section of the Kansas City, Missouri, Police Department is responsible for receiving and storing all evidence, confiscated property, and unclaimed property recovered by members of the department. This can include property and evidence recovered at a crime scene. Items used in court must be secured in a manner to retain their evidentiary value. Property staff must also secure confiscated and unclaimed property to protect it from damage, and must attempt to locate the rightful owners of the property.

When recovering property, officers complete a recovered property form, which details the description of the item and any information pertinent to the case, including case report number, location of recovery, and victim and suspect. Once completed, police officers bag, depending on the size, and tag the item. The tag will have information that corresponds with the recovery form. Property is then held at the station until picked up by property unit staff.

At the property room, recovered property is entered into the property database, and set for shelving. The property room only holds cash, drugs, and jewelry, while all other items are stored at the warehouse facility. Recovered property kept for safe-keeping can be claimed by its owner. Once authorized by police staff, property recovered from criminal activities is returned to the owner, destroyed, or sold at auction.

Findings and Recommendations

Summary

We were able to account for all property in our sample. We tracked and located 1100 pieces of property and evidence collected from January 2003 through July 2005. We located recovered property in the property room, warehouse, crime lab, and some patrol stations using the Police Department's property database. We used the original property forms to trace destroyed or claimed property.

While conducting our inventory we identified some problems with the storage and tracking of recovered property. Police warehouse staff told us the roof of the warehouse leaks into the storage area. We saw where staff placed large tarps over a section of shelving to protect property from possible water damage. Information problems slowed our tracking of property. The Police Department's computer network was affected by a virus and property room and warehouse workstations could not be operated. An incorrect entry into the property database as well as an incomplete property master log caused a delay in tracking two items. Finally, the property unit is storing more property leading to a decrease in storage space.

Police management and property unit staff both had concerns about air quality in the property storage facilities. Poor indoor air quality can lead to allergies, coughing, and fatigue.

To strengthen controls over property and evidence, the warehouse roof should be repaired and the Police Department should allow the city to provide them with network and PC support services. In addition, the department should develop an indoor air quality plan to protect staff from the effect of poor air quality.

All Property in Sample Located

We tracked and located all property in our sample of recovered property found in the property database. Our inventory included property found in the police property room, the warehouse, and crime lab and disposed items. Our sample was from all property collected from January 2003 through July 2005.

All Items in Sample Located

We tracked and located 1100 items during our test of controls over property and evidence. (See Exhibit 1.) We went to the police property room, warehouse, crime lab, and police headquarters to locate items. We inventoried guns, drugs, drug paraphernalia, money, jewelry, blood samples, fingerprint cards, and other items.

Exhibit 1. Police Inventory Sample

Item or Location	No. of Items
Items found in property room or warehouse	546
Guns	19
Items released by property unit to Crime Lab for analysis	13
Occurrences of recovered cash deposited by accounting department	60
Items retrieved by claimant or disposed by property unit	337
Items collected by Crime Lab for analysis	125
Total Sample	1,100

Source: KCPD Property Inventory Database.

To conduct our test, we obtained a list of case report numbers issued by police dispatchers from 12 randomly selected days between January 2003 and July 2005. We used the department's records database to identify corresponding property forms. After obtaining copies of property forms for the selected days, we obtained a copy of the police property database of all property collected from January 2003 to July 2005. The database shows where the property is supposed to be located within each property facility.

Using information in the property database we located each item in our sample. Once we located the item, we compared the information written on the property label, located on the bag holding the item, with that on the recovered property form. Some of the property had been released to a claimant or destroyed. For those items we verified disposal by examining the original property form for the appropriate disposal date stamps and claimant identifiers.

Storage and Tracking of Property Problematic

While conducting the inventory we found problems with the storage and tracking of recovered property. There are leaks in the roof of the police warehouse where some recovered property is stored, which could potentially harm property. Problems with information slowed our efforts to track property. Also, the Police Department is storing more property

than it is disposing of, causing a decrease in available property storage space.

Warehouse Roof Leaks

Warehouse staff told us that during inclement weather, the roof over the police property warehouse leaks into the storage area. As a precaution, staff has placed plastic tarps over property under leaking sections of the roof. Public Works staff says it has been leaking on and off for five years and will cost about \$100,000 to repair.

The police store much of their recovered property in the warehouse. The city owns and maintains the facility, but allows the police to use it. Most property is stored off the ground in brown paper bags on metal shelves reaching from the floor to the ceiling. Larger property (i.e., doors, vehicle parts, etc.) are stored in the rear of the warehouse.

To protect property stored in the warehouse, the City Manager should ensure that the roof over the police warehouse is repaired.

Information Problems Slowed Process of Finding Property

During our inventory, we encountered problems with information which slowed our efforts to locate property. A computer outage in the property room and warehouse delayed tracking of property. Issues with handwriting or data entry hindered the tracking of a gun. One entry in a recovered property log was not completed.

Computer outages delayed tracking. During our inventory we were delayed two days while property room and warehouse computers were down, making it harder to track property. Police Department computers were attacked by a virus, making the computers inoperable. Police staff said the department did not have the appropriate software installed at the time to combat the virus. In a 2001 audit, *Consolidating City and Police Support Services*, we recommended that the Police Department allow the city to provide it with IT support services, but that never happened. The city's network was protected from the virus because it had downloaded the appropriate patches from Microsoft. Had the Police allowed the city to provide IT support services, its networks probably would have been unaffected by the virus. The city's Information Technology Department is currently working with police staff to address vulnerabilities in their computer network.

Vulnerability in Windows Software

On August 9, 2005 Microsoft released a security bulletin reporting a critical vulnerability within Windows' plug and play service. If exploited an outside user could execute codes as well as elevate user privileges. Microsoft told users to apply a patch, provided by Microsoft, immediately. The same day, the city authorized patches protecting its network from the Zotob worm.

On August 16, 2005, the Zotob worm infiltrated the unprotected computers of the Police Department and replicated itself throughout the department's network.

Errors on the property form hindered tracking of one gun.

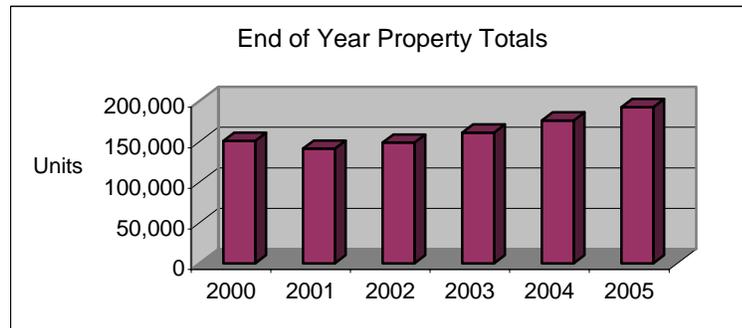
Discrepancies between the property database, lab database, and the handwritten property form led to a delay in us locating one gun. During the inventory, crime lab staff had trouble locating a gun that had been released to them. After pulling the original property form, crime lab staff said the gun was filed under an incorrect case report number. Staff said the officer who recovered the gun used the case report number of another case he was working on when completing the recovered property forms. The gun was later found. Lab staff said property can be misfiled in the database when officers transpose numbers on their reports.

Police property log entry not completed. At one of the police stations the log book of recovered property was missing the signature of the property claimant. The signature indicates who received the property and allows the police to track property when it leaves the patrol stations. When releasing property, the necessary paperwork should be fully completed.

Number of Items Stored Increased

For the last four years the property unit has stored more property than it has disposed of, limiting storage space for new property. (See Exhibit 2.) The disposition of property requires the written approval of the officers working a case. Once a case is either adjudicated or the prosecution chooses not to prosecute a suspect, officers can initiate the disposal of property (except for drugs which require a court order) by completing a disposal form. Once completed and submitted to the property unit, property staff can dispose of the items.

Exhibit 2. End of Year Property Totals, January – December 2000-2004, and January – October 2005



Source: KCPD Property Unit.

Indoor Air Quality Plan Needed

Police management expressed concerns about the air quality and other health issues within the police property unit. Police staff confirmed management's concerns about health problems. Poor air quality can cause health problems like headaches and coughing. An indoor air quality plan can help address issues surrounding air quality within the property and evidence unit.

Management and Staff Expressed Concerns About Air Quality

Police management suggested we look at air quality and health issues surrounding the property and evidence unit. They were concerned about the ventilation, especially for staff working in the drug room. When interviewed, patrol and property unit staff felt air quality could be an issue. Staff from the property unit commented that co-workers developed allergies, while patrol staff said one person developed asthma. Warehouse staff said they have to contend with exhaust fumes from the neighboring vehicle repair facility as well as the lack of climate control within the warehouse.

In visits to the property facilities, we observed the conditions of which management and staff spoke. The property room was not well-ventilated and the drug room had a strong odor. When at the warehouse, we noticed there was no climate control in the storage area and the warehouse staff was sweating as they helped us track items.

Poor indoor air can cause health problems. Since the Environmental Protection Agency says bad air quality is associated with headaches, coughing, fatigue and other illnesses, we looked at the difference in sick

leave usage between civilians in the property unit and all civilians across the Police Department. Police sick leave data showed that property unit staff took an average of 6.1 days of sick leave per year while all civilians in the Police Department took an average of 5.7 days per year. We did not audit the police data.

The Police Department should develop an indoor air quality plan. The Environmental Protection Agency suggests establishing an indoor air quality plan to address certain health concerns.² An indoor air quality plan includes naming an air quality manager and making staff responsible for air quality issues. The EPA suggests that some ways to improve indoor air quality are:

- Keep ductwork clean and dry
- Use health and safety committees
- Identify building management and staff with indoor air quality responsibilities

Indoor air quality can have harmful effects on building occupants and can cause building-related illness (BRI). BRI refers to illness brought on by exposure to building air where symptoms can be identified and attributed to agents in the air. Legionnaire's disease and hypersensitivity pneumonitis are examples of BRI.

To protect staff from the effects of poor air quality, the Chief of Police should establish an indoor air quality plan.

Recommendations

1. The City Manager should ensure the roof over the police warehouse is repaired.
2. As we have previously recommended, the Chief of Police should allow the city to provide the Police Department with network and PC support services.
3. The Chief of Police should establish an indoor air quality plan.

² For more information on indoor air quality go to <http://www.epa.gov/iaq/>.

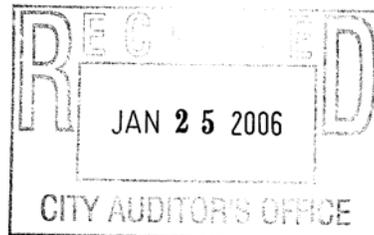
Appendix A

City Manager's Response



Office of the City Manager

Memorandum



DATE: January 25, 2006

TO: Mark Funkhouser, City Auditor

FROM: Wayne A. Cauthen, City Manager ^{W.A.C.}

SUBJECT: Response to Draft Report on Police Department Property and Evidence

The recently completed audit conducted by your department on Police Department Property and Evidence revealed three issues that should be addressed to increase tracking and environmental standards of the property and evidence room for the Police Department. I have reviewed audit and submit to you the following:

Recommendation #1: The City Manager should ensure the roof over the police warehouse is repaired.

Agree. The City Manager will take measures to repair the roof over the police warehouse. The Building Maintenance Division of the department of Public Works will follow up on this activity to ensure the roof is properly repaired.

Recommendation #2: The Chief of Police should allow the city to provide the Police Department with network and PC support services.

Agree. Gail Roper, the city's Chief Information Officer has taken steps with Chief Corwin and his staff to begin consolidating information technology services for the Police Department with the City of Kansas City.

Recommendation #3: The Chief of Police should establish and indoor-air quality plan.

Agree. While the City Manager's Office does not have the authority to directly implement and manage this recommendation to its completion, we will support the recommendation by sending a memo to the Chairperson of Police Commissioners and Mayor Barnes encouraging them to establish an indoor-air quality plan.

Cc: Stan Harris, Director of Public Works
Gail Roper, Chief Information Officer

Police Department Property and Evidence

Appendix B

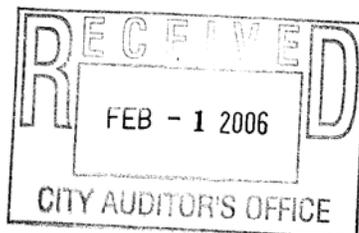
Chief of Police's Response

Police Department Property and Evidence

Police

KC/MO

James D. Corwin
Chief of Police



February 1, 2006

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Office (816) 234-5010
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TO: Mark Funkhouser, City Auditor

FROM: James D. Corwin, Chief of Police

SUBJECT: Response to: Draft Audit Report, Performance Audit
Police Department Property and Evidence

After review of the above draft report, the following is provided in response to the listed recommendations, as each relates to the Police Department:

1. *The City Manager should ensure the roof over the police warehouse is repaired.*

Agree Since this is city-owned property, the warehouse roof should be repaired by the City department responsible for upkeep of such facilities.

2. *As we have previously recommended, the Chief of Police should allow the city to provide the Police Department with network and PC support services.*

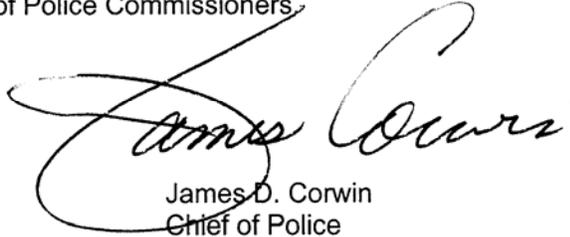
Agree in Part This recommendation was proffered, in most part, due to a two-day computer outage caused by a worm that infiltrated the KCPD network. The worm was able to infiltrate the network after the responsible employee failed to download and install the recommended patch from Microsoft. The existence of separate network and PC support services did not directly cause the event, which could have occurred to a single network if the responsible employee failed to act in a timely manner. The impact of this short-term outage appears immaterial to the outcome of the Property and Evidence Audit.

It should be noted that prior to this event, the KCPD Computer Services Unit had been actively working in conjunction with the City's IT Department to address various information technology issues. Unforeseen attacks on computer network systems continue to be an on-going security issue in today's technologically driven world. The KCPD Computer Services Unit continues to work with the City's IT department to address network security through a focused approach where Police Department and the City's IT staff collaborate on best practices to protect both networks from outside intrusions.

3. *The Chief of Police should establish an indoor-air quality plan.*

Agree Employee health and safety is of the utmost importance to our organization. In lieu of creating a health and safety committee the department will forward the indoor air quality findings and EPA suggestions to the Human Resources Division, which ultimately bears the responsibility for coordination of the health and safety of our department members to include the development of an indoor-air quality plan.

Please contact my staff at 234-5010 if you need assistance in scheduling a date to present your findings to the Board of Police Commissioners.



James D. Corwin
Chief of Police

cc: Commissioner Wasson-Hunt
Commissioner Wilson
Commissioner Brady
Commissioner Zobrist