



Home Office

Tamper evident bags

Version 8.0

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About this guidance

This guidance tells Immigration Enforcement (IE) and suitably trained and accredited criminal investigators within the Home Office about tamper evident bags (TEBs) and when and how to use them.

Criminal Investigators in Immigration Enforcement must be aware of their obligations under the UK General Data Protection Regulation (UK GDPR) and Part 3 of the Data Protection Act 2018 see:

- IE CFI Data protection policy
- Data Protection guidance held on SharePoint: Information management and data protection

The Home Office has a duty to safeguard vulnerable people and promote the welfare of children for more information see: [Vulnerable adults and children](#).

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 Operational Guidance, Risk and Compliance 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.

Publication

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

- version **8.0**
- published for Home Office staff on **10 October 2023**

Changes from last version of this guidance

Housekeeping changes

Related content

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Why tamper evident bags are used

This page tells criminal investigators in Immigration Enforcement (IE) and suitably trained and accredited criminal investigators within the Home Office why they 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.

For further information on Search and seizure see Search and seizure: premises.

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 tracked
- make sure the items retained as evidence keep their integrity (reliability), as they are sealed with a special adhesive that displays the word 'stop' 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. To do this you must:

- store and handle all bags properly that are to be used for property or exhibits
- record the unique reference numbers of all TEBs to make sure you maintain a chain of evidence

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Using tamper evident bags

This page tells criminal investigators in Immigration Enforcement (IE) and suitably trained and accredited criminal investigators within the Home Office 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, wherever possible, place the item in the bag in such a way 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 when the bag is sealed. Notwithstanding, best practice is to scan all items and saving that copy onto Clue prior to depositing the item into the secure store.

How to seal a TEB

The TEB seal is an adhesive strip covered with a blue 'peel off' strip, and an orange and white security strip that the adhesive strip makes contact with when sealed. You must make sure the contents of the bag do not touch the blue area of the seal, because when removed, the adhesive under the blue strip sticks to the orange, white and green security strip.

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 adhesive strip to the orange, white and green security 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 to use a TEB

You must use a TEB for all items of property taken during investigations unless it is impossible to do so. TEBs are available in sizes up to 0.675m x 0.9m to facilitate nearly all seizures including bulk seizures. Where it is not possible to seal the mouth of the bag it is permissible to use a separate seal and label the item.

Sharp items are to be placed in an appropriate protective container prior to placing it into the TEB.

You must place clothing in a paper sack, seal it and attach an exhibit label. Where possible breathable TEBs should be used for damp or wet items. If a breathable TEB is not available, then wet items can be placed in an open bag inside a TEB.

Cash and items for forensic analysis are to be double bagged in line with best practice. That is: place in one TEB and seal it, then immediately place in another TEB sealing that and ensuring all relevant sections are completed on the TEB label.

Exhibit reference format

CFI officers are to use the following format when attributing a reference to a seized item:

- **3 initials** relating to the seizing officer - if they only have 2 names, the last letter in their family name may be used additionally
- **date** in plain **8 digit format**
- **number** starting at 1 without any preceding zeros increasing by whole numbers
- if this is split down into component parts, then the splitting officer should use their initials and start again using the 8 digit date format for the date the split is undertaken
- if one of the component parts are further split down again, then the splitting officer should use their initials and start again using the 8 digit date format

Each part must be divided from the next by a hyphen (dash). For example:

- a single item seized on 25 June 2023 by officer Arthur Bradley Cole would be **ABC25062023-1**

for this item split into 3 component parts by David Edward Francis on 26 June 2023:

- **DEF26062023-1**
- **DEF26062023-2**
- **DEF26062023-3**

For component part, in this case DEF26062023-2, to be further split down into a further 2 component parts on the same date:

- **DEF26062023-4**
- **DEF26062023-5**

Alternatively, for the component part, in this case DEF26062023-2 to be further split down into a further 2 component parts on the following day:

- **DEF27062023-1**
- **DEF27062023-2**

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Completing the tamper evident bag exhibit label

This page tells criminal investigators in Immigration Enforcement (IE) and suitably trained and accredited criminal investigators within the Home Office about 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 should not 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 date in 8 digit format followed with a dash and sequential number. For example, ABC25062019-1 for an item seized on 25 June 2019. For further details see Exhibit reference format
Court Exhibit No	This is sometimes allocated to an exhibit during the trial at court.
R-V	Where known, put in the name of the suspect that evidence relates to.
Property Ref No	Write in here the reference number given to the tamper evident bag by the property officer. This may be the M reference on Clue that is now in place of the 'X number' previously used
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

Section heading on the bag	What information it records
	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 name or number must correspond to how they are referred to in the premises search book
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.
Bag opened by	To be completed in full by the person opening the bag.
Witnessed by	To be completed in full by person witnessing the bag being opened.
Continuity name, Rank, Number, Signed, Date	To be completed in full every time the TEB containing items is in the possession of another responsible person. Other than the property officer taking it into or issuing from the store.

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Official – sensitive: start of section

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Official - sensitive: end of section

Opening and re-bagging an item (exhibit)

This page tells criminal investigators in Immigration Enforcement (IE) and suitably trained and accredited criminal investigators within the Home Office about how to open and re-seal a tamper evident bag (TEB) correctly.

For information on completing a tamper evident exhibit label, 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-bagging an item (exhibit)

To re-bag an item or exhibit, you must:

- re-seal it in a new TEB
- include in the new TEB the original TEB, folded so the reference numbers and original details can be clearly seen
- record on the new TEB either the original exhibit reference details (when the item is re-bagged only) or the split exhibit reference details (when the item is split from the original exhibit, see [Exhibit reference format](#))
- record on the new TEB the same description details as recorded on the original TEB
- record on the new TEB the same place, person, time and date details from whom, where and when the item was seized / produced, as recorded on the original TEB
- sign the continuity section of the new TEB
- not sign the new TEB as the seizing / producing person - this section should be left blank (as the signature recorded on the original TEB from the person seizing/producing the item relates to the person exhibiting the item)

You need to follow this procedure in order 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 case management system (Clue)

- inform the case officer
- complete the TEB and where possible make sure the opening of the TEB is witnessed by another officer

You must include in the Clue record:

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

For more information see: Clue the criminal investigation case management system

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Disposing of tamper evident bags

This page tells criminal investigators in Immigration Enforcement (IE) and suitably trained and accredited criminal investigators within the Home Office about when not to use tamper evident bags (TEBs) and how and when to dispose of them correctly.

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 office for disposal.

Disposing of TEBs at the end of an investigation

To protect personal information, you must dispose of TEBs appropriately, making sure personal information on the TEBs is not put in the public domain; either by shredding or using confidential waste systems as those which are used by the police.

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Health and safety for using tamper evident bags

This page tells criminal investigators in Immigration Enforcement (IE) and suitably trained and accredited criminal investigators within the Home Office about health and safety advice for handling items to be stored in a tamper evident bag (TEB) and the best way to secure the items you are keeping.

Things to consider before 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, when a police forensics officer is not available to deal with forensic evidence, wearing forensic protective clothing so forensic integrity is preserved
- let someone else package items requiring DNA analysis if you have a cold or recent cut which has bled
- always wash your hands thoroughly before and after handling property and exhibits
- always beware of sharp objects before and during packaging
- follow the firearms and explosives safe handling instructions:
 - if you find firearms or explosives on the premises, see: Safe Systems of Work 01 operational arrest activities
- 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 excess 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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