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## Properly Packing and Shipping Your Evidence

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You just completed examining the scene of an accident. You performed a thorough job of collecting the pertinent information and related evidence. You return to your office and begin the next phase of resolving the mitigating issues. You locate a qualified expert and arrange to send him the evidence.

Fairly straightforward so far, but consider this: the evidence you shipped to the expert is crucial to your case. If it were to disappear or arrive damaged, your case could suffer significantly. Therefore, you should take time and give some thought to how you will ship your evidence.

The best way to handle the evidence shipping issue is to ask your expert, "What is the best way to ship the evidence?"

For instance, fracture surfaces must be protected so that the mating fracture surfaces do not touch each other and any jarring or jostling inherent by any shipping means does not further damage the fracture surface. Bubble wrap, and plenty of it, is a great product with which to not only wrap your evidence, but also line the container you will use for shipping. Paper towels or rags are not bad but can pose a problem during examination due to the fibers that a jagged fracture surface can accumulate. Styrofoam peanuts are another good packing material. The main idea is to first wrap the evidence to protect it and second, pack the shipping container to minimize any movement the contents may experience during shipping.

Once the evidence is sufficiently secured and ready for shipping the next order of business is documenting the chain of custody. The chain of custody documents the history of possession in the life span of the evidence. Should a spoliation issue arise, the chain of custody serves as a means of tracing the many hands that have been in possession of the evidence. The chain of custody can be as formal and documented as you want or as simple as is necessary.

The key information in a chain of custody are the *four W's*: **who**, **what**, **when**, **where**, and **how** (for the sake of thoroughness). Regardless of the format, it is important that a signature accompany any transfer of possession.

Concerning shipping the evidence, a vendor that can provide a means of tracing the package is highly recommended. **FedEx**, **UPS**, and **USPS** use tracking numbers for most packages and offer several methods of delivery depending on the shipper's time constraints.

Another option is a **courier service**. While more expensive, you are assured, barring anything unforeseen, of your evidence reaching the expert in an agreed upon period and intact.

Finally, if you decide to **hand-deliver** the evidence to the expert, it is still to your benefit to securely pack and box it in anticipation of Murphy's Law (if anything and everything can go wrong it will and at the worst possible moment).

If you are interested in other resources related to the shipping or preserving of evidence, please give us a call and we will be happy to answer your questions.