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Inspection and Inventory Audit Report

Spring Lake Heights Police Department NJ

Conducted October 22, 2018

Chief (Ret) Michael S. Miller

Background: I was contacted by Spring Lake Heights Police Department Lt Ed Gunnell in reference to conducting an inventory audit of the Police Department's Evidence Room, due to him being promoted to Chief of Police. The agency is not accredited however it is seeking accreditation through NJSACOP commencing in 2019. We discussed the needs of Spring Lake Heights Police and I subsequently provided a quote for services, which the Department subsequently accepted. We agreed on a date of October 22, 2018, which I estimated would be complete on that date.

On Scene Evaluation: I arrived at the Spring Lake Heights Police Department on October 22, 2018 and met with Lt Gunnell. I was given a tour of the facility and also had the opportunity to interview the custodian. A custodian was onsite at all times during our auditing. During the course of the onsite evaluation, I initially focused on learning about how a) the current function operates in terms of intake, packaging, temporary storage, transfer of property into long term storage, storage schemes, and final disposition.; as well as b)how the department utilizes their property management system to track and manage their inventory. Each of these functional areas is discussed in detail within the report.

Of further note:

The PE facility is being maintained in a clean and orderly manner

The integrity of the PE items are being maintained

The PE is being protected from damage and deterioration

PE purge process is ongoing, but attention is needed (see disposition sectionz0

Temporary Storage areas are clean, intact and the locking mechanisms are functional

Department directives relevant to PE are being developed and will be fully implemented in 2019.

Spring Lake Heights Inspection

Intake and Packaging of Evidence:

Intake and packaging generally meet the criteria necessary to gain accreditation, with the exception of specific criteria, such as a written requirement that all items taken into custody be logged in prior to the end of the officer's tour. Spring Lake Heights is in the process of a total rewrite of their evidence control policy through The Rodger's Group, which should rectify specific policy shortfalls.

At an optional level, the Department is doing certain things in accordance with best practices. They are

- The case officer logs all items into the IMC system and there is no need for the custodian to duplicate the work by making a second entry or written back up system. So long as the IMC is securely backed up to a location off site so that data is not lost in the event of a fire, flood, etc, ONE system works best
- The Department requires double verification for items containing currency.
- The Department utilizes glue strip bags for currency and CDS. While the current system of glue strip bags for high risk items is within contemporary norms, I strongly recommend transitioning to heat sealed tubing. In the interim, I suggest heat sealing the remaining supply of glue strip bags below the glue strip for additional security. The officer should sign across the heat seal in either circumstance.
- The method of labeling includes PR numbers as well as an additional tracking number, which caused some confusion. Labeling should be consistent and reflect the item numbers that are generated on the report created in IMC.

Property Management System:

The Department is using the IMC RMS for the logging and tracking of evidence. Lt. Gunnell indicates that he is well versed in the system and satisfied in its performance. While I am not familiar with the IMC system, I noticed that Lt. Gunnell was able to adeptly work the evidence module and could provide an accurate log of evidence upon request. He was also able to explain in detail what the various sections of the report mean. Not being familiar with the capabilities of the IMC evidence module, I will outline the main aspects that an evidence management system should have to track evidence and manage an evidence room.

Four main aspects:

Collection Purpose: Why an item is brought into the function. Examples include:

- Evidence
- Forfeiture
- Found Property
- Safekeeping

Offense Type: The most serious offense associated with the item, or other occurrence prompting item intake. Examples include:

- Homicide
- Robbery
- Possession of CDS
- Ordinance Violation
- Found Property

Status: The general whereabouts of the item. Examples include:

- Stored in location (and the specific location within the room/department)
- To lab
- To court
- At MCPO
- At MCSO

Item Type: The specific category of property or evidence to which an item belongs. Examples include:

- Handgun
- Rifle
- Shotgun
- Vegetation
- Power Substance
- Rocklike Substance

The above aspects, when properly documented work together to create an accurate inventory of all items on hand, an accurate chain of custody for each item and serve to provide alerts to the property custodian to assist in disposition of each item. Lt. Gunnell indicates that the system is capable of more functions that it is being used for and plans to expand the usage of some of the system's advanced functions. Based on my observations and interaction during the audit, I have seen and used systems that appear to be far less complicated than IMC and have many more tools to assist in the management and purge preparation. With that said, IMC may have similar capabilities which are either not enabled or not utilized. I suggest that staff attend a demo of the capabilities of a robust system and compare that with IMC.

Temporary Evidence Holding:

For accreditation purposes, the Department policy needs to be modified as noted in “intake”.

Temporary holding should be of a key in only design, meaning that once the impounding officer has secured the items, the only person(s) who could access them are the property custodian keyholders. The current method of temporary evidence holding meets this requirement.

Policy modification will need to include a provision that the evidence custodian is contacted if the lockers are full or items are otherwise unable to be secured.

The bicycle area contains a chain and a lock that is capable of securing all bicycles within the basement area. This however needs to be modified so that the main chain lock can only be accessed by the evidence custodian, but officers can secure newly recovered bikes to the chain using temporary locks, which the custodian can remove at a later time and secure said bike to the group using the main chain and lock.

Physical Design of the Evidence Vault

The main vault needs modifications to be in compliance with the NJ Attorney General Guideline and best practices. There are several areas of concern which are discussed below.

Security/Environmental**: Construction is solid which is optimum, however there are several issues that need to be addressed.**

- The vault should be located in a secure area within the police department and optimally under video surveillance.
- The vault doors should be alarmed and monitored. There is an alarm present, however it feeds to the police desk and is just cleared when activated.
- Needs fire suppression.
- *NJ Attorney General/NJSACOP Guideline requirement* - **<u>High risk items need to be secured under a separate layer of security (cash, CDS, firearms and jewelry/precious metals/gemstones valued at over $500.</u>** The facility is adequate to accomplish this by utilizing lockers which were newly acquired for this purpose. Additionally, during the audit process, high risk items were physically separated from general evidence amd placed under an additional layer of security.
- Consider the addition of a HEPA air handler.

Storage Scheme: Logistically the room should be laid out so that it is easily understood by a reasonable person. The storage scheme should be modified to accomplish this.

- The storage locations within the room are overly broad and do not easily translate to identifiable storage locations within the IMC. While it may be possible for the custodian to locate an item in a timely manner based on "log numbers", it is not conducive to easily locating items in bulk, nor does it break down specific areas. For example, the storage location of "SLHVAULT" accounts for about most of the items in holding. A better method would be to clearly mark each storage rack/drawer with a letter and each shelf with a corresponding number, such as storage location Rack A, Shelf 1 or simply A1.
- Keep items off the ground as much as possible.
- Add a 55 gal drum or trash can for storage of long, thin items, such as bats, swords, bows, skies, etc.
- Storage locations should be created for items moved from their primary location awaiting a process such as return, destruction, auction, etc. When an item is slated for its respective process, it should be moved to the awaiting process location, such as "destruction box A", but should remain in status "stored in location" until the item is actually destroyed or transferred to another agency for destruction.

Administration of the Evidence Vault

Special Handling Items:

Cash:

- Cash on hand should be on deposit rather than in holding as per 40A:5-15.
    - Deposit found money and non-essential evidence money into a law enforcement trust account within municipal finance, within 48 hr; or returned to owner.
    - Deposit funds pending forfeiture with County Prosecutor, within 48 hr.
    - Only cash absolutely needed for prosecution such as dye pack cash, bloody cash, serial number recorded cash, should be kept as evidence.

- More effort needed to give back to claimants. Responsibility to reunite rests with the agency.
- Cash storage locations should be contained within the "cash/jewl" locker section in the IMC

CDS: CDS is not stored for long periods before transfer to lab and is general not returned from the lab. This is an outstanding practice.

- Records need to accurately reflect the status of the CDS item. Make sure IMC is capable of producing an accurate chain of custody that shows in flow and out flow of items needed for lab analysis etc.

Firearms: Firearms are now segregated from general property in lockers newly acquired for this purpose. Make sure the security of the pins in the locker hinges is adequate. Notation of cleared and checked should be notated in IMC entry, along with the hazard marking “Firearm” on the labeling.

- Loose firearms on hand should be repackaged into handgun boxes. Rifle boxes should be used for long guns.
- Firearms storage locations should be contained within the “firearms” locker section in the IMC

Disposition:

Disposition needs to be accomplished in a regular manner to prevent the room from being overburdened with items. This is true of firearms, cash and general property and evidence. To improve the general health of the evidence room as well as comply with State Statutes, AG Guidelines and directives and conform to contemporary best practices, **TIME** must be allocated to the evidence control officer to accomplish disposition. I estimate that roughly 10% of all items in holding could be purged from the room. Disposition methods are discussed below.

- Destruction: Contraband as well as items of identification and financial instruments such as credit cards, financial documents, etc that cannot be returned should be destroyed by an appropriate method. The same applies to firearms that have been approved for destruction. Follow Monmouth County policies relating to destruction, and if none exists, state policy.
- Auction: Property that becomes owned by the municipality such as that found by an officer, or unclaimed property not wanted by the finder or abandoned property should be auctioned. This can be accomplished by conduction a live municipal auction or using a service such as govdeals.com or propertyroom.com.
- Donate: Municipal government can authorize donation of property such as bicycles or youth sporting equipment to a 503c entity.
- Return to Owner/Finder

Audit:

Full Inventory (@100%): N=592

Items Not Located=2
Items Not Located Rate= .33%

12SLH-105-PR	Letter, envelope and unk. granular substance
09SLH-88-PR	Zig Zag rolling papers

Additionally, there were 9 items that were listed as active, where documentation was provided that the items were destroyed. Those items were updated in the IMC.

Audit Discussion:

The items not located rate across the board is well within the “excellent” range. For comparison, rates for rooms considered “excellent” are less than 1%, “good” run around 2% or lower and average at around 4% or lower. As noted above, the discrepancy rates are less than .5%

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Plan of Corrective Action:

Top Priority Items:

- The storage locations within the room are overly broad and do not easily translate to identifiable storage locations within the IMC. Create storage locations and barcode each location. Each box, bin, drawer, open shelf, etc should be its own location and should be barcoded!
- Cash on hand is too voluminous and should be on deposit rather than in holding. Mandated under 40A:5-15. **As per conversation with Lt Gunnell on December 30, 2018, this has been corrected.**
- Segregate high risk items from general property and evidence within IMC, if possible.
- Provide training to all department personnel in reference to general evidence management. This can be accomplished by online module and delivered asynchronously.

Lesser But Still Important:

- I strongly recommend transitioning to heat sealed tubing. In the interim, I suggest heat sealing the remaining supply of glue strip bags below the glue strip for additional security. The officer should sign across the heat seal in either circumstance.
- Storage locations should be created for items moved from their primary location awaiting a process such as return, destruction, auction, etc. When an item is slated for its respective process, it should be moved to the awaiting process location, such as "destruction box A", but should remain in status "stored in location" until the item is actually destroyed or transferred to another agency for destruction.

S/Michael S. Miller______________________________ Date: December 30, 2018