

# **Hollister Police Department: Property Room Inspection**

**Conducted by  
Law and Justice Committee**

**Issued July 31, 2008**



**County of San Benito  
Civil Grand Jury  
2007-2008**



# HOLLISTER POLICE DEPARTMENT: PROPERTY ROOM INSPECTION

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## SUMMARY

Proper and secure preservation of physical evidence is important for the successful solving and prosecution of criminal cases. The Hollister Police Department maintains a property room in which all physical evidence collected at a crime scene is kept for safeguarding. The property room also handles any abandoned, found, stolen, or seized property that is brought in by police officers. Members of the current Grand Jury found the Hollister Police property room to be well organized and maintained.

## PURPOSE OF INQUIRY

The 2007-08 San Benito County Grand Jury examined the Hollister Police property room to determine whether the agency is properly processing, maintaining, and disposing of physical evidence and other property. The last inspection of the property room was completed by the 2003-2004 Grand Jury.

## METHODOLOGY

Grand Jury members of the Law and Justice Committee conducted an inspection of the property room and interviewed police staff members.

## DISCUSSION

The property room is composed of:

- one main area with several rows of ceiling-to-floor shelves
- a small room, which has shelves lining its walls
- a small, walk-in freezer
- a closet-sized room used for drying evidence, such as bloody items, before they are stored.

Bicycles are kept outside of the building in a secured locker cage.

Evidentiary items are generally organized on shelves, bins, and other containers according to type and/or year. For example, all computer evidence is grouped together on two rows of shelves.

Grand Jury members noticed that evidence items were packaged, labeled, bar-coded, and neatly placed on shelves or in containers. They also observed that the property room, overall, was clean and orderly.

The Police Department is required to keep evidence for a certain number of years after a case is closed. For example, evidence items for felony cases are kept for at least 3 years,

while evidence items for sexual, child abuse, or domestic violence cases are kept for at least 10 years.

Police staff does its best to ensure that all property is returned to its proper owners. The Police Department channels unclaimed property through <http://www.PropertyRoom.com>, an online auction site specifically utilized by law enforcement agencies. All contraband, drugs, and guns are properly disposed of according to law.

### **Staffing**

The Hollister Police property room has only one staff member. A Multi-Service Officer (a non-sworn officer) is in charge of the daily management and has responsibilities for all processing, maintenance, and disposal of evidence and other property that is brought in each day. This officer must ensure all procedures comply with state laws and regulations and of Hollister Police Department policies.

In years past, the property room was staffed by two officers. However, one position was cut for lack of funds. On occasion, a Police Department volunteer assists the Multi-Service Officer.

In addition to overseeing the property room, the Multi-Service Officer has other major responsibilities, including supervising both building and vehicle maintenance and purchasing maintenance supplies and police equipment.

### **Space**

Grand Jury members observed that most of the shelves in both the main area and the smaller room were packed. As space is freed on shelves, all items are shifted over to fill in the empty space. At the time of the inspection (April 2008), there were between 4 and 6 empty shelves in the main area.

Police staff is currently seeking ways to ease the problem of inadequate space in the property room. One option they are exploring is a system of rolling shelves in the main area that would generate 60% more storage space. The staff estimates that with this shelving system, the property room would be able to properly serve its function for an additional 10 years.

## FINDINGS

- F1.** The property room officer runs the operations in an efficient manner.
- F2.** The property room is run by only one staff member who must divide his/her time among performing several other major responsibilities.
- F3.** The property room is clean, neat, and orderly.
- F4.** The property room has inadequate space.

## COMMENTS

The Grand Jury commends the police department staff, particularly the Multi-Service Officer in charge of the property room, for maintaining a neat, well-organized property room.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

- R1.** Hire another staff person to assist the Multi-Service Officer with duties in the property room and/or other responsibilities (based on Findings F1 and F2).
- R2.** Purchase and install a rolling shelf system for additional space (based on Findings F3 and F4).

## RESPONSE REQUIRED

To comply with the Penal Code, including sections 933 and 933.03 (see page viii of this document), the following affected agency (or agencies) shall respond to all relevant findings and recommendations, especially, without limitations, to the findings and/or recommendations specified below.

- The City of Hollister shall respond to the Recommendations R1 and R2.
- The Hollister Police Department is requested to respond to Recommendations R1 and R2.

