

Video and Audio Recordings

Video and audio recordings of activities continue to become prevalent in investigations of criminal activity. Recordings include

- surveillance tapes
- recordings of criminal activities such as drug buys or other investigations
- recordings by the perpetrator of criminal activities
- recordings of crime scenes and autopsies
- recordings of interviews, interrogations and confessions

In addition, uses of video recordings by law enforcement may include:

- A realistic view of the overall scene based on a continuous recording of what a viewer sees, rather than an overall pictorial.
- A depiction of a particular event in motion that would not be suitably depicted through still photography.
- Evidence at trials by video as provided by Wisconsin Statute §885.
- A real-time product for investigators to use for briefings, strategy sessions and interrogations.
- A record of a new or unusual technique developed in the field to process the scene or collect evidence.
- A training vehicle for use to instruct personnel.
- A review of the scene or autopsy for briefing of personnel or to verify that all the items of evidence have been recovered from the scene.

I. Laboratory Examinations

In addition to being able to edit, enhance and duplicate video recordings, the Imaging Units have resources for exporting, enhancing and printing individual fields/frames from video.

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Further, the Forensic Imaging Units perform comparative analysis of known objects with objects recorded in the video such as weapons, clothing, vehicles and buildings and reverse projection photogrammetry.

The following examinations are not conducted at the Wisconsin State Crime Laboratory Bureau: voice identification, audio authentication, audio enhancement, acoustical analysis and photogrammetry, except for reverse projection photogrammetry.

II. Identifying and Labeling Video and Audio Recordings

When recording to videotape, audiotape, CD or DVD, always use new media with only one case-related event recorded on each media. It is suggested that the following information, also called an audio slate, be recorded on each video recording on the audio track:

- a. Camera operator's name, agency and address
- b. Personnel present from agency processing scene
- c. Date, time and exact location of recording
- d. Agency case number and officer-in-charge

Each video produced should be labeled as to the case name, agency number, date produced and name of videographer. The label should also be signed and dated by the videographer verifying that the video recording is a "Fair and Accurate Reproduction" and is an unedited original. The record tab should be removed from the cassette or rendered "safe" from erasure.

Do not use adhesive labels on CDs or DVDs. It is also recommended to use only markers designed for writing on CDs or DVDs. Another option is to use an inkjet printer and inkjet printable CDs and DVDs.

III. Videography Procedures

NOTE: It is not recommended that video be used for the exclusive recording of the crime scene or autopsy.

Crime Scenes

For crime scenes, include an audio slate at the beginning (see Section II). If testimony or sound is not relevant, the camera's sound recording mode or microphone should be turned off. If a switch is not available, insert a "dummy" microphone plug into the auxiliary microphone jack. This will disable the camera's microphone. If the camera microphone cannot be disabled, care should be taken as to any sounds, or conversations that may be picked up by microphone during recording. Depending on the design, microphones on cameras can pick up sounds behind as well as in front of the camera.

Using a very slow panning speed, pan the area to provide an overall view of the entire scene. Complete 360° pans should be made of exteriors of buildings and surrounding area, looking toward the structures and also away from the structures to the surrounding area.

When taping a walk-through of the scene, a camera gyro stabilizer, shoulder brace or chest pod is recommended to steady the camera. Try to avoid "jerky" camera movements, either right to left or up and down. Movement should be as smooth as possible. An alternative to the "walk-through" technique would be to record the scene as if photographing it using the four basic views from a stationary position.

Avoid excessive "zooms". Zoom in on items only when needed to show detail and keep your zoom speed slow. Remember, still photographs are taken to record individual items and details.

Do not include equipment, personnel or unnecessary elements in your video. Be careful of reflective surfaces, such as mirrors, that may show your reflection or other items on the videotape.

If light levels are too low where camera will not record or

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camera gain must be used, consider using an on-camera video light or additional light source.

NOTE: A few video camcorders have a night time monochrome setting that uses visible and IR light which could result in some dark objects being recorded with a lighter tone than expected. This night time setting is more useful for surveillance work.

Avoid the use of any in-camera video effects such as fade-in and fade-out.

Interviews and Interrogations

Interviews and interrogations require a different procedure than for crime scenes. See State Statutes for specific legal requirements. The following are general guidelines for consideration:

1. The audio recording is always left on.
2. The audio slate should include at a minimum the names of all persons present, the date, the starting time, the agency and the location.
3. Whenever you stop or restart the recording, an audio slate should be including in the recording to explain why the recording is being turned off or resumed.

NOTE: If you run out of space on a tape, CD or DVD, explain this in your notes and at the beginning of the next recording.

IV. Duplicating Video and Audio Tapes

Duplicates should be labeled as duplicates and labeled as either “Unedited Duplicates” (no changes from original, an uninterrupted dupe from start to finish) or “Edited Duplicate” (additions, deletions or change of the sequence of events). Edited duplicates should have a log on file describing what edits were applied and who did the editing.

NOTE: Record tabs should be removed from duplicate cassettes when duplicating is completed or rendered “safe” from erasure.

V. Write Protecting Audio and Videotape Recordings

Prior to viewing, duplicating, sealing and/or submitting video and audiotapes, disable the record mode by either removing the record tab or moving a slider tab to the non-record position (safe or save). These are usually located on the spine portion of the tape shell.

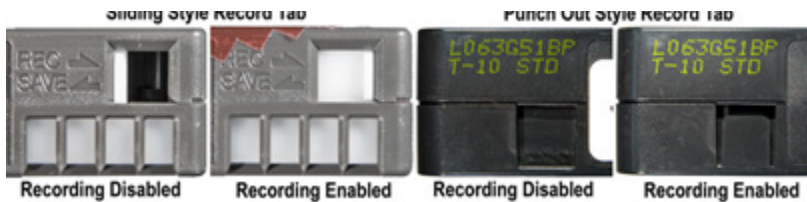


Fig. 3-1 The first photograph (left to right) shows a sliding style record tab with the tab in the save position to disable recording. The second photo shows the record tab moved to the record position to enable recording. **Note:** on some sliding style record tabs the record and save positions may be reversed. The third photo shows the record tab removed to disable recording. The fourth photo shows the record tab still in place to enable recording.

VI. Viewing

Do not repeatedly view an original video or audiotape recording whether newly recorded or seized as evidence. Repeated viewing, especially in the pause mode, can damage the tape and cause information to be lost by gradually wearing out the recording surface. Instead, duplicate the original and view the duplicate. However, if analysis is needed, make sure to submit the original tape to the Laboratory.

VII. Sealing

The actual videotape that has the evidence recorded on it is housed within a shell that can be removed to allow access to the tape within. Unless this shell is to be processed for latent prints, place some type of thin seal over the ends of the shell to demonstrate that tape access has been prevented. Seal both sides in a manner that does not interfere with normal tape operation. An alternative method is to seal the videotape in a container using accepted sealing methods (see Chapter 1 – Evidence Integrity).

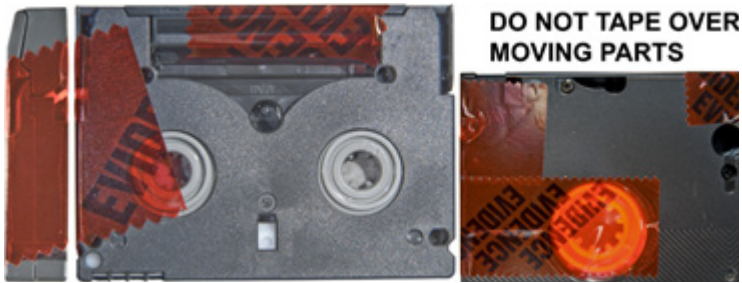


Fig. 3-2 The three photographs above show the common mistake of taping over the moving parts of a video or audiotape cassette shell. Never tape over the moving parts of a video or audiotape cassette shell.

Do not use thick sealing materials that can jam in a VCR and do not place the seal over the record tab area or this may disable that function. The best products to use are commercially available labels made specifically for this purpose or tamper-proof tapes. The ends of the sealing tape and shell should be initialed and dated. If the tape cassette shell is to be processed for latent prints, *DO NOT PLACE EVIDENCE SEALING TAPE OR OTHER MARKINGS ON THE CASSETTE SHELL.*



Fig. 3-3 The three photographs above show examples of the correct ways to seal and mark a videotape cassette shell. However, do not mark or place evidence sealing tape on any audio or videotape cassette shell to be processed for latent prints.

Once the cassette shells have been sealed and record tabs removed, tapes may be sealed in paper evidence bags or evidence boxes as described in the Chapter 1 – Evidence Integrity.