

KERN REGIONAL CRIME LABORATORY

Laboratory Services Section, Administrative Services Unit



Policy on Service to Customer Agencies

QT57180

Creation Date: 01/18/2013

Introduction

The Laboratory's goal is to provide its customers with accurate, clear, unambiguous and objective testing results in accordance with all written laboratory policies, protocols and procedures. The Laboratory's activities shall be taken impartially and structured and managed so as to safeguard impartiality. The Laboratory shall be responsible for the impartiality of its laboratory activities and will not allow commercial, financial or other pressures to compromise impartiality. Threats to impartiality could include such things as threats that arise from a person or body acting in their own interest (i.e. financial self-interest), threats that arise from a person or body being too familiar with or trusting of another person instead of seeking objective evidence, and threats that arise from a person or body having the perception of being coerced openly or secretly. Laboratory management is committed to impartiality. The Laboratory adheres to the "ANAB Guiding Principles of Professional Responsibility for Forensic Service Providers and Forensic Personnel" and reviews these guidelines annually (see QMSM, [QT39622](#) at 17025 std. 4.1.3.1). Any potential threats to impartiality must be reported to the unit supervisor and/or laboratory director immediately. He or she will investigate the potential lack of impartiality and take any actions necessary. If a risk to impartiality is identified, the laboratory will initiate a Preventive Action workflow (see the Policy on Reporting Quality Variances and Preventative Actions [QT46422](#)) and discuss how it will eliminate or minimize such risk. The Laboratory shall identify risks to its impartiality on an on-going basis, and these risks and any conclusions are discussed, at a minimum, at the annual management review meeting.

Laboratory personnel shall also endeavor to assist their customers with the use of science and technology to further justice within Kern County. The Laboratory will strive to continuously improve their processes and services to exceed customer expectations and to ensure compliance with regulatory standards.

The entire Kern Regional Crime Laboratory (KRCL) shares this responsibility.¹

¹ A customer is a person or organization that requests the testing services of the laboratory. The laboratory's Quality Management System Manual ([QT39622](#)) defines customers of the Kern Regional Crime Laboratory to be both law enforcement agencies that are geographically located within the County of Kern, and prosecuting attorneys who work within the Kern County District Attorney's Office. The Laboratory also serves any other law enforcement or criminal justice agencies that are outside the county when directed to do so by the District Attorney or Assistant District Attorney.

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Scope of Forensic Services

The Kern Regional Crime Laboratory offers a variety of forensic services to its client agencies. These services are listed in the table below. Also listed are the periods of time that the laboratory strives to complete each type of service request.² Turn-around-times are computed by the LIMS at the moment that requests are set, and should be used by examiners to prioritize case workload. In general, laboratory personnel work all cases on a “first-in-first-out” basis. However, the District Attorney’s Office may request that certain cases be worked on shortened deadlines in order to meet office priorities and court deadlines.

Service Area	Service Description	Turn-Around-Time (Calendar Days)	Notes
Technical Management Team	Administrative Closure	5	
Laboratory Services	Case Information Release* (e.g. Discovery)	10	
	Evidence Drying	15	
	Subcontracting	30	
Biological Services	Biological Screening	30	
	DNA (STR,Y-STR) Analysis	60	
	Database Search	5	
	CODIS Confirmation*	10	Uses DNA Analysis report
	Kinship Analysis	60	
Crime Scene Services	Crime Scene Response	30	15 days for police-involved shootings
	Latent Print Processing	30	
Drug Testing Services	Drug Analysis Examination – Law enforcement	6	
	Drug Analysis Examination - Prison	20	
Forensic Alcohol Services	Blood/urine Alcohol Analysis	20	

² This time is expressed as a “turn-around-time” – the time that it generally takes for a client agency to receive a service or completed report of examination once a request has been made and, when appropriate, evidence has been submitted.

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	Breath Alcohol Calibration	30	
Physical Evidence Services	Firearm Analysis	60	
	Firearm Database Search	10	
	Fracture Match Analysis	30	
	Impressions (Shoe and Tire) Analysis	60	
	Serial Number Restoration	30	
	Toolmark Analysis	60	
Toxicological Services	Basic Drug Screen – Blood or Urine	15	40 days for basic drug screening with any combination of confirmation
	Drug Confirmation Analysis – amphetamine, benzo, cocaine, MAM, marijuana, opiate, phencyclidine	25	
	General Unknown Screen - blood	30	

*Not a LIMS service

Defining Customer Service

Laboratory personnel strive to provide “value added” service by developing and maintaining good working relationships with laboratory customers. This is accomplished through:

1. Clarifying ambiguous or incomplete contracts (e.g. service requests) at the time of evidence submission;
2. Involving agency shareholders in possible changes to testing requests in order to provide more relevant and/or probative information (at or near the time of examination);
3. Maintaining dialog with the customer during lengthy examinations (greater than 90 days) in order to report progress or delays, as appropriate, and to keep the customer current;
4. Providing technical advice, guidance, and assistance in matters related to examinations, and the interpretation of analytical results;
5. Seeking feedback from customers that may be used to improve the Laboratory’s quality system and technical operations;
6. Presenting seminars and training sessions; and
7. Ensuring customer confidentiality.

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Customer Confidentiality

All employees of the Kern Regional Crime Laboratory shall ensure customer confidentiality at all times (see also QMSM [QT39622](#) at 17025 standard 4.2 and Policy on Document Dissemination [QT43808](#)). Except for information that the customer makes publicly available, or when agreed between the Laboratory and the customer, all other information is considered proprietary information and shall be regarded as confidential. The laboratory shall inform our law enforcement customers via email or telephone **in advance** of any information it intends to place in the public domain (e.g. a media request for public information). If the information is related to a specific case, this communication will be added to the LIMS communication log or case file. Information about a customer of the laboratory obtained from sources other than the customer, shall also be confidential between the customer and the laboratory. The source of the information is confidential to the laboratory and will not be shared with the customer, unless agreed by the source. *By contracting services with the Kern Regional Crime Laboratory, the customer is agreeing that confidential case information (e.g. case reports, case records, etc.) will be released to the appropriate party as a result of a Subpoena Duces Tecum, request by a state regulatory board, DMV request, a public records request approved by the Assistant District Attorney or their designee, a discovery request for court, as required by law or authorized by contractual arrangements. This agreement serves as a notification to the customer.*

Telephone Service

The Kern Regional Crime Laboratory uses a main line that Administrative Services Unit staff answer to direct the caller to the appropriate unit or individual. In addition, there are direct lines for each Laboratory staff member. All individuals are committed to providing prompt response to customer needs as evidenced through the return of telephone calls within 24 hours or the next business day. To this end, individual voice mail greetings are to be worded as follows: "You have reached the desk of (name), (title) with the (section name) section. I am unavailable to take your call at this time. If you require immediate assistance, please call the laboratory at 661-868-5367. Otherwise, please leave me a message including your name, call back number and if you are calling in regards to a case, the laboratory case number. I will return your call within the next business day. Thank you."

Messages shall be addressed within 24 hours or the next business day.

Field Service

The Crime Scene Response Team also provides agencies with an immediate requested service, crime scene response, and represents the Kern Regional Crime Laboratory in the community. The designated crime scene response team members carry laboratory cellular phones and can be reached during business hours by calling the laboratory's main number (661-868-5367) and asking for the

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Crime Scene Response. The cellular phones are programmed into the Laboratory's automated after-hours telephone answering system such that when a customer calls the Laboratory outside of 8:00 AM to 5:00 PM Monday through Friday to request crime scene response, the phone system will automatically dial these team members and their back-up responders every 15 minutes until there is an answer. Alternatively, the agency may call the designated crime scene cellular phones directly (cell numbers were provided to agency dispatch service). Crime scene responders must make immediate contact with the requesting agency and they are expected to be en route from their current location within an hour of the time when the first call was received. Responders must be in close communication with the requesting agency to let them know their estimated arrival time to the crime scene.

Requests for Testing Service

The Administrative Services Unit (ASU) and the Evidence Control Unit (ECU) represent the "face" of the Kern Regional Crime Laboratory's analytical units, interacting directly with agencies that request forensic testing, calibration and inspection services. As such, these units serve as a model for customer service within the laboratory.

The Kern Regional Crime Laboratory accepts evidence via electronic submission using the Portal software program. The transfer of electronic case information from Portal to the LIMS (the Laboratory Information Management System) together with the physical submission of all associated evidentiary item(s) constitutes a contract between the submitting agency (customer) and the Laboratory.³ An electronic evidence receipt generated by the LIMS serves as a tender, and is the official receipt of this request.

The evidence and accompanying Portal information will be reviewed by the ECU at the time of evidence submission. If an evidence submission is not acceptable, then a Memorandum for Evidence Refusal ([QT56489](#)) will be attached to it and the entire submission will be returned to the agency representative for correction. The Memorandum for Evidence Refusal will be completed by the Laboratory Services Section supervisor (or Technical Management Team member) and will include all corrections that need to be made before the submission can be resubmitted to the Laboratory. If an evidence item is rejected due to analytical unit criteria, then the appropriate policy (with the requirement highlighted) will also be attached to the Memorandum for Evidence Refusal.

It is the responsibility of the appropriate laboratory section supervisor or Assistant District Attorney to cooperate with customer agencies and their representatives to clarify testing requests and to monitor the Laboratory's work performance.

³ The term "Contract" is defined as an agreement between the Laboratory and its customers (for forensic examinations/analyses). A "Request" is the process utilized by a customer when seeking analysis by the Laboratory. The term "Tender" is the Laboratory's response to the customer regarding a request.

Documentation of these actions shall be made part of the communication log of the affected case file(s). The Quality Assurance Unit shall oversee the preparation, packaging, and dispatch of test and/or calibration items (e.g. sample splits) needed by a representative of the court for verification purposes. The Kern Regional Crime Laboratory will notify the customer of any subcontracting arrangements that have been made on their behalf for forensic testing and/or calibration services through a LIMS report of examination.

The Kern Regional Crime Laboratory shall use test and calibration methods, including methods for sampling, which meet the needs of the customer and which are appropriate for the tests and/or calibrations it undertakes. It should be noted that by using the services of the Kern Regional Crime Laboratory, customers are agreeing that the Laboratory can use its own procedures and conduct whatever testing on the items that it deems most relevant. The appropriate Laboratory section supervisor shall inform the customer, in writing, when the method proposed by the customer is considered to be inappropriate or out-of-date. These communications shall be retained in the relevant case file(s). When it is necessary to use methods not covered by standard procedures, these shall be subject to written agreement between the customer and the Laboratory Director and shall include a clear specification of the customer's requirement and the purpose of the test and/or calibration.

The customer shall be informed as to all tests and methods chosen within the Report of Examination provided electronically as .pdf files only after completion of both technical and administrative reviews. See the Policy on Document Dissemination ([QT43808](#)) for more information on receiving reports and case records. The customer agency's name and agency representative will be listed on the report; however, the agency address will not be listed as reports are only provided electronically and are not mailed. In reporting results, it might be appropriate to communicate the opinions and interpretations by direct dialog with the customer.

Improving Customer Service

If an evidence submission is resubmitted to the ECU and is not acceptable a second time, then the submission review will then be escalated to the Laboratory Director. If the same evidence submission is rejected more than two times, a Report of Quality Variance will be initiated to determine the root cause of the miscommunication and the matter will be escalated to the Laboratory Director.

Some testing requests/submissions may require an additional review in order to clarify the customer's request, determine the probative nature of the evidence, and define the methods to be used (or discuss the limitations and resources available for testing). This review shall be done and documented by the appropriate section supervisor. The customer shall be informed of any deviation from the initial contract in writing, whether at the time of evidence submission or

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at the time of examination by the analyst. All such events shall be documented within the relevant case file(s).

The service standards and customer expectations will be measured by Laboratory management by evaluating crime scene response times, examination turn-around-times, any QT Employee Grievance/Quality Complaint Submission workflows and customer satisfaction ratings. The technical management team will conduct an annual evaluation of the Laboratory's customer service and identify opportunities for process improvement.

Quality Complaints

The Laboratory uses a Qualtrax workflow entitled "Employee Grievance/Quality Complaint Submission" to record instances of internal and external complaints and grievances related to the Laboratory's quality system. Note that the investigation and decision on complaints and appeals shall not result in any discriminatory actions. A description of the handling process for complaints is available to any interested party upon request.

Complaints may be received in a variety of ways including in-person, via customer feedback surveys, via phone, or by email. Once a complaint has been received, the Laboratory confirms whether the complaint relates to laboratory activities that it is responsible for and, if so, will be responsible for gathering and verifying all necessary information to validate the complaint. An "Employee Grievance/Quality Complaint Submission" workflow will be initiated to begin the process of handling and documenting the complaint. The Laboratory is responsible for all decisions at all levels of the handling process for complaints.

The workflow can be initiated by any KRCL personnel and requires the following information: complainant name and agency, topic, description of the issue, supervisor of the affected unit, desired outcome, and option for a document upload.

The workflow moves to the unit supervisor and requires a date that the issue was discussed with the complainant (acknowledging receipt of the complaint to the complainant), summary of facts gathered and verified (including a root cause analysis), a decision, the action taken in response and option for another document upload. If the issue is one of quality, then the supervisor will initiate a Report of Quality Variance (RQV) workflow and include that RQV number in this Quality Complaint workflow for cross-referencing. The unit supervisor must verify that the appropriate action was taken. The workflow moves to the Quality Assurance Officer for review.

When the workflow moves to the Quality Assurance officer, the following information is required: date of QA discussion with complainant, additional facts adduced, decision of second review including additional actions taken (if any) and an option for a final document upload. The workflow moves to the Laboratory Director for final review if the issue was not resolved during the second review.

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The final review by the Laboratory Director requires the following information: a date of final review, final decision, final review of facts adduced and document upload for a record of the final communication sent to the complainant. The KRCL shall provide the complainant or appellant with progress reports (if applicable) and the outcome, whenever possible. The decision (or formal notice signifying the end of the complaint) to be communicated to the complainant or appellant whenever possible, shall be made by, or reviewed and approved by, individual(s) not involved in the original laboratory activities in question.

Customer Feedback

The Evidence Control Unit shall also seek customer feedback through vehicles such as Customer Service Satisfaction Surveys ([QT160043](#)) and online surveys, letters to submitting agencies, office e-mail, laboratory staff attendance at multi-agency meetings, etc. Laboratory staff who hear verbal feedback and/or complaints at multi-agency meetings or anywhere else are responsible for documenting the feedback and sending it to the Quality Assurance Officer and/or initiating an "Employee Grievance/Quality Complaint Submission" workflow, if required, so that the feedback is recorded and acted upon. The Laboratory Support Services supervisor shall regularly report all feedback to the Laboratory Director, who will use it to improve the Laboratory's management system, testing, inspection and calibration activities and customer service.

A report of quality variance (RQV) will be initiated in Qualtrax when the agreed requirements of the customer have not been met. If necessary, the Quality Assurance Unit will notify a customer and recall work depending on the extent of a report of quality variance.

Dealing Effectively with Difficult Customers⁴

Employees may have to deal with angry customers. Rarely do these situations turn ugly, but the potential is ever present.

Suggestions for dealing with difficult customers are below; however, this is not a substitution for formal training. When you are unsure of your abilities to deal with a difficult customer, contact your supervisor for assistance.

- Deal with EMOTIONS first:

Ask *open-ended* questions and listen to bring out the customer's feelings. Open-ended questions start with: "Why, When, What, How, Who, Which one, and Describe how..." Open-ended questions create expanded answers, provide background information, and lower the customer's emotional level.

Give empathetic feedback.

⁴ [County of Kern, County Administrative Office, Policy/Procedures Manual](#)

Summarize the customer's feelings. "I know that you are upset and feel that this is unfair."

- Deal with the PROBLEM:

Ask *closed-ended* questions to determine the specifics of the customer's problems. Close-ended questions start with: "Did, Have, Is there, Do you, Will you, Can you..." Close-ended questions create fact-based information, one-word answers, and focus on facts rather than emotions.

Five-step Process for Addressing Any Customer Problem

Step 1 - Acknowledge the customer. Show the customer the law, ordinance, or regulation you are enforcing.

Step 2 - Assess the situation. Suggest alternatives that will solve the problem.

Step 3 - Affirm your understanding. Agree on a solution and follow through.

Step 4 - Analyze alternatives. Do something extra, if possible.

Step 5 - Agree on a plan. In all cases, speak in a calm, quiet voice.

By affirming your understanding, you will again defuse any negative emotions the customer may be feeling. Ask the customer what can be done to solve the present situation.

Safety Precautions for Defusing Violence⁵

There are five steps to defusing potentially violent situations:

1. Understand the mind-set of the potentially violent person.
2. Take the moral "high road."
 - Establish an atmosphere of cooperation.
 - Do not display anger, fear, or anxiety.
 - Tell the person that this is his or her time and you're willing to respect that.
 - Talk in a calm voice, lower and slower than your counterpart. YOU set the example.
 - Understand that angry outbursts on the part of that person can have a positive effect. It allows the aggrieved person to vent his or her negative feelings and to begin to defuse.
 - Be absolutely truthful in any discussion with the person. To lose credibility at this stage can be catastrophic.

⁵ [County of Kern, County Administrative Office, Policy/Procedures Manual](#)

3. Listen to the aggrieved party and allow a total “airing” of the grievance without comment or judgment.
 - Offer the person a private place to talk.
 - Ask the person to be seated but you take your seat first if possible.
 - Ask the party if you can take a few “brief notes” to help you retain the information.
 - Maintain eye contact—it is a sign of respect and it indicates that the person is getting your full attention.
 - That person’s perceptions are his or her reality. Do not argue with those perceptions.
 - Do not down play the importance of the person’s concerns, however seemingly insignificant they are to you.
 - If you talk at all, ask questions that call for long, narrative answers. This does two things: It assures the aggrieved party that you want to hear all he or she has to say and it assists in the defusing process.
4. Allow the aggrieved party to suggest a solution.
 - A person will more readily agree to a resolution that he or she helped formulate.
 - Assure the person that you will act on any injustices he or she has suffered—then make absolutely sure you do just that.
 - It may surprise you that the person’s suggestions may be very reasonable.
5. Move toward a win-win resolution.

Saving face (dignity) is paramount. Even people facing severe disciplinary action may just want to be heard and “get on with life.”

As you make a concession, ask him or her to do likewise. Try to get “something for something.” In the overwhelming number of cases, the person just wants fairness.

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DOCUMENT REVISION HISTORY

Version Number	Version Date	Author	Approval	Changes Made
QT ver. 6	3/11/2014	K. Miller	K. Miller	Changes made as the result of meet and confer with union representatives on 12/12/13.

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