


Signal Tribune

Long Beach auditors found “significant security risk” in LBPD Evidence Control. They just won a national award for their report.

 BY EMMA DIMAGGIO, MANAGING EDITOR · MAY 17, 2021 · 4 MINUTE READ



Exterior of the Long Beach Police Department Headquarters in Downtown Long Beach. (Richard Grant | Signal Tribune)

The Long Beach City Auditor’s Office won a national award last week for its audit of the Long Beach Police Department’s Evidence Control Section (ECS).

The audit, conducted in 2019 but delayed due to the pandemic, led to heightened security measures and focused on physical security of warehouses, personnel access and the accuracy of ECS’s inventory.

LBPD Evidence Control Section is responsible for the intake, storage and disposition of over 300,000 property and evidence items that are held as crime scene evidence, seized goods, prisoner's personal property, or found property.

The award winners—City Auditor Laura Doud and team members Jeames Lam, Hannah Gardener and Timothy Lim—received the Exemplary Knighton Award from the Association of Local Government Auditors (ALGA). Long Beach's auditors competed with more than 300 other auditing organizations for the honor.

"It's extremely, extremely rewarding when your work is acknowledged and recognized," Doud told the *Signal Tribune*. "There's a ton of work that goes on in auditing that no one sees. We do a lot of research — and a lot of background information — to really zero in on things that will make a difference."

"I am very pleased with the cooperation we received from the [Long Beach Police Department] and that they agreed with our recommendations."

City Auditor Laura Doud

Changes made as a result of the audit

The audit's recommendations focused on improving security over property and evidence by: implementing physical security measures at the storage location, limiting personnel with access to these items and performing effective inventory management.

Judges commented that recommendations were clear, specific and appropriately addressed the key findings.

"We work really hard to understand every department objective quickly," Doud said. "So we can determine whether their operations are functioning as intended, as efficiently as possible and make recommendations to improve the operations and services to best meet the public's needs."

As a result of the audit, LBPD has implemented the following changes:

- Installed a security alarm system at the main storage warehouse
- Repaired security cameras
- Limited access at the storage warehouses to appropriate staff
- Created an inventory schedule to examine all items regularly

“I am very pleased with the cooperation we received from the LBPB and that they agreed with our recommendations,” Doud said in a statement.

Audit findings: ‘Significant’ security risks

Before the audit, 15 individuals had access to evidence control who shouldn’t have, according to the audit. Another 15 individuals had more access than necessary.

These included non-LBPB City employees, LBPB employees who had been transferred out of the ECS, non-City personnel and one unknown person, according to the audit.

This access “present[ed] a significant security risk,” the audit states. Immediately after the audit, in March of 2019, access was restricted to ECS and Forensic Science Services Division supervisors.

In evidence control inventory, 191 high-risk items were not accounted for, prompting auditors to recommend an inventory schedule to examine items regularly, which has already been implemented by the department.

The regular examination of items also helps keep track of dispositions.

After certain requirements are met, an item undergoes “disposition,” meaning that an item is either returned to its owner or finder, destroyed, sold at an auction or, if currency, deposited into the City’s bank account.

According to the audit, only eight money dispositions were performed a year “when they should be performed monthly.”

Warehouses used by ECS lacked security alarms or functional cameras, the audit states. Cameras have since been repaired.

Security footage itself is only kept by the department for 30 days, “which is significantly shorter than the one-year period required by State law, and even shorter than the multiple years suggested by [International Association for Property and Evidence],” the audit states. LBPB has a target date for July 1, 2021 to install new cameras.

“By implementing our recommendations, the City can better maintain the integrity of property and evidence, ultimately ensuring public confidence,” Doud said.

LBPB disagree with recommendation to restructure Evidence Control Section

Though the audit focused on security and personnel, it also included suggestions for staffing and organizational placement policies. ECS is currently housed under the Investigations Bureau, which the audit states “can create potential conflicts of interest.”

Though the auditors did not find any instances of evidence tampering, the audit did suggest restructuring the chain of command outside of police operations so “the integrity and independence of both the investigative and evidence management processes are enhanced, minimizing the opportunity for or even the appearance of possible evidence tampering.”

This restructuring was the one recommendation— out of 27 total — that LBPB disagreed with. Their response to the medium-priority item was: “We disagree with the potential for conflict given the organizational structure of the department and the roles and responsibilities of ECS personnel.”

No plans for implementation were included.

In addition, sworn personnel are assigned to the section when “best practice recommends civilian personnel for this function.” Doud said that hiring civilians for administrative tasks gives “more opportunity for officers in patrol,” as well as cost-saving benefits.

LBPB responded: “The budget for the police department is such that we must eliminate a position to gain a position. So the sergeant position would have to be eliminated to fund the new supervisor position. There will not be a net gain of another supervisor on the street.”

The audit also states that the ECS’s policies were “not comprehensive and out of date.”

In an email to the *Signal Tribune*, LBPB said that policies and procedures have been updated in a new procedures manual which has already been issued to property personnel.

In addition, LBPD said that auditor recommendations “have already been addressed or are in the process of being addressed within the Department.”

“Most of the recommendations are either already completed or set to be completed in FY2022,” the email states. “Some recommendations require a move to a different facility; efforts for that are already underway.”

Detailed judges’ comments can be viewed [here](#), the Long Beach Police Evidence Control Section Performance Audit can be viewed here [here](#), and the Report Highlights Sheet can be viewed [here](#).