

Conducting a Sexual Assault Kit Inventory

This brief provides guidance to the Bureau of Justice Assistance (BJA) National Sexual Assault Kit Initiative (SAKI) grantees on how to conduct a sexual assault kit (SAK) inventory. Though a SAKI inventory consists of cold cases of sexual assault, the information provided also applies to current sexual assault cases and may be used for jurisdictions that are required by local and state mandates to conduct an annual audit of SAKs.

One of the requirements of the BJA SAKI program is that each agency complete an inventory of SAKs within its jurisdiction (e.g., state, county). BJA defines a completed inventory as a census of all unsubmitted SAKs, which includes SAKs that were never tested and those which were only partially tested. *Partially tested* includes SAKs that were submitted to the crime laboratory but that received serology-only testing, or that were previously tested for DNA with antiquated technology (e.g., Restriction Fragment Length Polymorphism, DQAlpha) that prevented uploading results into the Combined DNA Index System (CODIS).

A Comprehensive Inventory

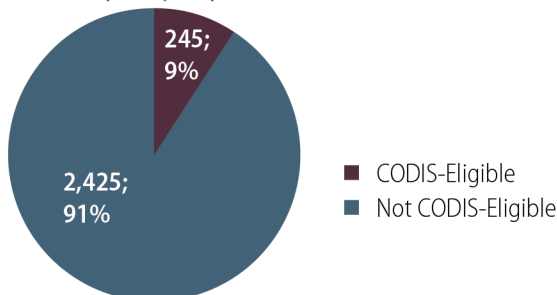
It is important to note that the inventory methods used should result in a full accounting of all unsubmitted and partially tested SAKs. An inventory that relies only on a survey-based approach or that only accounts for particular categories of SAKs is not sufficient. For example, a survey of law enforcement agencies to gather estimated counts or a census that only goes back to a specific date or that only includes SAKs housed in a particular agency are neither effective nor accurate methods for conducting an inventory.

A *phased inventory* may be the best approach for a large jurisdiction, to account for the increased time and effort necessary to conduct an inventory and an assessment of partially tested SAKs. In a phased approach, a jurisdiction can break the inventory process into two or more parts and can certify their inventory numbers along the way. Phases may be defined by approaches such as geographic regions, time periods, or category of SAK (i.e., unsubmitted or partially tested). This approach allows agencies to begin testing on SAKs under one or more phases, while conducting the additional reviews or outreach needed to complete the remaining phase(s).

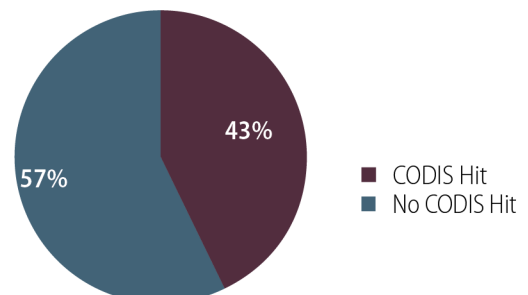
In the inventory, it is important to capture partially tested SAKs that have never been tested with CODIS-eligible technologies. Partially tested SAKs hold valuable forensic evidence for sexual assault cases, to include those that were negative for serology-only testing.¹ SAKI grantees have obtained new CODIS hits by testing partially tested SAKs with current DNA technologies (see **Figure 1**). Thus, SAKI requires agencies to include these SAKs as part of a comprehensive inventory and testing plan.

Figure 1. Serology-Negative SAKs Yield CODIS-Eligible Profiles

CODIS Eligibility of Serology-Negative SAKs
(n = 2,670)



Hit Rate of Serology-Negative SAKs with CODIS-Eligible Profiles
(n = 245)



Note. Pie charts represent combined data from the Charlotte-Mecklenburg Police Department and the Memphis Police Department, both SAKI grantees.²

¹ Casey, D., Domijan, K., MacNeill, S., Rizet, D., O'Connell, D., & Ryan, J. (2017). The persistence of sperm and the development of time since intercourse (TSI) guidelines in sexual assault cases at Forensic Science Ireland, Dublin, Ireland. *Journal of Forensic Sciences*, 62(3), 585–592. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1556-4029.13325>

² Data for pie charts provided by Savicki, S. (personal communication, 2024, May 8). Charlotte Mecklenburg SAKI Site Coordinator. Griggs, A. (personal communication, 2024, May 14). Memphis Police Department SAKI Site Coordinator.

We recognize that agencies may vary regarding the best methods for completing their inventory of previously unsubmitted and partially tested SAKs; nevertheless, agencies are encouraged to use the following guidance to build a foundation for successfully completing their inventory.

Inventory Documentation Requirements

As you complete your inventory, record the following:

- ◆ Total number of SAKs and locations where SAKs are currently stored—SAKs collected up to the SAKI grant application date are to be included in the inventory
- ◆ A written summary of the process used to conduct the inventory
- ◆ Date ranges for which SAKs have been in the agency's possession, listing the oldest SAK received through the most recent
- ◆ For each SAK:
 - Victim name
 - Age of the victim at the time of the assault
 - Date of the offense
 - Date of SAK collection
 - Law enforcement incident number (or any other unique identifiers)
 - SAK category: unsubmitted or partially tested
 - Additional case-specific information associated with each SAK that may be important for submission strategies, such as ensuring meeting statute of limitations requirements.

Conducting an Inventory of Previously Unsubmitted and Partially Tested SAKs

The following steps are recommended for agencies to succeed when planning and carrying out a SAK inventory.

1. Determine who should be in charge of conducting the SAK inventory.

This responsibility varies for different jurisdictions, and in some cases the responsibility may fall to law enforcement or, in others, to prosecution. For example, in Detroit, MI, this task was led by the prosecutor's office staff under observation by police property personnel. In other jurisdictions, the inventory process has been led by law enforcement with assistance from prosecutors and other partners.

2. Determine whether the inventory can be completed electronically or if it must be conducted manually.

In some instances, an electronic system—such as a police property database—can be used to conduct the inventory. The database could be used to track information, such as the evidence tag number, case number, victim name, incident data, collection data, and name of the original officer in charge of the case. If a database or another information system is not available, then a manual count will have to be used to conduct the inventory.

Crime laboratories may have an electronic laboratory information management system (LIMS) that could be used to conduct the partially tested SAK inventory. If an LIMS is not available, then a manual review of crime laboratory reports will be needed to identify partially tested SAKs for the inventory.

Additional Information for Manually Conducted Inventories

A manual count of the SAKs will likely require the effort of a number of individuals. One recommendation is that a project coordinator develop a staffing plan that would describe the staff involved (e.g., prosecutor's office personnel and volunteers). In some instances, law enforcement may have concerns about non-law-enforcement personnel entering the police property room to count SAKs. If this is the case, consider bringing out and counting the SAKs in batches in a secure room within the law enforcement building, while ensuring that the process is conducted under strict supervision of police property personnel. Other strategies may also be developed to address this issue. Collaboration with your crime laboratory is vital to understand which SAKs may be included in the partially tested criteria. An individual familiar with interpreting laboratory reports and your laboratory's historical SAK testing policies should be considered as part of the staffing plan.

3. Determine if all of the SAKs are located in one physical location or if multiple locations must be inventoried to provide an accurate census.

A multidisciplinary team should be consulted to determine where unsubmitted and partially tested SAKs could be stored. One key consideration is that, while SAKs may have been stored in the law enforcement agency's main property room, sometimes they are stored on other law enforcement property (e.g., an off-site property storage facility) or elsewhere, such as hospitals, rape crisis centers, clinics, crime laboratories, or other off-site property storage facilities.

4. Develop a plan for the logistics of the inventory process to ensure that all SAKs are counted only once.

One recommendation is that a project coordinator create a labeling system so that when a SAK is counted, it is marked appropriately and documented.

View our SAKI Training and Technical Assistance (TTA) webinar focused on strategies and considerations when conducting an inventory of unsubmitted SAKs. Representatives from the Iowa Department of Justice, Cuyahoga County Prosecutor's Office (OH), and City of Portland (OR) Police Bureau presented at this webinar; all three agencies are SAKI grantees and have started or completed their inventories of unsubmitted SAKs. Each agency gave a short presentation describing their inventory process, lessons learned, and challenges to successfully completing their unsubmitted SAK inventory.

[View the "Summing Up Sexual Assault Kits" webinar](#)

5. Identify the type of information that can be extracted from the outside of the SAK to provide more details about the SAK contents and case.

In addition to the information listed under the "Inventory Documentation Requirements" section of this document (above), agencies should also record additional information as available and appropriate to their SAK testing strategy. It should be noted that the information collected should pertain only to the information on the outside of the SAK or in an electronic database. If paperwork regarding additional information about the SAK is inside the kit, it cannot be accessed during the inventory process. It may be necessary to gather police reports associated with the unsubmitted and partially tested SAKs to gather these data elements. Each multidisciplinary team should discuss the level of staff time and effort necessary to coordinate with law enforcement agencies and to pull police reports.

6. Develop a process to determine the current status of each SAK—specifically, whether the SAK had been submitted to a forensic crime laboratory for testing and returned and if the case corresponding to the SAK had been adjudicated.

If an electronic file or database is available that describes the status of the SAKs, then it should be used for collecting more information about the SAK status. Alternatively, if this is not available, then this step may involve a review of the police records corresponding to each SAK, because these records may contain more information on the case. Police records may also have documentation from the medical provider or crime laboratory indicating whether a SAK had been submitted for testing.

Case review of crime laboratory reports will aid in identification of SAKs that were previously only tested for serology and not further examined with DNA analysis, or that were previously tested for DNA with antiquated technology not compatible with CODIS. Traditionally, serology-negative SAKs were not further examined for DNA testing. However, with advancement in the sensitivity of current forensic DNA testing, the ability to obtain a CODIS-eligible DNA profile from serology-negative samples has improved. Hence, serology-negative SAKs should not be overlooked.

7. Develop a process for maintaining and tracking information collected during the SAK inventory.

We recommend that the project coordinator create some type of database or electronic spreadsheet for tracking the information collected during the inventory. In addition to the data elements listed in the "Inventory Documentation Requirements" section of this document (above), the tracking information should include details about the personnel who recorded the SAK information and the date the information was recorded. For more information, please refer to the SAKI TTA brief [Implementing an Evidence Tracking System: Key Considerations for Managing Critical Information](#).

Statewide Jurisdictions

The SAKI TTA Team recognizes that completing a statewide inventory of previously unsubmitted and partially tested SAKs has unique challenges and considerations. Conducting a statewide inventory is complicated by large geographic scale, and the SAKI TTA Team encourages statewide agencies to focus on making their methodology efficient. A phased inventory approach that separates the state into geographical regions and proceeds region by region will help ensure that each local agency has been accounted for and will also provide a template for more effectively tracking the inventory.