



# GENERAL ORDER

## GENERAL ORDER 630.03

### Digital Cameras – Fire Investigation Division

#### OFFICE OF THE FIRE MARSHAL

Issue Date: May 30, 2007  
Revision Date: February 06, 2018

#### 1 APPLICABILITY

2 Personnel assigned to the Office of the Fire Marshal (OFM) responsible for fire origin and cause  
3 investigations.

#### 4 POLICY

5 The Howard County Department of Fire and Rescue Services (Department) Fire Investigation  
6 Division (FID) shall utilize a structured procedure to ensure the most secure use of digital  
7 photography. This policy will outline the procedures for use, maintenance, and storage to  
8 support fire investigations. This policy will also outline the procedures when copies of  
9 photographs are requested from persons outside of the Department.

#### 10 DEFINITIONS

11 ➤ **Investigator** - a Fire and Explosive Investigator assigned to OFM, with the responsibility  
12 of determining fire origin and cause.

#### 13 PROCEDURES

14 Investigators shall not take pictures of fire scenes with a personally owned camera, to include  
15 mobile phones equipped with cameras. All photographs taken at fire scenes by OFM personnel  
16 are to be considered evidence and shall be considered the property of the Department. No  
17 photos will be taken, printed, downloaded, or distributed for personal use, unless approved for  
18 Departmental use (e.g. training, support, etc.) by the Fire Chief or his/her designee. All requests  
19 for copies of photographs will be directed to the Custodian of Records, as appointed by the  
20 Department.

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22 No Investigator will be authorized to store and/or duplicate any photographic digital  
23 information that is classified as evidence on any Departmental or personal computer without  
24 Department approval. In addition, no photographs classified as evidence will be transmitted to  
25 other individuals (except as required by law or in response to a subpoena or court order). Any  
26 requests to transmit photos classified as evidence requires approval of the Custodian of  
27 Records. No digital photographs will be posted on the internet. Permission to deviate from the  
28 above shall be obtained from the Fire Chief or his/her designee.  
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30 Each Investigator will be issued a digital camera and accessories, and will be responsible for the  
31 use, care, maintenance, and security of the equipment.

- 32 • Accessories include, but are not limited to: lenses (zoom, telephoto, etc.); two (2)  
33 batteries; battery charger; at least three (3) memory cards; carrying case.
- 34 • The correct date and time shall be properly set within the camera.

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36 Ideally, when photographing a scene, the Investigator will use one memory card per case. If  
37 more than one case is placed on a single memory card, a separation between the cases shall be  
38 documented. This can be accomplished by photographing a sheet of paper with the case  
39 number, date, time, and location of each investigation.

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41 All digital images shall be captured at the largest file size, and the finest quality setting available  
42 for the camera used at the time of the investigation. Different settings may be used depending  
43 on the circumstances presented at the time of the investigation (e.g. time, weather, working  
44 conditions, etc.).

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46 Investigators will process the images as soon as possible following the completion of the  
47 assignment, using the following procedure:

- 48 • The memory card shall be removed from the camera and placed in a secure area.
  - 49 ○ Before removing a memory card, the camera must be turned off to ensure that a  
50 loss of data does not occur.
- 51 • The secured memory card shall be placed in a card reader that is attached to the  
52 Department computer assigned to each Investigator.
- 53 • The images shall be copied from the memory card to a disk (CD-R or DVD-R) as a backup  
54 for each investigation. Each disk will only contain one case or investigation. The backup  
55 copy will be stored in the case file assigned to the investigation.
- 56 • The images shall be uploaded to the fire investigation reporting software in use by the  
57 FID, into the case file generated for the investigation.
- 58 • If needed, the memory card will be forwarded to the Howard County Police Department  
59 (HCPD) Forensic Services Section (FSS), using the Howard County Police Film Envelope  
60 (Form HCPD 1312), for archiving under the applicable HCPD case number.
- 61 • After each case is copied and uploaded, the memory card shall be formatted.

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63 No digital photographs shall be altered, erased, or tampered with. If images need to be  
64 enhanced in any way, the original image will be copied and opened with an enhancement  
65 program. The copied image will be enhanced, with changes made recorded. The enhanced  
66 image will be saved with a different file name than the original image to differentiate the files  
67 (e.g. "Image 1-ORIGINAL," "Image 1-ENHANCED"). Justification for photographic enhancement  
68 shall be documented in either the case narrative or in a Supplemental Report.

### 69 REFERENCES

- 70 • None

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# GENERAL ORDER

73 **SUMMARY OF DOCUMENT CHANGES**

- 74 Convert to new G.O. template
- 75 Revised title
- 76 General revisions, format changes, etc.
- 77 Add date/time setting in camera (Line 34)
- 78 Add procedure for image archiving by HCPD FSS (Lines 58-60)

79 **FORMS/ATTACHMENTS**

- 80 • None

81 **APPROVED**

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