

Slide 1



This presentation provides an overview of the Victorian Auditor-General's report *Police Management of Property and Exhibits*.



Property management is integral to policing and critical to successful prosecutions. This audit examined whether Victoria Police stores and secures property and exhibits effectively and efficiently.

We focused on seized property, which are items that are collected, confiscated or seized as part of a criminal investigation. Items can include drugs, firearms and other weapons or DNA samples. Seized property makes up 75 per cent of all property.

An exhibit is any property that may be used in court as evidence.

**Storage locations and roles**

Victoria Police holds property in over 200 storage locations across Victoria:

- All police stations
- Crime Command, Logistics and Exhibits Office
- Large centralised storage facility
- Victoria Police Forensic Science Centre

The diagram consists of three overlapping circles. The top circle is blue and contains the text 'Informant' and 'Officer investigating the crime'. The bottom-left circle is orange and contains the text 'Officer in charge' and 'Oversees all property at their station'. The bottom-right circle is teal and contains the text 'Property officer' and 'Manages the property'.

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Property is stored at police stations across the state and in central storage locations. Property is the responsibility of the Informant, who is the police officer investigating the crime. Property officers manage the property and all property is oversighted by the officer in charge.

### Mismanaging property creates risks for Victoria Police

 Adverse impacts on court outcomes	 Misuse of sensitive or private information
 Liability for missing or damaged property	 Occupational health and safety (OHS) and workplace incidents
 Arbitrarily depriving citizens of their property	 Reputational damage

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Managing property is a critical part of successful prosecutions and maintaining community safety. Mismanaged property creates risks for Victoria Police, including adverse impacts on court outcomes or misuse of sensitive or private information.

**Focus of this audit**



How well does Victoria Police store property and minimise associated risks?

Does the control framework for property management support high performance?

Does Victoria Police store and secure long-term and digital evidence to support staff and minimise risk?

Does Victoria Police effectively prioritise and sustain improvements to property management?

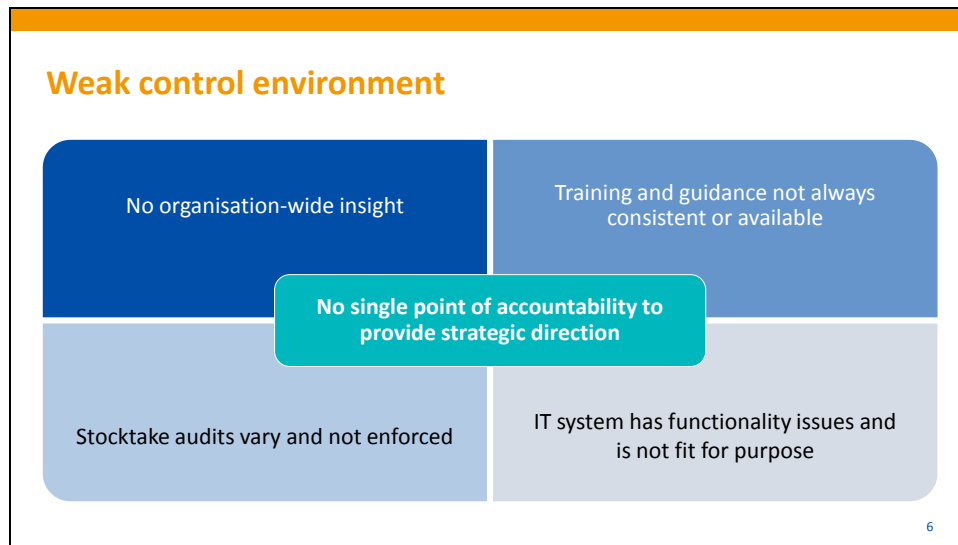
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The objective of this audit was to determine how well Victoria Police stores property and minimises associated risks.

We examined whether Victoria Police has a governance structure for property management that:

- supports high performance
- stores long-term and digital evidence securely
- maintains evidentiary value, and
- reduces associated risks—such as occupational health and safety, or OHS, risks.

We also examined how Victoria Police collects property and how efficiently it disposes of property.




Until recently there was no single point of accountability for the property management function. This created several inefficiencies and weaknesses such as:


- no organisation-wide insight into property holdings, issues and trends
- training and guidance that is not always consistent or available as needed, and
- practices for auditing property stores that vary—required audits are also not being completed and there are no consequences for non-completion.

In addition, the property management IT system has many functionality issues. It does not adequately support operational police or produce accurate reporting on compliance due to data quality issues.


**Test of essentiality and secondary evidence**



Test of essentiality not well documented



Test of essentiality not reapplied <sup>SCS</sup> property once in custody



Use of secondary evidence not maximised

Victoria Police cannot be certain it is keeping property holdings to a minimum based on evidentiary value.

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The 'test of essentiality' means that only items that have evidentiary value should be seized and only when 'secondary evidence' is not available. Secondary evidence is either a photograph or a copy of the real item.

However, there is no way to know whether the test is effectively or consistently applied at the time of seizure. The test is also not periodically reapplied to exhibits already in storage to reduce unnecessary holdings.

Victoria Police is also not making best use of secondary evidence, especially for low-risk property types, such as license plates.

Therefore, Victoria Police cannot be certain it is keeping property holdings to a minimum based on evidentiary value.

## Storage of property

Significant gaps in handling and storage of all property types, including contamination and degradation risks	
	Victoria Police does not know how many items fall under the 50-year retention policy for serious unsolved crime
Difficulty forecasting future storage needs and preserving evidentiary value	

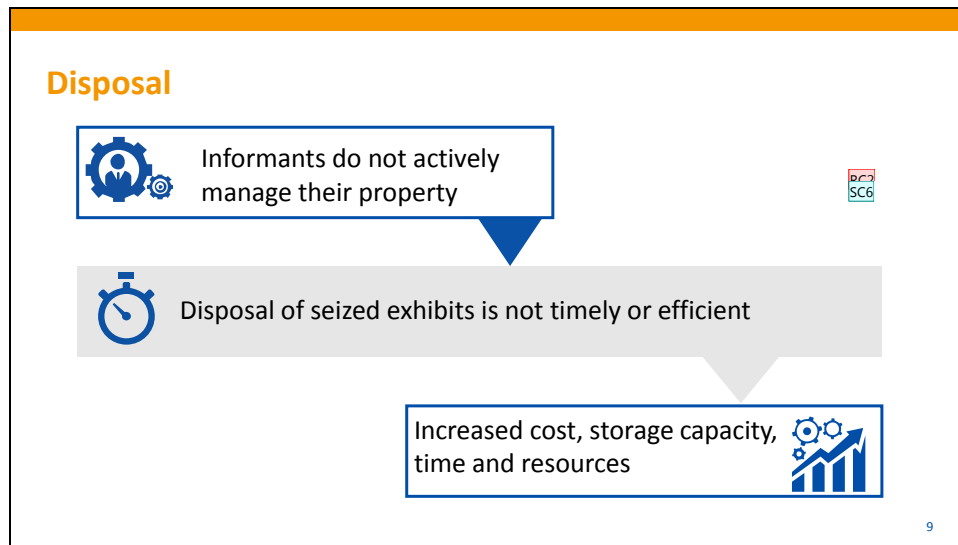
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Policies and procedures do not set clear standards for the safe and secure storage of property to protect against contamination or degradation. We observed risks such as mould, high temperatures and water leakages.

Property related to unsolved serious crime must be retained for a minimum of 50 years. However, Victoria Police does not know how many items are subject to this rule.

It is also difficult to forecast future storage needs and risk storing items in a way that does not preserve evidentiary value in the long term.



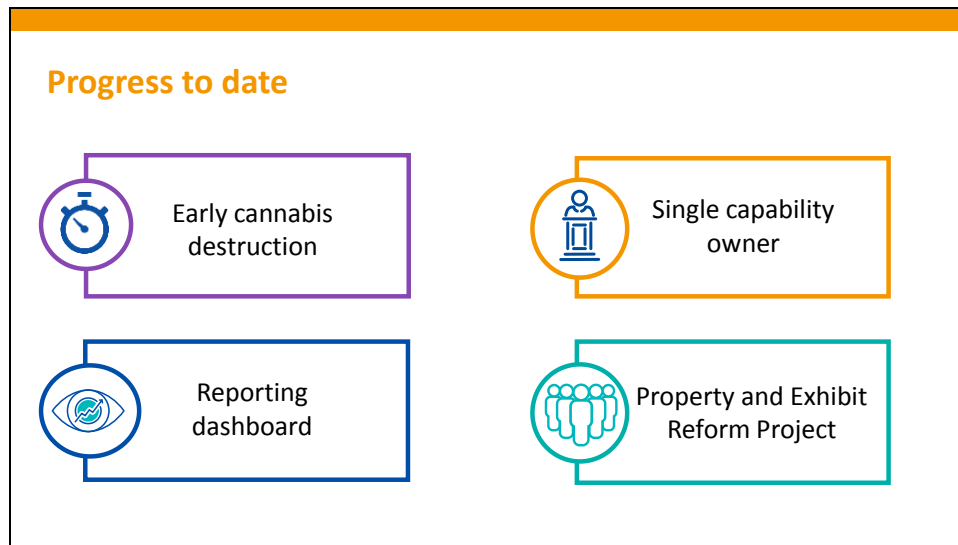


We assessed the timeliness between when items were approved for disposal compared to the date when they were actually disposed of or returned to owner.

We found that Victoria Police does not dispose of seized property in a timely or efficient way.

The main cause of this is that time pressures and inefficient processes prevent informants from actively managing property.

This inefficient disposal increases costs, storage requirements, and the time and resources necessary to manage and audit property.



Recently, Victoria Police has made improvements to property management including a successful pilot that destroyed six times more cannabis than the traditional approach, and also reduced OHS risks.

It also appointed a single organisational owner for property management. The new owner will need to continue work on many improvement projects and provide strategic leadership for property management.

## Recommendations

### 8 Recommendations for Victoria Police

- Define the expectations and responsibilities of the property capability owner
- Develop an end-to-end property management handbook
- Encourage staff with responsibility for property to undertake the property management e-learning training
- Improve or replace the current property management IT system
- Implement a standardised and enforced stocktake audit schedule, that is adequately supported by tools and technology
- Consult with prosecutions to assess opportunities to increase the use of secondary evidence
- Assess how much property relates to serious unsolved crimes and forecast future storage capacity and packaging needs
- Consider alternative potential efficiencies for property transportation

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We made eight recommendations to Victoria Police. Victoria Police accepted seven recommendations in full, and one recommendation in principle.

For further information, please view the full report on our website:  
[www.audit.vic.gov.au](http://www.audit.vic.gov.au)

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