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This training bulletin is the eighth in a series designed to explore alternative reporting methods. Now that we have provided you with the essential terms, concepts and components of implementation, it is time to discuss what to do when a victim elects to convert to a standard reporting procedure.

## **Information for Victims**

Regardless of which alternative reporting procedure victims initially choose, they should be advised that they can decide at any time to convert to a standard report and participate in a full law enforcement investigation. A variety of options can be offered to convert the report, by contacting the law enforcement agency, SAFE program, victim advocacy organization, or another entity. However, some community protocols might designate one or more of the options as preferable to others.

For example, many SAFE programs operate on a callout basis without any administrative time, which means that the forensic examiner (or other staff person with access to the exam report) will not generally be available to respond when the victim calls. Community protocols might therefore advise victims that the preferred method for converting to a standard report is to contact the law enforcement agency and provide the tracking number. This number can be used to locate and retrieve the relevant information, along with possible evidence from the medical forensic examination, if one was conducted.

Victims should also be provided with a range of information about potential conversion. For example, they should be informed that the longer they wait, the more difficult it may be to conduct a thorough investigation and pursue prosecution in their case. They should also be notified of the statutes of limitations for sexual assault crimes in the state where it was committed. If evidence is transferred from the SAFE program or other health care facility to law enforcement when victims convert, a form that victims sign will need to document their authorization for this release. Other aspects of the response protocol should also be described in the informational materials provided to victims.

## **Cambria County Protocol**

To provide one example of such a protocol, the Cambria County procedures for converting an anonymous report to a standard report can be summarized as follows:

- If at any point in that two-year time period, the victim chooses to convert to a standard reporting procedure, a variety of options are available. Victims are advised (at the time of the exam) that they can initiate this process by contacting either law enforcement or the SAFE program, as well as other specified agencies (e.g., Victim Services).



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- If the victim contacts law enforcement and indicates that evidence was collected anonymously, the agency will either contact -- or instruct the victim to contact -- Victim Services or the SAFE Program at the medical facility where the exam was completed.
- If the victim chooses to contact Victim Services, an advocate will provide the victim with support and assist the victim in contacting the SAFE program. The SAFE program will provide the victim who is converting from an anonymous report to a standard report with necessary information regarding evidence storage or will contact the police department directly and relay the information, including the SAFE number from the front of the evidentiary kit, the name of the attending SAFE, the name of the responding officer who picked up the evidence, and the date and time of evidence kit retrieval.
- The police department will then link that information to the anonymous kit stored in the evidence room and the informational police report using both the incident number and the SAFE number on the front of the evidence kit (provided to them by the SAFE program).
- The police department will determine the jurisdiction where the assault took place and arrange for transfer of evidence to the proper jurisdiction.
- The law enforcement agency with jurisdiction will then be able to proceed with the investigation, following the same general strategies as in a standard reporting procedure.

### Developing your Protocol

When crafting a protocol for converting from alternative reporting to standard reporting, the critical question is this: *Is there any realistic possibility that cases will be successfully investigated and prosecuted if victims convert from an alternative reporting procedure to a standard report with full participation?* If not, what can communities do to make this a reality? These questions can be used to guide the development and evolution of a comprehensive protocol.

### For More Information

In many communities, guidance is needed to successfully investigate and prosecute 'converted' cases. Otherwise, this option could be a false promise for victims. To explore this issue, an [archived webinar](#) is available on the EVAWI website, entitled *Prosecuting Converted Cases*. The webinar addresses a range of issues such as the following:

- What do we call these cases?
- How do we perceive them?
- How do we investigate converted cases?
- How do we prosecute them?



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### Up Next

So far, this series of training bulletins has provided an overview of issues related to alternative reporting methods. In our final installment, we offer best practice recommendations to assist you in implementing these methods in your own community.

*This project is supported by Grant No. 2013-TA-AX-K045 awarded by the Office on Violence Against Women, U.S. Department of Justice. The opinions, findings, conclusions, and recommendations expressed on this website and all posted materials are those of the author(s) and do not necessarily reflect the views of the Department of Justice, Office on Violence Against Women.*

