

What is a crime scene investigation



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The roles and duties of police officers as first responders crime scene investigators as truth seekers are very important. Actions taken at the beginning of an investigation at a crime scene play a vital role in solving a case. Careful and thorough investigation is the key to ensure that potential physical evidence is not tainted or destroyed or potential witnesses are not overlooked (Reno, 2000). An important factor influencing the ultimate legal significance of evidence is that investigators follow an objective, thorough, and thoughtful approach. The goal of this process is to recognize and preserve physical evidence that will yield reliable information to aid in the investigation. Three main components of an investigation are: physical evidence, interviewing and interrogation (Summerfield, 2005). Key words: Police officers, investigations, potential evidence, physical evidence, crime scene, truth seekers, roles, duties, Fourth Amendment Rights

What Is A Crime Scene Investigation?

A crime scene investigation is an examination of the scene of a crime for any clues or evidence that may lead police to a suspect. One can think of a crime scene as a piece of history. The crime scene has a story to tell. The evidence can retell the story with the right approach to investigating the crime scene. Crime scene investigation is a slow and hardworking process, but the methodology that requires perfect care also tends to reveal important clues to the method, motive and suspect of the crime. CSI investigators combine law enforcement tactics with scientific knowledge in their work, and the way investigators do their jobs plays a big part in whether or not the police capture a suspect (Vaux, 2011). A crime scene is the beginning point of a successful or unsuccessful investigation. The main objectives of a crime

scene are to preserve and collect relevant information and any physical evidence that will make a connection between all parties involved. The first responders dispatched to the scene of a crime are usually the only people who get to view the crime scene immediately after the crime took place, at its original state. The end result of the investigation is to ensure that justice is served (Thomas, 2011). Crime scene investigation consists of analyzing the scene of a specific crime in order to determine what happened and provide clues as to the identity of the suspect. Several basic considerations come into play when managing a crime scene effectively. They carefully and systematically examined a crime scene to learn how and when the crime was committed, who committed it and why, and perhaps what items may have been removed from the scene. Each investigation of a crime scene is different. The differences depend on where the crime is committed, how big the crime is, and the area of the crime. A number of procedures take place at a crime scene. While others depend upon the nature of the scene and the circumstances surrounding the crime, there are specific procedures that are always done. Crimes could be discovered by a witness who sees a crime in progress and reports it to the police, a victim of the crime reports it to the police or the police discover the crime in progress. Police discovering the crime in progress is also known as a sting operation. These are situations where law enforcement agents set up a scenario and criminals are encouraged to commit crimes (Vaux, 2011). Once the investigation Officers has gathered all the information possible from a crime scene, they may release it. After release, people can go back to using the site as they normally would. The site may require specialized cleanup to remove dangerous substances, along with the unsavory reminders of a crime, such

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as the smell of a decomposing body or damage caused by a fire (Smith, 2003).

Roles and Duties of Police Officers as First Responders

The certified first responder (CFR) profession was developed to address the lag between the time an accident happens and the arrival of an emergency medical technician, such as a paramedic. Many certified first responders are trained firefighters, lifeguards, athletic trainers, police officers or park rangers (Thomas, 2011). Police Officers as first responders crime scene investigators and as truth seekers are the starting point of a crime scene investigation. Important information is discovered and collected to help solve the crime and seek the truth that surrounds the crime. The crime scene investigator at the scene first, gets an understanding of what the investigation will entail, and construct a plan of action for locating and gathering evidence. Every crime scene is different; however, the crime scene investigator has to make sure that all physical evidence is located and collected in a proper manner, record all pertinent information, secures the scene from contamination, and goes over what he or she thinks took place, and how and why it happened (Siegel, 2009). At a crime scene, the first responders other than onlookers are usually police officers, emergency medical technicians and depending on the situation, the fire department. The first responders dispatched to the scene of the crime are usually the ones who get to view the crime scene immediately after the crime first happened and at its original state. To get an accurate account and successful resolution in a criminal investigation, first responders at a crime scene must

maintain the links that connect the suspect to the victim and the crime scene (Thomas, 2011).

Ensure Safety

The first duty of the police officer as first responders is to ensure safety. As the first to arrive on the scene, they must make sure that the victim or victims are safe, out of danger, and provided with the proper medical care. They also have to make sure the paramedics responding to the crime scene will treat the victim and take them to a nearby hospital for treatment if necessary. Another important duty is to separate the witness so that they can tell their stories without influencing each other (Cox, 2011). It is a very important duty for the police officer to secure the crime scene area so that no unauthorized persons can come in and interfere with the investigation. Crime scene security perimeter measures has to be established by securing the crime scene area as soon as possible with barrier tape, police vehicles or other means to preserve the evidence and make sure that crime scene does not get contaminated (Thomas, 2011).

Interview Victims and Witnesses

Interviewing is one of the duties that give the investigating Officer the opportunity to get evidence and testimony that will help establish facts, identify potential suspects and potentially provide corroboration. Conduct a preliminary interview with onlookers and the victim, if possible, to determine if anyone can identify the person who committed the crime. At this time the attending officer will obtain a physical description of the suspect and ask the victim to explain what happened to the best of their ability. Interviewing is divided into two viewpoints, witness and victim. Both interviews have some

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common elements, but with differences based on on the individual circumstances. The interview should be conducted as near to the time of the crime as possible. The witness should be able to tell what happened without being interrupted. The victim should be interviewed with sensitivity and on a professional level (Summerfield, 2005).

Manage the Area

An officer is assigned as the crime scene security officer. He will keep a log of names of personnel entering and leaving the crime scene. Anyone entering the crime scene can contaminate the evidence that could possibly link the suspect to the crime scene, so accurate documentation and evidence preservation is essential (Thomas, 2011).

Apprehend the Suspect

While on duty, Police Officers will look for the person who committed the crime at the scene and make an arrest if the suspect is still in the vicinity of the crime. They want to ensure that all responsible parties are held responsible for their actions. Suspects who are arrested for the crimes are usually booked into jail or cited and release (Hickey, 2003).

Detain All Witnesses and Onlookers

Collecting valuable information in the investigation, by interviewing people at the crime scene, is a duty that could help in apprehending the suspect. Witnesses usually have important information about the suspect and about what actually happened. Sometime the credibility may be an issue in some cases with the information given; but victims and suspects physical evidence

in such a case will be very useful in connecting any missing link in the investigation (Thomas, 2011).

Document the Scene

The responding Officer should use methods which consist of written notes which will be used in constructing a final report, crime scene photographs, and a diagram or sketch. The goal of the documentation is to create a visual record that will allow forensics lab and the prosecuting attorneys to recreate an accurate view of the scene. There should be a great consistency between each of these functions. Each method is important in the process of properly documenting the crime scene. The notes and reports should be done in a chronological order and should not include opinions, analysis, or conclusions. Just the facts! The crime scene investigator should document only what they see, not what they think. The final report should tell a descriptive story. A general description of the crime scene should be given just as the investigator sees it when they do the initial walk through of the scene (Byrd, 2000).

Collect and Preserve Evidence

Once the crime scene has been thoroughly documented by the investigating Officer and the locations of the evidence noted, and then the collection process can begin. The collection process usually starts with the collection of the most fragile or most easily lost evidence. Special consideration can also be given to any evidence or objects which need to be moved. Collection can continue along the crime scene trail or in some other logical manner.

Photographs should also continue to be taken if the investigator is revealing layers of evidence which were not previously documented because they

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were hidden from sight (Schiro, 2011). Each type of evidence has a specific value in the investigation. The value of evidence should be kept in consideration when doing a crime scene investigation. It is also wise to collect more evidence at a crime scene than not to collect enough evidence. The most should be made at the crime scene, since an investigator has only one shot (Schiro, 2011). The reasons for the evidence collection is to organize the evidence that the investigator recovered from the scene, where the items were recovered from, and what part of the lab that the items were directed to (Byrd, 2011).

Report to the Leading Crime Scene Investigator

This particular duty call for all events that took place, any adjustments or alterations made to the crime scene and all movements in and out the crime scene perimeter will be documented. Lack of accurate information, omissions, negligence, under or overemphasis in information can severely damage the investigation and the outcome for a successful conclusion. An accurate account of what happened, without any addition or deletion is very important when communicating with the leading investigator (Thomas, 2011).

The Fourth Amendment Rights

The Fourth Amendment plays a very important role when it comes to individual rights. The most important word in the evaluation of The Fourth Amendment is the word warrant. The Amendment states: “ The right of the people to be secure in their persons, houses, papers, and effects, against unreasonable searches and seizures, shall not be violated, and no warrants shall issue, but upon probable cause, supported by oath or affirmation, and <https://assignbuster.com/what-is-a-crime-scene-investigation/>

particularly describing the place to be searched, and the persons or things to be seized”, (Scalia, 2007). According to the Fourth Amendment of the United States Constitution, the elements are the 1. Oath or Affirmation made 2. Probable cause determined 3. Specific warrant issued and 4. The actual Search, arrest, seizure, and detainment. The order of these elements is important! 1 and 2 should happen before 3, and 3 before 4. Properly conducted, a crime scene search can reveal evidence that allows investigators to reconstruct the crime and identify the perpetrator. Lawfully conducted, a crime scene search can aid in the successful prosecution of those responsible. To lawfully conduct a crime scene search, however, investigators must be extremely careful to follow the dictates of The Fourth Amendment (Crawford, 1999). Because officers under the intense stress and pressure of a crime scene may overlook the contents of The Fourth Amendment, law enforcement agencies should reinforce the need for warrants through policy. The fact that a crime was committed on the scene generally provides the requisite probable cause for obtaining a search warrant. Moreover, forensic technicians and crime scene analysts can assist in meeting the particularity requirement of The Fourth Amendment by supplying a list of likely items of evidence to include on the warrant application. By developing policies that emphasize the need for warrants, law enforcement agencies can substantially increase the likelihood of successful prosecutions (Crawford, 1999). Officers can also search and seize objects on a person if the officer has placed the person under arrest. This exception extends to situations in which the police in good-faith mistakenly arrest the wrong suspect and seize contraband during the search. If a suspect, either during traffic stop or otherwise, makes a furtive gesture, the

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gesture justifies a limited warrantless police intrusion (Wheatly, 2007). When Police Officer obtain a warrant before conducting a search, the warrant must comply with the Fourth Amendment before evidence from the search will be admissible in court. A warrant may be defective if it is not supported by probable cause that is established by a detailed, sworn statement made by a law enforcement officer appearing before a magistrate (Fairlex, 2011).

Conclusion

Police officers as first responders require considerable knowledge. They have a great responsibility when being the first person on a crime scene. They have to make sure that the victims are safe and the suspect is apprehended, and that each of their Constitutional Rights are in place. Processing a crime scene is a very lengthy and thorough process. Investigators will spend hours, and sometimes days, documenting the crime scene and its condition and collecting all the physical evidence that is present in an attempt to discover what crime was committed and who committed it. All crime scenes, bodies of evidence and investigative techniques are unique in their own right. The Criminal Justice System wants to convict the guilty, while protecting the innocent. As with any element of our society it is essential that we have in place some system for validating conclusions and assumptions to ensure fairness and justice are preserved. Even our system of government has seen the wisdom in a system of checks and balances to ensure no single force can dominate without a consensus. Our law enforcement investigative process should do no less. By ensuring all elements of an investigation are fully explored and considered, this can be achieved (McFadden, D.).