

Crime scene preservation



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Crime scene preservation should be the most important step to any first responder. This protocol should continue to be followed by anyone who processes the scene.

From the moment the first responder arrives at the scene, he/she should exercise a pertinacious attitude to insure that curious onlookers and personnel who are not involved in a task related to the scene, remain outside the cordoned perimeter. Without this first step, evidence found at the scene can be compromised or worse destroyed which could result in possibly ruining any opportunity to create a strong case to arrest and convict a suspect. Once secured, the crime scene can be processed. There is a basic protocol that all investigators follow and even though each crime scene is different with a vast array of circumstances the basic procedures remain the same. These functions are: interviewing, examining, photographing, sketching, and processing. Each function has its own set of rules and challenges in its own right and I will attempt to demonstrate what each function is and the challenges that an investigator may encounter.

Interview: This would be the first task to perform. The investigator would interview the first responder and gather as much information from him/her as possible. Some important points would be the type of crime that was committed, in what area it was committed, and how it might have been carried out. Other people who would be interviewed would be the victim, neighbors, passersby, anyone who may have seen and/or heard anything that would assist the police in apprehending the perpetrator. Some of the challenges confronting an investigator during this phase could be, the victim not willing to discuss his/her ordeal, neighbors giving conflicting information

regarding what was seen or heard, finding those individuals who were in direct proximity of the crime scene prior to and immediately after the crime was committed, or not having any witnesses at all.

Examine: To examine the crime scene is to determine if what is thought to have happened supported by evidence found at the scene. Among the things to examine, the investigator would want to identify points of entry and exit and delineate key areas throughout the location. A challenge that might present itself could be the ability to search areas that may not be directly connected to the crime scene but could still offer evidence. Before a search could be made of additional areas, the investigator may need to obtain an additional search warrant once they could offer probable cause as to why the search is necessary. **Photograph:** Taking photographs of the crime scene creates a pictorial record of the area where the crime was committed, the surrounding areas that indicate the pattern of travel of the perpetrator and/or the victim, the position of articles in the areas, and also gives a record of physical evidence that was found including the body of the victim and blood spatter patterns in relation to the rest of the area. Some investigators are also using video cameras where one investigator runs the video while another investigator narrates.

While this is an excellent idea, the quality of a still image can offer better clues than a video. A new technology for photography known as Photo Stitching is on the rise for law enforcement. It is currently a well known tool for Real Estate Agents who want to give potential buyers a larger picture or a 360° view of a property that is for sale. **Sketch:** Sketching the crime scene allows the investigator a means of being able to recall the layout of the area.

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Again, position of articles in relation to walls and other articles as well as the position of the body and the area where it was located will be included in the sketch.

A challenge in sketching could be trying to get all of the information seen onto paper. Process: The final step for the crime scene protocol is actually processing the site. All evidence at this point should be collected, placed in an appropriate container, and logged. This also begins the chain of custody for the evidence that is collected.

All latent prints are lifted; all documents are collected including those pages underneath that could possibly hold impressions from which additional information can be collected. The investigator must also remember to include reference samples with the evidence so as to allow for comparison testing. From the smallest hair or fiber sample to the trash cans, anything that is in, on, around, or near the body, including clothing and bedding etc, or the crime scene is considered evidence. Once all of the evidence is collected it is dispatched to the crime lab for further processing via personal delivery or by mail. Special Challenges: There are always special challenges when dealing with a crime such as rape because you are going to have to subject the victim to the task of being personally processed by using a Sexual Assault Kit which will allow the person utilizing the kit to collect evidence such as debris from under the fingernails, including skin in the event the victim tried to scratch the attacker, pubic hairs, seminal deposits and both defensive and abusive wounds and bruising.

Having to collect this kind of evidence from an already distraught victim requires special handling and tact. Other challenges that arise are those that are connected with arson, homicides, accidents and crimes committed at night. With arson, there is the need for specialized personnel who can identify the origin of the fire and whether or not an accelerant was used. Accidents require taking note of skid marks, tire tracks and paint transfer. There is also the task of identifying any fluids that might be on the road or fumes near the site.

Homicides require a ballistics expert and there is also recreating the scene noting where the shots were fired from based on trajectory. Crimes committed under the shroud of night are the most difficult to process because the “lay of the land” looks different at night. Evidence is harder to locate and there is always a chance of evidence being destroyed by a misplaced step in the dark. References Crime Scene Processing Protocol. (n. d.). Retrieved Oct. 26, 2008, from [http://www.](http://www.feinc.net/cs-proc.htm)

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