

Metropolitan Police Academy



3.3 Crime Scene Awareness and Management

November 6, 2023

3.3.1 Explain the key considerations for officers when they arrive on a crime scene

Patrol officers encounter crime scenes on a daily basis. The scenes vary in size, complexity, and severity. Regardless of these variations, the first consideration on every scene must be safety. Scene safety is a phrase that you will hear repeatedly throughout your time in the academy and career, but what does it mean? **Safety** is defined as “the condition of being protected from danger, risk, or injury.”

As a police officer, it will be your job to protect yourself and others from danger, risk, and injury. When you approach a crime scene, you must immediately assess any potential safety concerns.

Things to consider:

- The suspect’s location.
- The location of weapons on the scene and if they are accessible to the victim or suspect.
- Hazardous scene conditions (e.g., condemned buildings, gas leaks, open manholes, stairwells, and doorways).
- Potential biohazards that may be present (e.g., blood, bodily fluids, drugs that can be absorbed through the skin like PCP).
- Potentially aggressive animals (e.g., dogs).
- Pests such as roaches, bedbugs, or even pets that could be infested with lice. (This is a serious issue. Many insects are easily transmitted through simple contact, and you do not want to bring these insects home with you.)

Remember that the assessment of safety never stops. Threats to safety can change with little or no warning. Protect yourself and your partner by taking control of the scene during an investigation. If a suspect is on the scene, an officer should be in control of the suspect at all times. If a weapon is on the scene, separate the victim and suspect from it, or secure the weapon if separation is not possible.

Always be mindful of your surroundings. Unsafe structures and buildings increase the chances of you or someone else being injured. While you are on the scene, be aware of what you are touching and where you are stepping. Always wear personal protective equipment (PPE), such as rubber gloves, when on crime scenes. If you are in a location that may be infested with pests and/or insects, limit your contact with that environment as much as possible.

Once scene safety concerns have been addressed, your next consideration is **securing the scene**. Securing the scene can help to minimize new safety risks from developing while providing the first step in preserving evidence. This is accomplished by **establishing scene boundaries** that encompass all areas known or suspected to contain evidence. You should always make your scene is large enough to encompass areas like flight paths/escape routes. It is far easier to decrease the size of a scene later than to increase the size of a scene as potential evidence may be destroyed.

For example: You are on the scene of a homicide along a busy road. You have established scene boundaries around the area containing the body but chose not to block the street to keep traffic flowing. A crowd gathers at the boundaries while new information is uncovered that the suspect may have shot the victim from across the street. The area

across the street is not included within your scene so you must expand your scene boundaries. The first hurdle is to move the crowd, and this can prove very difficult when it includes potential family members and friends of the victim. Once you have moved the crowd, you now need to reestablish your scene boundaries. Expanding a scene often takes more police officers and resources than making the scene larger at the beginning.

When establishing scene boundaries, the preservation of evidence and the safety of emergency workers must take precedence over traffic concerns and pedestrian convenience. Showing respect and compassion to individuals inconvenienced by a crime scene is imperative, but MPD officers cannot sacrifice the integrity of the scene for the convenience of these individuals.

We have talked about where you should place the scene boundaries, but how do you physically establish scene boundaries? The first and most common way is for an officer to advise approaching individuals. Other methods of securing a scene are to use physical barriers such as crime scene tape, barricades, fences, walls, buildings, and anything else that physically blocks a person's passage into the scene. Once the boundaries are physically established, officers must be positioned to ensure that the boundaries are respected.

Once the boundaries are secure, an access point to the scene should be established. The primary responsibility of the officer assigned to the access point is to establish a crime scene log using their police notebook. A crime scene log is used to record the names of anyone who enters or is already inside the scene.

Crime scenes can occur in indoor or outdoor settings and all environmental conditions. Each type of location has unique challenges and requires a somewhat different response.

Outdoor scenes have more potential access points. Every access point needs to be secured and monitored. Outdoor scenes generally require more officers to secure due to the increased number of access points and the fact that they can cover a much larger area. They also have the potential to be compromised by weather, such as rain, which can wash away possible evidence. In situations like this, it is important that officers be guided by the official on the scene and do what they can to preserve evidence without disturbing or contaminating it. It also is important to make sure you request the appropriate crime scene unit to respond in a timely fashion to facilitate the scene being processed in the fastest manner possible. This will help preserve as much evidence as possible during inclement weather or adverse conditions.

Indoor scenes are often smaller and generally have limited entrance points, which can reduce the number of officers required to secure the scene. An indoor scene also creates a natural access point and allows a crime scene log to be more easily kept. The challenge with indoor scenes is that there are often many more hiding places for people and evidence to be concealed.

3.3.1-2 Crime scene communication

Police departments have traditionally tried to tightly control the flow of information regarding ongoing incidents and investigations. Generally, the release of information is centralized in the hands of senior commanders and designated spokespeople. There are good reasons for doing so. It ensures consistency

in the message that is provided to the public—with only a handful of officials speaking to the media, it is much less likely that multiple, conflicting messages will be disseminated.

There are also serious risks associated with releasing information:

- If a suspect is alerted that the police are specifically looking for certain pieces of evidence, it is possible that he or she will attempt to destroy or hide that evidence to prevent the police from finding it.
- If a suspect is alerted to the fact that the police are looking for him or her, he or she may flee. This could also create the potential for violence if the suspect has time to prepare, whereas the police may have been able to make an arrest without violence if the suspect was surprised.
- Sometimes initial information or reports are wrong. Investigators are trained to keep this possibility in mind and to seek out as much corroborating evidence as possible, but the media often reports whatever the initial account is as unquestioned fact. This has led to false narratives of events becoming widely believed by the public and to the misidentification of suspects.
- Individuals speaking to the media may not stick strictly to information that they know for certain to be true. Individuals may give in to the temptation to speculate or report information that they merely believe to be true but is inaccurate.
- Defense attorneys will attempt to claim that particularly widespread or sensational coverage is so prejudicial that it prevents their clients from getting a fair trial. If successful in court, these claims can endanger successful prosecutions.

Given these risks, it is understandable why many police agencies choose to tightly control the flow of information from within the agency to the public. When communication was limited to daily newspapers and nightly news broadcasts, such a system of controlling public statements worked fairly well. As we are all aware, however, information moves much, much faster today.

With access to the internet and social media literally in the palm of everyone's hands, information and misinformation can spread like wildfire. This has a number of implications for police communications:

- Trying to prevent *basic* information from being released, except on our timetable, is often futile and counterproductive. Witnesses, journalists, activists, and everyday people are often already talking about what they have seen or heard on platforms that have a global reach.
- Many departments have established presences on social media and use these to inform the public about serious crimes and other notable incidents. Often, officers have not received any additional training on communications and operate under the old mindset concerning print and broadcast media. This has led to situations where officers refuse to provide any sort of information about why they are present at a location, while their agency's official social media account has already released the nature of the incident for public consumption.
- When means of communication moved much more slowly, the measured, centralized release of information did not seem unusual and did not impact the general perception of law enforcement authority. Today, in contrast, people are generally used to receiving information within minutes (at the most) of a request or incident. The inclination of some agencies to wait hours, or even days, before releasing any information seems more and more unusual to people. This can have the effect of undermining trust in the agency.

Police agencies must adapt with changing technology, while not letting go of the solid fundamentals of good law enforcement communications strategy. The principles of the Marine Corps Command and Staff College related by Dr. Garcia provide a good guideline for police officers when it comes to communicating about crime scenes or ongoing investigations:

- **Engage:** Speak with the members of the community who are on scene. Simply refusing to speak is becoming less and less of an option, and your refusal to speak sends a message in itself.
- **Tell the truth:** Don't lie, but also don't reveal confidential or sensitive information. You are responsible for whatever you say so you will have to balance giving out information against potentially compromising an investigation. If you are in doubt, err on the side of releasing less information. However, just because you decide to avoid releasing specific information does not mean that you cannot engage and converse with community members.
- **Stay in your lane:** Talk only about things that are your direct responsibility. Adhering to this maxim will help you avoid compromising an investigation. In general, only talk about what you are immediately doing; if you're holding a crime scene, limit your remarks to holding the perimeter of the scene. Don't talk about what other officers or detectives are doing, as this increases the chances of inadvertently compromising the investigation. Once information has been released, we cannot recall it.

When speaking with members of the community on scenes, use plain English and not jargon or technical terms which can be confusing to people who are not professional law enforcement officers. You cannot assume that your audience is familiar with police procedures and terms. Also, the use of technical language can make officers seem disengaged, remote, or uncaring to the public.

Be mindful of your interactions with other officers. Laughing and joking on scenes can very easily send the wrong message and be misinterpreted. You will be judged by others on your bearing and manner. While jovial behavior is often innocent in nature (such as coworkers expressing comradery, expressing happiness upon seeing an old classmate from the Academy), to the public it appears that the officers have an inappropriate bearing and manner while handling the trauma experienced by a community member.

While engaging with members of the community, you must never lose sight of the fact that you are investigating a crime. The primary purpose of your engagement is to reassure community members regarding their safety, provide basic information about why the police are at a particular location (without compromising the investigation), and potentially gather additional information that would be beneficial to the case itself. Ensuring trust in law enforcement and reassuring the public of its safety are fundamental parts of the job of police officers. Each opportunity to engage allows MPD to positively build trust with our community. Of course, we are talking about times when a situation is under control, and it is safe and prudent to speak with bystanders.

With an active hazard or unsecured scene, or when other pressing tasks are to be accomplished, those will generally take priority over speaking with uninvolved parties. For example:

- You arrive on a scene and are told that it's a homicide, however the sergeant hands you a roll of crime scene tape and tells you, "Go secure the front of the building." As you secure the scene, you will be looking for potential evidence and, if found, you will keep it from being lost, destroyed, moved, tampered with, or missed by another officer. Once a detective or crime scene technician arrives on the scene, you should notify them of what you have found.

- You are maintaining the crime scene perimeter when you are approached by a member of the community who wants to know what happened. **Engage:** Introduce yourself and ask who he or she is. **Explain:** Tell the truth while staying in your lane by providing basic information which would not compromise any investigation. Saying to a member of the public that the police were called to the house and that officers are currently investigating what happened is acceptable. Even if there are pressing tasks, you should at least acknowledge the community member and tell him or her that an officer will come back to talk when possible.
- If a concerned community member asks if anyone is deceased, you may not disclose this information without consulting with an official or the lead detective on the case. A next of kin notification may not have been made and it should not come to the family through street rumors. If the member of the community is asking because they are a relative, friend, or other concerned party, acknowledge and respect the question. Identify and locate, when the timing is appropriate, a detective and/or official to speak with the community member.
- If a witness is known, this is something that may not be released, as it may imperil the investigation or the witness and his or her family. You should neither acknowledge if a witness has survived the attack nor to which hospital he or she was transported.
- Similarly, you should not disclose specifics about the crime, such as the type of weapon used, or statements made by a witness or suspect. You can reassure the community if the police are still looking for subjects or if there is no concern for continued public alarm. Encourage members of the community to call **(202) 727-9099** if they hear any details, and hand out a tip card if possible.
- If a lookout has been placed for a specific individual or vehicle, ascertain from a detective or supervisor if this information is for the general public or is being kept under wraps so as not to alert the suspects they are known and being sought. As deemed appropriate by the official, you may communicate this to the inquiring community member.
- Members of the media that arrive on the scene and are looking to conduct an interview or gather additional information for reporting purposes should be directed to an official on scene. It is not the role of a patrol officer to serve as the official spokesperson for the department, nor to make declarative statements to the media.

Officers are responsible for being engaged and providing good customer service through every interaction. Consider the following scenario:

You are an officer assigned to scout/cruiser 5031. You receive a radio assignment for the sound of gunshots at 1234 Main Street NE. Upon arrival on the scene, you and your partner find the front door of the home ajar. As you proceed to the door, you see that it has been “kicked in” and the locking mechanism destroyed.

You call out to the interior of the house and receive no answer. Carefully entering the home, you find an individual inside suffering from multiple gunshot wounds. The victim has been bound and possibly assaulted. You immediately call for assistance, give aid to the injured victim where possible, and check the house for any suspects or additional injured victims or complainants/witnesses.

A short time later, the EMS board has come and gone, and the house is filled with officials, detectives, and crime scene personnel. You and your partner are told to put up crime scene tape. As you begin laying out the crime scene tape and establishing the boundaries of the crime scene, you realize a small crowd of concerned community members have

gathered on the sidewalk directly in front of the residence. They begin calling out questions asking about the well-being of the occupants of the home. How do you respond?

In the past, officers would respond with little to no information. In fact, some officers have been rude and demanded the crowd disperse. However, you cannot and should not respond in this fashion. So, how should you respond? Depending on your knowledge and responsibilities, here are a few suggestions:

- When you are among the first responding officers, you are going to have more information than others when asked questions. At the same time, however, the department may be releasing information as the scene is being investigated (example Twitter feed: “MPD is investigating the sounds of gunshots at 1234 Main Street, NE, more information to be released later.”) The community is not naive. So, how should you answer their questions about the well-being of the occupants? First, while you should not lie to them, you should keep in consideration that next of kin notifications have most likely not been made, even if the victim’s body has been identified. You might answer in this manner, “The detectives are currently investigating a shooting that occurred inside the residence and will be getting in touch with the families of those persons involved.”
- This may naturally be followed up by a community member asking, “Was anybody killed?” Here again, keep in mind the feelings of the family members who have not yet been notified and what the public actually needs to know at this moment. Consider answering in this manner: “I don’t know much about the scene. I know that members of the District of Columbia Fire and Emergency Medical Services Department have come and done what they could, and the department is currently attempting to reach out to family members.”
- Saying “Next of Kin” is a giveaway that someone is deceased inside. If the transport vehicle from the Office of the Chief Medical Examiner is on the scene, you can acknowledge that a death has occurred (if known), but you should refrain from disclosing the identity of the deceased. If members of the community want more information, this is an appropriate time to request an official to speak with members of the public. Let the community know you have requested an official or detective to come to speak with them.
- If someone in the crowd offers to call a family member, quickly contact one of the detectives and have them come out and talk with that individual.

Patrol officers do not have to carry the burden of public communications solely on their shoulders. They should confer with the detectives and/or officials on the scene as to how much they should say.

Information that should be withheld

Since we are discussing the responsibilities of the first officers on the scene, they should refrain from giving out specific information such as, “A female was criminally assaulted.” In addition, this type of information should not be mentioned over the radio.

Other information that should be withheld at the crime scene is:

- The fact that a particular type of weapon was used (e.g., “They used a shotgun.” “They used a machete.” “She was raped at knifepoint.” “She was strangled with a nylon hose.”) This type of

specific information should be guarded and not shared as the detectives may use it during an interrogation to determine if someone is lying or not.

- Information that the residence was entered by kicking in the front door. Again, you should refrain from sharing this as it may cause concern among the local residents that their residences may be next, when in fact, this could very well have been a targeted location. Officers should attempt to ease the concerns of the community members for their own safety by assuring them that this appears to be an isolated incident if this is true.

Officers should ask those community members on the scene if they have any information that they would like to share that may assist the detectives in their investigation. Officers should keep in mind that the community members feel invested in the well-being of their neighbors and the neighborhood in general. When an incident occurs, it is normal for people to ask questions and want to know what happened. If it occurred in your neighborhood, you would want to know too.

Per **GO-SPT-302.13 (Body-Worn Camera Program)**, members shall activate their BWCs for all dispatched and self-initiated calls for service.

Each potential scenario is different, dynamic, and variable based upon the circumstances of that scene. Officers need to acknowledge and engage with members of the community. Lack of engagement, rude, or discourteous behavior undermines the fundamental principles of our agency and makes the work of each of our officers that much harder.

As noted, there will be times that officers are engaged in a law enforcement operation and the timing and release of information could be detrimental to the operation; however, officers should return and communicate on such scenes as soon as it is practicable to do so. Sufficient officers should be called to any scene to ensure MPD addresses and positively interacts with community members, where possible.

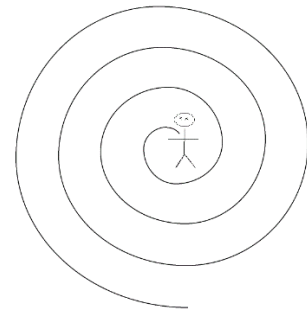
Every encounter with a member of the public is critical to building trust in our department and assuring the community we are here to help them. Your actions as a police officer will reflect on the MPD brand and are critical. Communicating appropriately is not just the responsibility of the Public Information Officer, district officials, or the Commander; it is a fundamental duty of each police officer in our department.

Appropriate communication with members of the community not only reflects the needs of the department but also the needs of the community. Every interaction a community member has with a member of the department should leave him or her feeling as if concerns have been acknowledged and addressed in some way. Consciously acting and communicating professionally reassures the public that MPD is engaged in their communities, cares about their well-being, and is working to keep them safe.

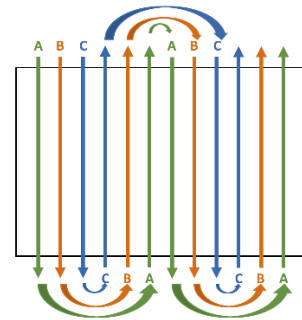
3.3.2 Identify the five basic search patterns

Once a crime scene is safe and secure, the search for and recovery of evidence can be particularly challenging. The only way officers can ensure that every area of a crime scene is searched for evidence is to use a systematic approach. This approach consists of five different search patterns:

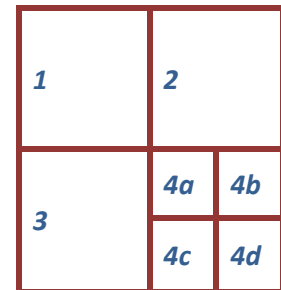
Spiral Search - A search method in which the officers move in an inward spiral from the boundary of the scene to the center of the scene, or in an outward spiral from the center to the boundary. A spiral search is commonly used when looking for an object that is suspected to be a specific distance from another. For example: A cartridge casing from a gun or an object thrown by hand from a specific location but thrown in an unknown direction.



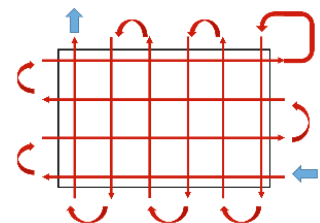
Line search – A search method used by multiple officers who stand in a long line and walk in straight lines going the same direction across the crime scene. Stakes and string can be used to create “lanes” for which each officer is responsible. A line search is commonly used when searching a large area looking for a large object.



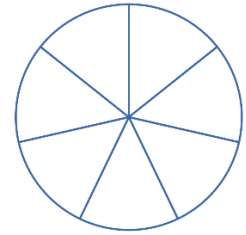
Zone search - A search method in which the crime scene is divided into smaller sections and officers are assigned to search each section. Each of these sections can be subdivided into smaller sections for smaller teams to search thoroughly. A zone search is commonly used for recording the location and shapes of suspected blood patterns, projectile trajectories, and other types of evidence where the interrelationship of each piece of evidence is of the highest concern.



Grid search - A search method employed by one or more people overlapping separate line searches, thereby forming a grid. A grid search is commonly used for searching large areas such as a field or open lands.



Wheel search pattern - A search method employed by several people moving from the boundary of the scene straight toward the center of the scene (inward) or from the center straight to the boundary (outward). A wheel search pattern is commonly used for searching large open areas. Each section of the wheel is searched using a variation of the line or grid search.



3.3.3 Identify the types of evidence that may be found at a crime scene

Police officers have a responsibility to identify, document, and preserve evidence at any crime scene they encounter, but what is evidence? **Evidence** is defined as “information given personally, drawn from a document, or in the form of material objects, tending or used to establish facts in a legal investigation.”

Evidence can either support or disprove an officer’s theory of the events on a crime scene. It is the responsibility of every police officer investigating a crime to consider all relevant evidence in making their decisions and preserve it for analysis and judicial proceedings. There are several broad types of evidence.

General Evidence

General evidence is any physical item that provides a clue or leads to relevant facts in a criminal investigation. General evidence can be a physical item that provides insight into a case through its presence, position, or condition, or through the information it contains.

Blood Stain Evidence:

Blood Stain Evidence is present at a crime scene and the blood stain was deposited during or after and as a result of what occurred on the scene. When you observe what you believe to be a blood stain, but you were not present to witness its origin, it should be referred to as *suspected blood*. Analysis of blood stain evidence can assist investigators in answering a number of things, such as:

- Where did the blood come from?
- What caused the wounds?
- From what direction was the victim or suspect wounded?
- How were the victim and suspect positioned?
- What movements were made after the bloodshed?
- How many potential perpetrators were present?
- Does the blood stain evidence support or refute witness statements?

DNA Evidence

DNA or deoxyribonucleic acid is the building block for the human body. DNA is found in blood, saliva, skin, hair, and bone. DNA from an individual is the same no matter what type of cell it comes from. For example, the DNA from John’s blood will be identical to the DNA from John’s saliva.

DNA is a powerful investigative tool, and it can be recovered from a variety of surfaces (e.g., countertops, door handles, weapons, and other surfaces). If recovered, DNA has the potential to positively link a known suspect to a scene or to another piece of evidence. With the exception of identical twins, no two individuals have the same DNA.

If you are working on a case with no known suspects, DNA can be compared to an FBI database known as CODIS (the Combined DNA Index System). CODIS contains DNA profiles contributed by federal, state, and local participating forensic laboratories from all 50 states, the District of Columbia, the federal government, the U.S. Army Criminal Investigation Laboratory, and Puerto Rico.

Trace Evidence

Trace evidence refers to a very small piece of evidence left at or taken from a crime scene that may be used to identify or link a suspect to a crime. Trace evidence can consist of many things, including human hair, animal hair, textile fibers, rope, feathers, soil, glass, and building materials. Physical contact between a suspect and victim or a crime scene can result in the transfer of trace materials. The identification and comparison of these materials can often associate a suspect to a crime scene or another individual. Here is a description of some types of trace evidence:

- **Hair** - Examination can determine if a hair is animal or human. If animal, the species and possibly breed of the animal can also be determined. If human, the racial characteristics, body area, length, root type (whether it naturally shed or was forcibly removed), and any artificial treatment or damage can be determined.
- **Fibers** - Examination can determine if a fiber is natural or manmade. Questioned fibers can be compared to fibers from a known source to determine if they are consistent with the questioned fiber from that source. Questioned fibers can also be compared to other questioned fibers to determine if they are consistent, though the source is not known.
- **Fabric** - Examination can determine if a questioned piece of fabric and a known piece of fabric are consistent in color, construction, and composition. Torn pieces of fabric can be physically matched to a damaged garment.
- **Feathers** - Examination can determine the species of bird that a feather came from, and questioned and known samples of feathers can be compared.

Fingerprints

Fingerprint evidence plays a crucial role in criminal investigations. Since a person's fingerprints are unique and do not naturally change during their life, they can be used to quickly and effectively confirm or disprove a person's identity. Fingerprints collected at a crime scene have the potential to link a series of crimes together or to place a suspect at the crime scene.

Footwear and Tire Impressions

The basic theory behind footwear and tire track analysis is that, much like fingerprints, shoes and tires may leave behind either prints (referred to as "imprints") or impressions that can be examined by investigators. The type of evidence left behind depends largely on the type of surface traveled. Often criminals take steps to cover their face and hands but rarely take steps to cover their footwear.

Footwear and tire impressions are evaluated on the following characteristics:

- **Individual characteristics** are unique aspects of a particular shoe or tire that result from use, not the manufacturing process. These could be from damage such as a cut, gouge or crack, or a temporary alteration like a stone or twig stuck in the tread.
- **Wear characteristics** result from the natural erosion of the shoe or tread caused by use. Specific wear characteristics include the wear pattern and the basic position of tread wear, the wear

condition and the amount or depth of the wear, and, where extreme, the damage to or destruction of the tread. For instance, the location and amount of tread loss on a particular brand and style of shoe will be different for each person wearing the shoe based on how and where they walk, and the length of time they have owned the shoe.

3.3.4 Explain ways to minimize contamination of a crime scene

Contamination is the introduction of something to a scene that was not previously there. Each time you interact with a crime scene, you will leave something behind or take something away. It is very important that you minimize this interaction.

Only trained members shall process scenes and collect evidence. All evidence shall be collected in accordance with Attachment A (Responsibilities for Processing Incidents and Crime Scenes) from GO-OPS-304.08 (Crime Scene Response and Evidence Collection).

Preventing crime scene contamination begins with each officer. Officers must refrain from eating, drinking, using tobacco products, or engaging in any other behavior that could cause them to deposit trace evidence at a crime scene. Wearing personal protective equipment (PPE) like rubber gloves can help to prevent you from adding your fingerprints to the scene or depositing other trace evidence that could cloud an investigation.

NOTE: Rubber gloves do **not** prevent you from picking up trace evidence from a surface onto the glove or from destroying fingerprints that may have been left on a surface you are touching.

Every action you take and everything you touch on a crime scene should have a valid and justifiable reason. As a general rule, you should never touch or move evidence. If you are forced to move evidence in order to provide a safe crime scene, it should be done so sparingly and with care and caution.

For example: You arrive at the scene of a shooting where the victim and suspect are still on the scene. The firearm is also still present on the scene. While securing the suspect and rendering aid to the victim, you may need to move or secure the firearm to protect yourself or others from continued violence.

NOTE: Officers should not disturb evidence unless it is to protect life or prevent injury.

Officers may also move evidence in situations where if the evidence was not moved, it could be lost or destroyed. Anytime you move evidence, you should always do what you can to first document its original location and condition through either photographing it or making notes when it is safe to do so.

With all that in mind here are some ways to minimize crime scene contamination:

- If your presence is not required on a scene, do not enter it. Every person's presence on the scene should be explainable and necessary.
- If you are on a scene and your presence is no longer required, you should leave the scene.
- When arriving on a scene, be careful where you park. Otherwise, you could easily drive over evidence and destroy a chance at solving a crime.

- Always be cautious where you step on a crime scene. You should use the same path to enter and exit the scene.
- No matter how many times a scene has been searched, you should always scan for evidence as you move about a scene. It is not uncommon to find new evidence as you move around.
- Wear gloves and do not touch anything that is not absolutely necessary. Each time you touch something you leave something behind or take something with you.
- Do not use chalk to mark the location of cartridge casings or place anything over the top of the casings.

It is critical that members do not do anything that may unintentionally contaminate forensic processing of the evidence.

3.3.5 Explain the importance of documentation of crime scenes

Crime scene photography is very important because it begins the documentation process of a scene. A photograph captures and preserves an image of evidence in the state it is in at the time the photograph is taken.

MPD issues every officer both a body-worn camera (BWC) and a cellular telephone. Both of these devices are linked to an official evidence archive maintained by the department at **Evidence.com**. The primary use of the cell phone is to classify BWC videos in the field, so officers do not have to return to the station and use a desktop computer to tag their videos.

The cell phone also comes pre-loaded with **the AXON Capture app**. This app uses the cell phone's camera to take photographs and upload them to Evidence.com. Photographs taken with AXON Capture become official crime scene photos and must be categorized and retained appropriately.

Patrol officers are to use AXON Capture to take crime scene photographs when that is the **only** form of evidence processing necessary at a crime scene. This will generally be most misdemeanor offenses, assaults, robberies where only minor injury occurs, and other scenes requiring an investigation (like an MPD-involved traffic crash with minor damage only). Patrol officers are to take crime scene photos with their department cell phones *only* when it is the only kind of evidence processing necessary. For example, if there was a break-in where both photographs and fingerprinting were necessary, the officer would call for a crime scene trained unit, and the trained officer would then both fingerprint and take crime scene photos.

Keep in mind that taking pictures or videos of a crime scene creates evidence. Therefore, photos should only be taken with your department-issued cell phone. You should never share photographs of a crime scene on social media. You should never take pictures using your own cell phone as doing so could allow a defense attorney to obtain a court order to examine everything on your personal phone as well as any devices or social media accounts to which it is linked.

Crime scene diagrams are an important tool that crime scene technicians use to capture the overall layout of a scene. They also document the location evidence is discovered on the scene. A crime scene diagram

includes measurements of the distance between evidence and a permanent object or structure. A diagram allows for the reconstruction of a crime scene at a later date to assist an investigation or prosecution of a case.

Once evidence has been documented through photography and diagramming, it must be removed from the scene and stored for presentation at court. Packaging and storage of evidence from scenes processed by the Department of Forensic Science (DFS) is generally done by the technician handling the scene. Evidence recovered on crime scenes processed by trained MPD members is packaged and stored by the officers at their respective element.

3.3.6 Differentiate between the roles of MPD members trained in evidence collection and evidence technicians assigned to the Department of Forensic Sciences

When more evidence must be processed than just crime scene photographs, you will need to call for an MPD member trained in evidence collection or a Department of Forensic Sciences (DFS) crime scene technician, depending on the type of crime scene (**GO-OPS304.08 [Crime Scene Response and Evidence Collection]**).

MPD Members Trained in Evidence Collection

Each district has a number of sworn officers who have been trained to process crime scenes when fingerprints, cartridge casings, or buccal swabs are the only form of forensic documentation required. These officers are assigned to each district and perform crime scene processing in addition to patrol duties. Generally, they handle non-violent burglaries and vehicle-related crimes (excluding carjackings), random gunfire calls for service, or when directed by a watch commander.

Department of Forensic Sciences Evidence Technicians

DFS Evidence Technicians work out of the Consolidated Forensics Lab. DFS is an independent city agency that provides integrated forensic, scientific, and crime scene services to the various DC government agencies tasked with investigating and enforcing laws, codes, and regulations. DFS technicians respond for the most serious criminal offenses and incidents that have the potential to develop into serious offenses (e.g., missing persons reports where kidnapping or other foul play is suspected or an unconscious injured individual where a violent assault is suspected). DFS handles all potential DNA evidence collection, firearms cases, cases involving other weapons, violent crimes that result in serious bodily injury or death, carjackings, and traffic-related fatalities. More information about the types of crime scenes that require a DFS response can be found in Attachment A (Responsibilities for Processing Incidents and Crime Scenes) from GO-OPS-304.08 (Crime Scene Response and Evidence Collection).

Summary

Patrol officers encounter crime scenes daily. The first consideration at every scene, regardless of its size, complexity, or severity, must be safety and then its integrity. Officers have a responsibility to identify, document, and preserve evidence at any crime scene they encounter. Evidence is information given personally, drawn from a document, or in the form of material objects, tending or used to establish facts

in a legal investigation. Officers at crime scenes should take great care to prevent or eliminate the possibility of crime scene contamination. Only trained members shall process scenes and collect evidence.

References

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