



Crime Scene Processing

.01 Policy

The proper search of a crime scene for physical evidence is a critical part of the criminal investigation. The ability of the investigating officer to identify what constitutes probative or viable physical evidence, and to properly secure and preserve it for trial is essential to the investigation of the crime and the prosecution of offenders. At the crime scene, every officer shares the responsibility of collecting as much pertinent physical evidence as possible. Certain procedures must be followed in the processing and preservation of evidence in order to ensure that its value for laboratory examination will not be adversely affected and that it will be admissible in court.

.02 Terms

Evidence: Anything that bears on or tends to prove the points in question. For the purpose of this order the term "evidence" means physical or tangible evidence, objects, fingerprints, bodily fluids or parts, impressions made on other objects, photographs, etc.

Chain of Custody: The continuity of custody for items collected as physical evidence. This continuity must be established in order to prove that items or materials offered as evidence during a trial are the same items or materials collected at the crime scene during processing.

Crime Scene Processing: The specific actions taken at the scene of a crime or accident; consisting of the taking of photographs, preparing a sketch of a crime or accident scene, and the collection and preservation of physical evidence.

Crime Scene Technician: The technician assigned to the Evidence Collection Unit of the Prince George's County or Maryland State Police.

Field Fingerprint Officer: A sworn officer who is responsible for processing minor crime scenes. (Required equipment - latent fingerprint kit and camera.)

Contamination: The undesirable transfer of DNA/biological or other material to physical evidence from another source.

Cross Contamination: The undesirable transfer of

material between two or more sources of physical evidence.

Biological Evidence: Evidence commonly recovered from crime scenes in the form of hair, tissue, bones, teeth, blood or other bodily fluids and cellular material.

Contaminated Property: Recovered or found (non-evidentiary) property that has been in contact with blood or other potentially infectious materials.

Single-Use Equipment: Items that will be used only once to collect evidence, such as biological samples, then discarded to minimize contamination (e.g., tweezers, scalpel blades, droppers.)

Personal Protective Equipment (PPE): Articles such as disposable (latex) gloves, masks, shoe covers and eye protection that are utilized to provide a barrier to keep biological or chemical hazards from contacting the skin, eyes, and mucous membranes and to avoid contamination of the crime scene.

DNA (Deoxyribonucleic Acid): The molecule that encodes genetic information. DNA is a chemical substance contained in cells that determines each person's individual characteristics. An individual's DNA is unique, except in cases of identical twins.

.03 Governing Legislation and Reference

Governing Legislation: N/A

Forms:

Chain of Custody Request for Analysis (Form PG 3747).

Chain of Custody Request for Analysis Continuation (Form PG 3747A).

Consent Search for Serology (Form 636).

Consent for Serology - Spanish (Form 637).

Consent to Search - Spanish (Form 639).

Consent to Search (Form 638).

Crime Scene Diagram (Form 633).

Crime Scene Processing Report (Form 631).

Crime Scene Processing Report - Continuation (Form 632).

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DNA Lab Request (Form 635).

Firearms Unit Request for Analysis (Form PG 4449).

Latent Print Exam Request (Form 634).

Property Inventory Record (Form 667).

Request for Laboratory Examination (Form MSP 67).

Request for Laboratory CDS Examination (Form MSP 67A).

.04 Procedure

A. Responsibility

The responsibility for the collection, preservation, and identification of physical evidence at a crime scene rests with the investigating officer, except in the special circumstances described in this subsection.

The processing of minor crime scenes will be conducted by Field Fingerprint Officers.

Field fingerprint officers may process the following crime scenes:

- Burglary, breaking & entering;
- Armed robbery (excluding bank robberies); and,
- Thefts.

Should the potential exist for crime scene requirements to exceed basic photography and/or latent fingerprint recovery techniques, processing by a Crime Scene Technician is necessary.

B. Evidence Collection and Processing Techniques

The following general requirements apply to the collection and processing of physical evidence in the field, regardless of the type of crime under investigation:

- All evidence must be collected legally in order to be admissible in court;
- At the time it is found, evidence should be displayed to another investigator, if possible, so that both individuals may testify as to its source.
- All evidence should be fully described in the investigator's notes and photographed in place prior to being picked up;
- All articles of evidence should be carefully marked for identification, preferably on the

article itself, in such a manner that the article is not damaged, and in a way so that the identification is permanent. Identification will consist of the investigator's initials or identification number.

- Each item of evidence will be placed in an appropriate container, such as paper evidence bags, transparent envelopes, plastic vials, or strong cardboard boxes. The evidence container will be sealed with a label or tag attached and will provide the following information:
 - Case number;
 - Type of case;
 - Date and time of finding the article;
 - Location at time of discovery;
 - Signature of the investigator, who discovered the article;
 - Name of witness(es), if any, to the discovery; and,
- Whenever available, materials and substances will be collected from a known source for submission to the crime lab for comparison with physical evidence collected.

C. DNA Evidence

DNA can be found anywhere at a crime scene. The first responding officer should identify possible sources and locations of DNA evidence. Any object or surface that may contain or have been in contact with semen, perspiration, saliva, and other bodily fluids, or skin cells from the victim and/or suspect is of significance to the investigation and should be preserved. Any biological evidence found at a crime scene can be subjected to DNA analysis.

In order to preserve DNA evidence at a crime scene, steps should be taken to avoid contamination of the scene. In an effort to secure a crime scene from contamination, it is necessary to:

- Restrict entry of the crime scene to essential personnel;
- Use the established entry and exit point and pathway;
- Determine the need for personal protective equipment; and
- Establish a secure location for the disposal of biohazardous material like used gloves

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and disposable instruments;

- Biological evidence can be contaminated by an officer's own body fluids. Avoid direct and indirect contact with biological evidence. Anything that is touched with an ungloved hand can leave skin cells behind, which can contaminate DNA evidence. Contamination may extend to the instruments used for collecting evidence. The following steps should be taken to avoid contamination and cross-contamination:
 - Use new latex gloves for each piece of evidence;
 - Dispose of single-use disposable tools and equipment between evidence collections;
 - Minimize contact with the sample (use a swab or disposable forceps, etc.);
 - If possible, allow evidence to dry before packaging;
 - Collect and package evidence separately;
 - Avoid direct contact with the evidence sample;
 - Use the appropriate personal protective equipment such as gloves, shoe covers, coveralls, and disposable respirators; and,
 - Avoid talking, sneezing, and coughing over evidence.

Consider crowds or hostile environments to be potential contaminants to evidence. Environmental factors such as heat, sunlight, bacteria, and mold can destroy DNA evidence. Accordingly, all potential DNA evidence should be identified, preserved, collected, packaged, and transported to an appropriate facility without undue delay.

Under normal circumstances, the collection and packaging of DNA evidence will be carried out by Crime Scene Technicians. However, should exigent conditions exist, an officer may be required to take custody of such evidence. This evidence should then be transported to the Prince George's County DNA Laboratory as soon as reasonably possible.

D. Inventory and Chain of Custody of Evidence

The chain of custody for physical evidence will commence immediately upon recovery of the evidence. All evidence collected at crime scenes will be listed on a chain of custody inventory form. The following information will be recorded for each item of evidence recovered:

- Description of the item, to include make, model name and/or number, serial number, color, and approximate weight and size;
- Source: from whom, or location where, obtained; and,
- Name and identification number of person collecting the item.

Each time transfer of custody of physical evidence takes place, the following information will be recorded on the chain of custody inventory form:

- Date and time of transfer;
- Receiving person's name and functional responsibility;
- Reason for the transfer (i.e., lab exam, court, etc.); and,
- Name and location of outside agency or facility receiving evidence, if evidence is delivered to or retained by another laboratory, a court, etc.

The chain of custody inventory form for any evidence submitted to a laboratory for examination will include the following prior custody information:

- Name of the person last having custody of the item;
- Date, time, and method of submission;
- Date and time of receipt in the laboratory; and,
- Name and signature of the person in the laboratory receiving the evidence.

E. Processing of Certain Crime Scenes Required

The following crimes require processing:

- Homicide, attempt homicide, or suspicious death;
- Rape, attempt rape, and sex offenses in the first or second degree;
- Assault and battery resulting in life-threatening or incapacitating injury;

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- Armed robberies (including all bank robberies.);
- Carjacking;
- Burglary;
- Theft, where the investigating officer determines that physical evidence may be present; and,
- Hit and run motor vehicle accidents resulting in personal injury, death, or extensive property damage.

If the crime scene of any of the crimes listed above is not processed, the investigating officer will state the reasons why in the case report

F. Crime Scenes Not Routinely Processed

As a general rule, the following incidents will not be routinely processed:

- Recovered stolen motor vehicles (except carjacking);
- Theft or attempt from a motor vehicle; and
- Misdemeanors.

However, processing of the above-mentioned crime scenes is justified if any of the following circumstances are present:

- Suspects have been identified;
- The crime scene is a vehicle that was used in the commission of a felony or crime of violence;
- The crime under investigation is believed to be part of a pattern of ongoing criminal activity in a specific area, or targeting a specific class of victim; or,
- The supervisor in charge of the investigation has determined that viable physical evidence exists at the scene.

G. Processing Search and Seizure Warrant Scenes

Crime Scene Technician will process the scene of a search and seizure warrant if any of the following conditions are present:

- The item(s) to be seized are believed to be connected to a crime scene previously processed by a Crime Scene Technician;
- The item(s) to be seized may potentially be submitted to a criminalistics laboratory for examination; or,

- Special photographic techniques are required. (Routine photographing of the scene will be done by field personnel or CID.).

H. Protecting/securing the Crime Scene

Prior to the arrival of the investigating officer, nothing at the crime scene should be touched or moved except as is required to save life or to deal with a medical or similar emergency. The first officer at the scene is responsible for protecting (securing) the crime scene.

Only persons who have a legitimate investigative or supervisory role will be permitted into a crime scene. The officer in charge of securing the crime scene will prepare a contamination sheet listing the name, rank and identification number (if any), and time of entry and exit of all persons who enter the crime scene.

Too many persons at a crime scene can lead to the destruction or removal of potential evidence. The senior ranking officer at the crime scene will ensure that the crime scene is protected and controlled.

I. Crime Scene Search & Preliminary Survey

A crime scene search is a planned search for the purpose of locating physical evidence of the crime under investigation. An effective crime scene search should include the procedures outlined in this section. However, it is recognized that every crime scene is unique and may require a somewhat different approach.

A preliminary survey of the crime scene will be conducted by the investigating officer or, if available, the Crime Scene Technician. This constitutes the planning stage of the search and will include:

- Developing the objectives of the search - what is to be found;
- Taking special note of evidence, which may easily be destroyed such as shoe prints in dust, footprints, and fingerprints; and,
- Organizing the search.

Make assignments for photographs, fingerprints, plaster casts and evidence handling.

Decide on search pattern to be employed - lane, grid, spiral or zone searches.

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Issue instructions to assisting personnel based on assignment and chronology of processing.

J. Report of the Crime Scene Processor

The crime scene processor will prepare a report of the events that transpired at the crime scene, based on his or her original notes and observations. The narrative is used during any prolonged investigation and at trial to recall details of the crime scene.

The narrative will include the following information:

- Date, time and location of the scene;
- Weather and lighting conditions;
- Identity of other individuals present at the scene;
- Assignments given to personnel at the crime scene;
- Condition and position of the evidence, which was found at the crime scene;
- Names of victims and suspects, if known;
- Case number; and,
- Action taken by crime scene processor, including type of photographs taken, measurements taken (yes or no) and a listing of physical evidence recovered.

Whenever a crime scene is processed by a Crime Scene Technician or a field fingerprint officer, a Crime Scene Processing Report will be filled out by the processor with the appropriate information included.

K. Crime Scene Sketch

A crime scene sketch is a handmade pictorial representation of conditions at a crime scene. It is used in clarifying investigative data and in making the situation more easily understood by eliminating unnecessary details. The sketch will be used in conjunction with, and not in place of, photographs of the crime scene.

The crime scene sketch will include:

- Dimensions of the crime scene and its relevant contents;
- Relation of the crime scene to other buildings, geographical features, roads, etc.;
- Distances between objects, and from objects to entrances/exits;

- Measurements showing the exact location of items of evidence including the victim. Each object should also be identified by indicating its distance from two fixed points such as doors, windows, walls, etc.;
- Address, floor, or room number, as appropriate;
- Direction of north; and,
- Names of the persons preparing the sketch; date, time, report number, type of case, and victim.

L. Recovered Property at Crime Scenes

Crime Scene Technicians will not take possession of recovered property unless it is necessary to transport such items for laboratory examination purposes.

If the investigating officer was the individual who collected the evidence from the crime scene then he or she is responsible for redeeming the evidence from the property storage facility for court.

If a Crime Scene Technician has collected the evidence from the crime scene, and if no investigating officer is involved in the chain of custody, then the Crime Scene Technician will redeem the evidence for court.

In addition to these procedures, guidelines for obtaining and returning evidence for court will be followed as outlined in the Property and Evidence directive.

M. Contaminated Property

When handling items that may be contaminated, employees will wear disposable gloves.

Contaminated property will be placed in a plastic envelope and sealed with evidence tape or heat sealed. Plastic envelopes containing contaminated property will not be stapled. The envelope will be clearly marked "Contains Possible Contaminated Items" or a biohazard label will be affixed.

Sharp items should be presumed infective and handled with caution, and will be placed in puncture-proof containers.

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HISTORY: Adopted September 24, 2012

This General Order supersedes all other orders and memoranda in conflict therewith.

Authority:

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Charles L. Owens". The signature is written in a cursive style with large, looping letters.

Charles L. Owens
Chief of Police