



NTIA

Crime Scene Preservation

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Protect the scene

Characteristics of a crime scene

A crime scene is recognised as being the location where an illegal act took place and can also be the person who is the victim of the actual crime committed. Not all crimes are ranked as serious; a crime can be a relatively minor matter, but it is still a crime.

A crime scene can be anywhere from a supermarket to pubs or clubs, stadiums, theatres, cinemas, tourist attractions, subways, railway stations, public transport, homes, hotels, sheds, garages and even places of worship. Absolutely anywhere at all.

Therefore, it is reasonable to recognise that literally anyone could be the first person to discover the crime. Knowing how to correctly protect the scene can help protect people and assist the authorities in their actions.

Characteristics of a crime scene are the particular or typical features that are commonly associated with a particular crime or a specific scene. This could relate to the offender themselves, particularly where someone repeatedly commits the same crime, as they characteristically use the same tactics, the same 'mode of operation'.

Common characteristics of a crime scene may include:

- Bloodstains or splatters at the scene of violent crime
- Glass fragments at burglaries
- Stolen items hidden when shoplifting and smuggling
- Evidence of drugs deals which are often committed in pubs and clubs
- Evidence of burglaries which are often committed at night
- Crowds of people which can attract street crime
- Assaults which are regularly committed in pubs and clubs
- The environment such as water or dust which can damage fingerprints
- Victims and witnesses acting emotionally.

Recognising the characteristics of a crime scene helps identify the steps to be taken to protect the scene, but we must remember that whatever your role, you must always ensure your own safety and the safety of others when preserving a crime scene.

Lockdown procedure

A lockdown is the term used to describe the recommended actions to take to help preserve the scene of a crime. Lockdown means just that, to close the scene off, to help preserve life and help ensure that things that may have value as evidence are not moved, removed, destroyed or contaminated. There are six steps to a Lockdown:

1. Create a secure and sterile perimeter – use whatever is available to help create a secure perimeter and help keep the crime scene sterile, for example doors, rope or if possible tape, tables, chairs or desks, or even work colleagues or trusted personnel (but only if it is safe to do so). CCTV can also be an effective tool.
2. Deter unauthorised entry – give instructions that no one should enter the crime scene. Remember your safety is important.
3. Establish only one point of entry – identify the most easily accessible point of entry and seal all others. Position yourself at this point. This task may be delegated to trusted personnel.
4. Log all personnel – create a log which is a record of events and personnel referring to the crime scene. The log keeper must record everyone including police and other agencies. They are also expected to communicate with the agencies and deter unnecessary entry. To create the log, use any available materials; paper, books or boxes, consider using pencils instead of pens as pens are likely not to work when wet. Mobile phones can be effective for note-taking and can also be used to take photographs or movies. Remember, all logs have evidential value and become exhibits themselves, therefore their security must be ensured.
5. Prevent scene disturbance – all the above actions will help prevent the disturbance of anything considered to be of evidential value. A common mistake of such a disturbance is staff members cleaning or clearing materials away. In offices employees may be conscious of the need to protect data and in licensed premises cleaning is commonly ongoing.
6. Deter the removal of any items – deter the removal of any items from the crime scene, particularly items that have been used in the commission of the crime, such as knives, screwdrivers or jemmies and may include first-aid equipment. The aim of the lockdown is to preserve life and the crime scene.

Preserve the scene

Ways in which a crime scene can be contaminated

Contaminating a crime scene can have disastrous effects on successful prosecutions of offenders. Contamination of the scene is basically contaminating evidence found in relation to a crime, so that it cannot be used or if it is used, the prosecution cannot prove its worth. A common contamination involves a victim coming into contact with the suspected offender after the crime has been committed. This gives the offender the opportunity to claim that evidence, their DNA or fingerprints are only found on the victim because of that later contact and may raise the element of doubt that prevents prosecution. The same effect is created if the suspected offender is allowed to re-enter the crime scene. Similarly, care should be taken that those people engaged in detaining a suspected offender also do not re-enter the crime scene or come into physical contact with any victims.

All this falls under what is commonly recognised as the rule of evidence which identifies that the best evidence is real evidence, for example an eye-witness account or the weapon that caused the wound in an assault. This is sometimes called direct evidence. Successful prosecution of offenders is more commonly achieved using real evidence as it more clearly proves the facts of the case. However, there are other forms of evidence that can be used, which are known as secondary evidence. Secondary evidence can be divided up into different categories which include documentary and forensic.

Most people know that fingerprints, hair, blood samples and DNA are classed as forensic evidence. However, it is not commonly known that a CCTV recording of a crime being committed is actually classed as documentary evidence rather than real evidence. It must be understood that the collection of all types of evidence must be completed properly and securely, which means that every precaution needs to be taken to ensure that evidence is not contaminated. For example, consider the evidence contained in and on a glass used to drug a date rape victim. This can easily become contaminated if people are not aware of the need to protect it as soon as possible.

Preserving evidence at a crime scene

We have already identified the importance of preserving a crime scene, irrespective of whether the crime is considered serious or not. The detection of a crime is important especially to the victim and those close to them. The victim may also be a business. Therefore, it is important that the scene is not disturbed in any way. Try to lockdown the crime scene as early as possible, as valuable evidence can be lost in minutes. When evaluating the forensic potential of a scene and to

assist you in taking appropriate steps to preserve evidence, you should remember the following four tasks:

1. Observe the scene. What can you see, hear, smell or feel? Never taste anything; it could be poisonous.
2. Make a note of whatever you find and do; use whatever comes to hand to allow you to make a written note of your discoveries and actions; mobile phones can be useful tools.
3. Preserve any potential evidence (do not move or remove it).
4. Communicate with the professional services, including when they arrive you need to tell them what you have found and done. The three simple rules for scene preservation are, do not:
 - ADD – Try not to add anything.
 - ALTER – Try not to alter anything.
 - REMOVE – Try not to remove anything.

To preserve evidence you must try to prevent:

- Movement of exhibits, i.e. tidying or cleaning up
- Evidence being destroyed, i.e. wiping fingerprints or disposing of drugs
- Additional material being added, i.e. adding fingerprints or footprints
- Loss of evidence, i.e. glasses or drug-taking items. When the police arrive tell them what you have seen and what you have done, in as much detail as possible, and never forget the value of photographs and telephone technology, voice recorders or dictaphones.

If you have moved, altered or added anything, it is imperative that you are honest and report it to the agencies who take control of the crime scene, i.e. police, fire and rescue services, HM Revenue and Customs or the Health and Safety Executive.

Fingerprints and DNA

(deoxyribonucleic acid)

Fingerprints can easily be contaminated, smudged or removed altogether. Fingerprints are more clearly visible on smooth surfaces, such as drinking glasses or windows; however they can also be discovered on sheets of paper, such as books and even banknotes, as well as more uneven or rough surfaces.

Fingerprints on smooth surfaces are lifted using magnesium powder and gummed sheets. The recovery of prints from less smooth surfaces is achieved using the fumes of other chemicals including iodine and cyanoacrylate.

Always try hard to protect the value of the evidence at a crime scene, but remember that your safety and the safety of others, including suspected persons, comes first. After this your next priority is ensuring a lockdown.

Only when it is safe to do so and there is no risk of contaminating the scene should any attempt be made to enter the crime scene to further preserve evidence.

Most people understand that DNA refers in some way to beings, organisms, indeed genes. Suffice to say that DNA does refer to genes and can be used to scientifically prove an individual's involvement in an act.

The glass used by the suspect

DNA can be obtained from substances and materials such as blood, semen, saliva, hairs, nasal secretions and skin and is a vital and valuable discovery in the fight against crime. Sometimes the least hi-tech approach can be the best in protecting fingerprint/DNA evidence. Cover exposed prints from damage and even the elements; always ensure that what you use to cover evidence is free from debris and dust. Items that could be used are boxes, umbrellas, paper etc.

Gloves can be an effective protection and aid crime scene preservation. These are not only good protection against disease, but can also be used to protect and preserve evidence when it is safe and effective to do so.

Procedures for dealing safely with blood and other bodily fluids

Remember that everything in a crime scene is relevant to an investigation. Whilst this qualification will help you act correctly, professional agencies are expertly trained and capable in their management of the scene. You must not dispose of anything found in a crime scene; however this rule may be stretched when medical attention or first aid is being administered within the scene, but we recognise that even the resulting contaminated waste could be considered as evidence and subject to retention.

When it's safe, your main aim should always be to set up a lockdown, encourage others to keep out of a crime scene, restrict the movement of any evidence and always check with the police or other crime scene professionals before removing or disposing of any items.

Report the incident

Types of incident reporting

Putting the skills and knowledge relating to crime scene preservation into practice will require records to be kept. Whatever profession you represent, when you take charge of a crime scene, responsibilities become your concern.

Some of you will work in industries or sectors that will have a report-writing system as part of their site management procedures or to support quality assurance. This will be an advantage in relation to crime scene preservation, but if there are no such procedures, there are still things that can be done to help satisfy audit-trail requirements. The audit trail can help justify actions and provide proof of the journey that items of evidence have taken: who has handled them and where they are stored.

Professionals in the security industry carry a purpose-designed pocket notebook which can be used for recording information, but as well as being a useful aid to recall what took place, notebooks or note-taking can also be used as a further aid, such as making plan drawings of the scene (a picture tells a thousand words), or using it as a crime scene attendance log.

Importantly, notes made at the time or immediately after the event (contemporaneous notes), are the only notes that a witness is allowed to use to refresh their memory when giving evidence. This can be a very valuable aid and help ease the fears associated with courtroom procedure.

Professional establishments commonly introduce the use of purpose designed records. The licensed retail trade is an excellent example of this as all pubs, clubs, hotels and restaurants should have the following reporting books: duty register, security incident logbook, personal notebook and accident book. Other industries have other reporting procedures. If you find a crime scene in your workplace, then you should be aware of the procedures to be followed. If you find a crime scene in a place that you are not familiar with, try to find assistance from people who represent the place where you are. The best possible advice is that you should always keep your own notes as you may be required to give a witness statement and you can use these notes to help you remember.

Reason for incident reporting

The reason for making a log of an event is to safeguard yourself or your place of work against any repercussions in the future and also if someone makes a civil claim for compensation. Incident reporting is good practice and looked upon favourably by the police.

We have already identified the importance of keeping records and reporting incidents; the value of the audit trail for evidential purposes and the justification of actions or the adopted policy of the workplace or venue. However, records and incident-recording material are also a very useful educational tool and should be used to review policies and procedures. Staff briefings are immeasurably enhanced using incident reports as part of the experiential learning cycle. By adhering to necessary confidentiality requirements, staff benefit from the actions that took place in a real live event rather than an imaginary scenario and are able to constructively evaluate which actions were effective or which need further development.

Incidents that need to be recorded

Any incident that involves an injury to a person (including thefts) or damage to a property should be recorded. We best identify which incidents to record by remembering what was discussed earlier in chapter 2: that a crime scene can be anywhere, and that even attempts to commit crime and talking about committing a crime or conspiring to commit a crime are also classed as offences. This highlights the importance of recording events as they happen as being extremely beneficial. Irrespective of the seriousness of the crime or the incident, the importance of making an effective audit trail is just as important.

When to call the police

We recognise the police and emergency services as the professionals in relation to crime scenes and associated procedure. Many organisations will have set policies which determine the adopted procedures to manage crime scenes. The following is a recommended policy of when to call the police and emergency services.

- If the person concerned (victim or suspect) asks you to
- If it is a serious injury
- If it is a violent assault
- If the suspect is still at the scene
- If you feel that the situation requires the police or emergency services.

What to include in an incident report

General advice recommends that the following information is always recorded in an incident report:

- Date and time that things happened
- The place where the things happened
- What you saw
- What you heard (use the actual words used)

- What you think was the cause of what happened
- Descriptions of those involved
- Descriptions of any vehicles
- Directions of travel of people or vehicles
- How clearly could you see the events; light, dark, foggy
- Whether you had a constant view of events and people or if anything blocked your view at any time

Dealing with the emergency services

Emergency services are there to support and advise you in any given situation and you should look upon them as an extension of your team. When they attend, it is important that you communicate certain information to them as effectively as possible. Lives could depend on it.

The information that emergency services need varies according to what the situation may be, but as a general rule tell them:

- What happened
- Where it happened
- When it happened
- How it happened
- Whom it happened to
- Who did it.

These basic headings can be extended to include more specific information:

- Injuries – tell them where any injured people are
- Dangers – tell them about all the hazards on the site that you are aware of
- Victims – tell them where any victims of crime are and their details if you have them
- Criminals – describe suspected offenders
- Direction of travel – explain who came from where and where they went to
- Vehicles – describe any vehicles involved, including the registered number plate and direction of travel
- Evidence – tell them where items (weapons, clothing, stolen goods etc.) relevant to the crime are
- Management – if you know, tell them who is in charge of the scene and your supervisor if required
- You – tell them your name and how they can contact you. It is good practice to ask the emergency service officer for proof of their identity and take their name or the name of the officer in charge. Make sure that you make notes of information that you may need at a later date, for example:
 - The time

- The weather
- The visibility
- What you saw
- What you heard
- Your position when you saw and heard.

Consider using mobile phone cameras or other recordings.