



Colorado Springs Police Department Standard Operating Procedure

DL-1100-03 Crime Scene Assessment Section 1100 – Investigative Functions

Effective Date: 1/20/2021

Supersedes Date: 5/13/2019

.01 Purpose

The purpose of this written directive is to specify procedures concerning initial processing of crime scenes in preparation for collecting physical evidence.

.02 Cross-Reference

[GO 1400 Collection of Physical Evidence](#)

[GO 1415 Evidence Office Procedures](#)

[DL-1100-01 Initial Investigation Procedures](#)

.03 Definitions

Physical Evidence: Physical evidence is anything that, when presented in a court of law, will assist in determining the truth about a fact in question. Physical evidence is also any object or fact that may indicate a crime was committed or anything that may connect a particular person to the crime scene.

.04 Procedure

Any item at the crime scene that can be used to ascertain what, in fact, occurred constitutes physical evidence. The process of collecting physical evidence includes evaluating the crime scene, photographing and sketching the scene, searching for evidence, and properly collecting the evidence found. To ensure that this process is proper and effective, officers collecting evidence will follow these procedures when applicable.

Preliminary Crime Scene Assessment

To ensure that the collection of physical evidence is both organized and effective, a preliminary assessment of the crime scene area will be conducted before actual collection begins. The purpose

of the preliminary assessment is to discover items that have evidential value and then determine the priority and method of collection.

Responsibility for this task is assigned to the officer in charge of the area to be searched. The officer in charge may assign other officers to perform this task, but those officers will report their findings to the officer in charge prior to collection. The officer in charge of a particular scene will vary depending upon individual circumstances. Generally, the first officer to arrive will oversee the scene until they are relieved of this responsibility by a supervisor, another officer is specifically assigned to this duty, or an assigned detective responds to the scene and assumes responsibility for it.

The preliminary assessment involves, but is not limited to the following tasks:

Identify Areas to Be Searched

Searches are not confined to the immediate area of the crime, but also include the approach and exit or flight areas. A fleeing criminal may accidentally drop some item of physical evidence during the attempted escape. The nature of the crime and eyewitness statements should be considered when making this decision.

Identify Areas to Be Photographed and Sketched

Rules of evidence require that the crime scene be reproduced in court with a reasonable amount of accuracy. Photographs and sketches enhance the credibility of the evidence and serve to support testimony of witnesses and verbal testimony of others. When used, photographs and sketches of the crime scene will be made with that objective in mind.

Determine an Appropriate Search Method

Methods of searching vary but, as in all phases of an investigation, some system is required. Before conducting a search, an investigator should decide on a plan of searching: clockwise, counter-clockwise, dividing the scene into specific areas, etc.

Determine a Logical Starting Point

Usually, it is wise to conduct an outside search first because of the difficulty in protecting such an area. Elements to consider are the nature of the crime scene, the search method to be used, and the number of personnel involved.

The officer-in-charge of the preliminary assessment will ensure that a record of the assessment is maintained through case report supplements or laboratory reports. This record will include the names of the officers/crime scene investigators involved, what was determined, and who found what.

Crime Scene Photographs

Whenever practical, searches should not begin until the crime scene area is photographed. The purpose of crime scene photography is to provide a photographic record of facts and to allow the viewer to obtain a better understanding of the crime. When appropriate, the following kinds of photographs will be taken:

General View

These photographs include pictures of the terrain adjoining the crime scene and/or adjacent neighborhood. It will show the scene of the crime and its surroundings. The general view photograph is used to orient the court or jurors to the locality in question.

Medium View

These photographs are taken from 10 to 20 feet from the area being photographed. Medium view photographs should show specific objects and contain sufficient details to associate it with *general view* photographs. To adequately determine which specific objects to photograph, a preliminary visual search of the crime scene area may be necessary.

Close-Up View

These photographs of individual items, and/or small sections of larger areas, are taken from one to five feet away. These photographs usually include some identifiable object or characteristics found in the *medium view* photograph.

Unless crime scene investigators are called to assist with photographs, crime scene photography may be performed by any officer assigned by the officer in charge. However, the experience necessary, and the nature of the area to be photographed, will be considered when making such an assignment.

Measuring Devices

Measuring devices such as rulers, yardsticks, and other devices are commonly used in crime scene photography to demonstrate relative size and relationships. Nevertheless, the use of such devices in every photograph may cause admissibility problems. Therefore, a minimum of two photographs of each object requiring a measuring device will be taken -- the first photograph without measuring devices and the second with measuring devices.

Documenting Photographs

Crime scene photographs, like other evidence, will be correctly and completely identified and documented. The department member taking the photographs is responsible for accurately

documenting the circumstances and details of their photographic activity at the scene of a crime. This information will be included in the member's supplemental offense report, or in the case of Metro Crime Lab personnel, the official laboratory report.

At a minimum, this will include:

- Offense number
- Nature of the crime or investigation
- Location of scene being photographed
- Date and time range photographs were taken
- Name of member taking the photographs
- Name of persons assisting with photography, if any
- Brief statement of circumstances under which photos were taken and any special techniques utilized, as appropriate
- At the discretion of the photographer, individual descriptions of specific photos, which are of particular relevance to the case under investigation may be included, as necessary for context or clarity.

Members may elect to document the specifics of each individual photograph; however this may be impractical when processing extensive crime scenes or taking a large number of photos at any one particular scene. In those cases, the information documented must be sufficient to allow the photographer to link their photos to a particular scene or event, and to permit them to be so identified in subsequent court proceedings.

All digital photographs taken by department members, which pertain to an official investigation will be uploaded into the Digital Imaging Management System (DIMS). If the member is unable to upload digital images into the DIMS then the member will place the digital images onto a CD/DVD and place into evidence using a film envelope, so they can be uploaded by crime lab personnel when the DIMS is available. Instant developing (e.g., Polaroid) photos, and all film/digital photographic media seized from others during an investigation will be placed into standard evidence packaging and placed into evidence.

Initial Search

The purpose of a search at a crime scene is to discover any physical evidence that will enable the officer to determine the facts of the crime, identify the perpetrator, and aid in the arrest and conviction of the criminal, or the exoneration of an innocent person. The initial search will be conducted only by those officers assigned by the officer in charge of the search area. During this phase of the search, officers will follow these procedures:

Determine if a Specialist is Required

To collect certain evidence effectively, specialized procedures may be required. The nature of the evidence to be collected and the gravity of the crime should be considered when making this decision.

Once the scene has been evaluated and it has been determined that a specialist is required, the scene should be protected but left undisturbed. All evidence should be contained and preserved in its original condition and location. The officer in charge of the scene will be responsible for showing the crime scene investigators any items of evidence that warrant photographs and/or collection.

Assign Recording and Collection Officers

The officer in charge of the area to be searched will assign one officer or two officers working together, to actually record and collect evidence. This establishes the chain of custody, concentrates the responsibility for evidence in one or two persons, prevents loss of evidence, increases efficiency, and reduces the number of officers who will have to appear in court to testify. The search record will indicate the name of the officer locating the evidence, the location, the time of discovery, a description of the item found, and the condition that the item was in at the time of discovery.

Locate Evidence

Officers will look for, determine, and make note of all items that could be of value as evidence. Officers should search for any evidence that would prove *control and possession* by the suspect, since the suspect may later take the stand and deny *control and possession*. Officers performing this task will notify the recording and collection officer(s) as each item of evidence is located.

Order Items will be Collected

Elements to consider include the fragility of particular evidence and/or the possibility of destruction during the collection process. Examples of evidence that should be collected first are fingerprints, footprints, and tire tracks.

All officers assigned to search will use the same techniques of search, unless directed otherwise by the officer in charge of the search area.

Crime Scene Sketches

When appropriate, a sketch will be made to depict the location of all evidence. Sketches will be made prior to actual collection. Officers will use one method for all measurements and decide what is to be sketched before starting.

The following sketches should be made:

Sketch of Locality

This type of sketch is of the immediate area in which a particular item of evidence is located.

Sketch of Details

This type of sketch shows the specific location of a particular item of evidence and its relationship to the closest objects depicted in the *ground* type of sketch.

Officers performing the sketching process should sketch only the essentials, such as the item of evidence, and its relationship to other objects. Sketches will include those items or objects that have been photographed.

Documenting Sketches

The following information will appear on each sketch made:

- Offense number
- Scale used
- Compass direction (orientation)
- Names of streets and/or landmarks
- Title (brief description of area)
- Date and time sketch made
- Sketcher's name

Responsibility for Sketches

The officer in charge of the area being searched is responsible for determining whether or not crime scene sketches are necessary, and if so ensuring that appropriate sketches are made. This task may be delegated to any officer at the crime scene. If a crime scene investigator has been called to the scene, it will be their responsibility to complete a sketch as part of their protocol for overall crime scene processing.

Preservation of Crime Scenes

Preservation of crime scene integrity is the responsibility of the first arriving officer, until she/he is relieved by other patrol officers, supervisors, or assigned investigators. In cases that will be exclusively investigated by patrol personnel, access should be limited to those officers having an actual need to enter for the purpose of collecting evidence or directly furthering the investigation.

In cases in which detectives have been called to the scene and have assumed responsibility for continuing the investigation, this will mean that only the following persons are permitted to enter the scene unescorted:

- Detectives (and when applicable, District Attorney's investigators) specifically assigned to investigate the crime scene
- Assigned crime scene investigators
- Personnel from the Coroner's Office

Any other person requiring access to the scene will be escorted by an assigned detective or other officer as designated by the assigned investigative supervisor or designee. In the event of exigent circumstances that require additional personnel to enter the crime scene unescorted, it will be the responsibility of each member so entering the scene to complete a supplemental report detailing the reason for entering the scene, and documenting all actions taken while in the scene. As soon as the exigency has passed, the unescorted member will leave the secured area of the crime scene.

Any member wishing to enter a secured crime scene for reasons other than an actual exigency, will contact the ranking member present from the unit having investigative responsibility for the scene to arrange for an escort into the scene.

The decision about if and how to enter the scene will rest solely with the ranking investigator present.

This directive is applicable to all CSPD personnel, regardless of rank or assignment.