


<p style="text-align: center;"><b>STRATFORD POLICE DEPARTMENT</b></p> 	Type of Directive: <b>Policy and Procedure</b>	Updated: <b>08/29/2025</b>
	Title: <b>Criminal Investigation Operations</b>	No. <b>8.3</b>
	Issuing Authority: <b>Chief Joseph McNeil</b>	Issued: <b>10/24/2001</b>
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**PURPOSE:** It shall be the purpose of this policy to establish guidelines for criminal investigations in order to assist with the identification and prosecution of offenders.

**POLICY:** It shall be the policy of the Stratford Police Department to follow a set of guidelines and common accepted practices for conducting criminal investigations.

### **Objectives of an Investigation**

The objective of a criminal investigation is to present physical evidence and testimonial evidence against an individual to determine guilt before a court of law.

The success or failure of an investigation may be closely related to the actions initiated by the Police at the time the crime was brought to their attention. What an Officer does or fails to do in early critical stages may determine the outcome of an investigation. The facts that are discovered and the evidence obtained are instrumental in directing an investigator to a successful conclusion of a case.

Supervisors shall use a case screening system, based on solvability factors and other specific criteria, which the investigator shall use as a guide in order to determine whether to continue or suspend the investigation.

### **Criteria for Continuing an Investigation**

An investigation shall be continued if any of the following conditions are met:

- **New Evidence Emerges:** Credible physical, digital, or testimonial evidence is discovered that advances the case.
- **Active Leads Exist:** Viable suspects, witnesses, or persons of interest remain uncontacted or uncooperative.
- **Public Safety Risk:** The case involves ongoing threats to individuals or the community.
- **Legal Mandate:** Statutory requirements or court orders necessitate continued investigation.
- **Interagency Collaboration:** Partner agencies request continued support or coordination.
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### **Criteria for Suspending an Investigation**

An investigation may be suspended under the following conditions:

- **Exhaustion of Leads:** All reasonable investigative avenues have been pursued without yielding actionable results.
- **Insufficient Evidence:** Available evidence does not meet the threshold for further legal action or prosecution.
- **Resource Constraints:** The case is deemed low-priority relative to current departmental demands and may be revisited later.
- **Jurisdictional Transfer:** The case has been reassigned to another agency or jurisdiction.
- **Closure by Resolution:** The matter has been resolved through confession, adjudication, or other verified means.

### **Conducting the Preliminary Investigation**

The preliminary investigation will start with the response of the uniformed Officer in the Patrol Division. Patrol Division can best render prompt and efficient response because of their twenty-four-hour operation and radio capabilities Patrol units can reach a crime scene with a minimum of delay. The uniformed Officer can: determine if a crime has been committed, locate the suspect for an investigative detention or an arrest, locate and interview witnesses and complainants, protect crime scene and perform many other duties necessary to build a solid foundation upon which a follow-up investigation can begin.

The preliminary investigation by an Officer may be very restricted or it may be the entire investigation. Considering other responsibilities, an Officer should continue a preliminary investigation to a point where all immediate facts have been obtained, all immediate leads have been exhausted, and interruption of the investigation would not tend to hamper or jeopardize the outcome of the case.

### **Statement Taking**

In criminal cases, an attempt will be made to obtain written statements from all suspects, victims, complainants, and significant witnesses. Statements shall contain elements of the offense necessary to establish the fact that a crime had been committed. Statements may be taken in either written or video and audio recorded format.

### **Role of the Detective - Investigative Tasks**

Proceed to the scene promptly and safely. Although demands for certain Police services must be answered promptly, expediency must include safe driving practices. Reckless and careless driving not only endangers the public but also unnecessarily risks the life of the responding Officer.

The importance of prompt service is especially significant in violent crimes against the person, because the possibility is always present that a victim may die if assistance is delayed. The time required for a Detective to arrive has direct bearing on the presence and quality of evidence at the scene, the longer the wait the greater the chances for the destruction or removal of evidence. Excessive delay may affect the availability of witnesses. People have a tendency to leave the scene of a crime as shock and excitement diminish and witnesses may realize that remaining in the vicinity increases the likelihood of becoming involved. Witnesses who remain have ample opportunity to discuss the incident with others. Each repetition increases the likelihood of distortion. Facts may become interwoven with false assumptions, distortions, and lies. Sympathetic witnesses and the suspect can prepare their statements.

Detectives should work with the EMS in providing care and first by rendering assistance to the injured. A Detective should never withhold medical aid in order to advance the investigation. Dying declarations will be taken, as necessary, and if time permits, a complete statement of facts.

Information will be promptly relayed to the Desk Officer for broadcasting, if necessary. The Detective will advise hospital personnel of the necessity of preserving and safeguarding any clothing removed from the victim at the hospital, any articles found on the victim's body and other items of evidentiary value. Seized items will be packaged as evidence in accordance with department policy.

In cases where the victim is going to be autopsied, all clothing will accompany the body to the Office of the Chief Medical Examiner.

Establish whether a crime has been committed, question the victim, complainant, and witnesses, and determine if an arrest is to be made. After the matter has been sufficiently investigated, an arrest, supported by probable cause, will be made if the suspect is present or located shortly thereafter.

In situations where the suspect(s) have fled the scene, the Detective should transmit to Dispatch a description, which describes the suspect's physical characteristics including clothing, description and/or number of any companions of the suspect, vehicle description, if used (make, year, body type, color, license number), direction of travel and possible destination (if known), anything items taken during the crime, and type of weapon used.

When facts are concerning suspects identity, place of residence, or location are obtained officers will be dispatched to locate the suspect.

### **Secure the Crime/Crash Scene**

Preserving a crime/crash scene means maintaining it in the same physical condition as a suspect left it. Crime/crash scene security measures should be immediately undertaken by the first Officer to arrive on the scene.

Unless it is necessary to assist injured persons or to affect an arrest, crime/crash scene integrity shall be maintained until the scene is processed. All unauthorized persons including Police not assigned to the case will be barred from the scene. Detectives and Officers must avoid touching objects or walking on evidence.

Speed and thoroughness are the essential elements in crime scene processing. Certain kinds of evidence at crime scenes may rapidly degrade or be lost. Elements of the weather as well as contamination by other means may quickly destroy or alter trace evidence left by a suspect.

Locate and identify witnesses. Separate them while reassuring them about what is happening. Reassuring victims and witnesses have a calming effect and builds confidence.

Separating the witnesses prevents them from exchanging information or being influenced to conform to each other's story. A victim who has come in close physical proximity to the criminal and shows no resistance to questioning, should be the first person interviewed. Be mindful that the victim has probably sustained either emotional stress or physical abuse or both. Insensitivity, especially in sex cases, may adversely affect victim/witness cooperation.

In major car crash cases, an on-duty shift commander will notify the Chief and/or his designee along with the Traffic Lieutenant who will coordinate a response by members of the major car crash investigative team.

In theft cases, the value of the property loss shall not be minimized and the victims in any case should not be criticized. An investigator should solicit the cooperation of the complainant/victim and other witnesses, and should not pass critical judgments on the victim or witnesses. A cooperative witness is a valuable asset, who not only may provide a reliable accounting of events, but may also assist to locate additional witnesses. As a routine practice, individuals who are interviewed should be asked to point out other bystanders who were present at the time of the incident. A witness who will share his experience with a casual listener may be reluctant to provide an official statement. Success in these circumstances may be achieved through the use of tact, courtesy, patience, and other behavior, which indicates a high degree of professionalism.

Detectives must use their time sensibly when a large number of witnesses are available. Requesting assistance from other Detectives or uniformed Officers in obtaining general information is recommended. A brief general statement and a record of the identification information may be sufficient until a later time.

The business telephone number of each witness or victim is very important and should be documented. Accuracy is important when recording witness or victim information.

### **Suspect Interrogation**

Often suspects are found at or near crime scenes. Therefore, initial questioning should develop the most information in a minimum amount of time. Documentation should be made of all information, which could gauge the suspect's veracity when answering questions. A Detective will immediately and routinely inform any suspect who is taken into custody for a crime of his Constitutional rights. Detectives will assure full compliance with constitutional requirements when conducting an investigation. Detectives will never use coercion, delay arraignment, fail to inform a defendant of their constitutional rights, or deprive a person of their right to counsel.

Document all conflicting statements, unusual behavior, evasive answers, or other discrepancies. Documentation should be made as soon as possible, as any delay in doing so increases the dangers of omission and error. Documentation should be legible, accurate, complete, and easy to understand. A "Field Notebook" should be used and all notes taken during criminal case investigations will be retained for court. Field Notes should include at least the following information:

- Date and time of arrival on the scene
- Weather conditions
- Date and time of the crime
- Date and time the crime was discovered
- Name and rank of any Police Officers present
- Results of initial interviews

- Identity of witnesses, suspects, and victims
- Details pertaining to any physical evidence
- A field sketch of the crime scene should be made which includes the following information.
- Dimensions and distances
- Relationship of the scene to other buildings, geographical features or roads or other landmarks
- Addresses, room numbers, floor number, and other scene locators as appropriate
- References to location of any significant items at a scene, such as the body of the victim or physical evidence that was found
- Date the sketch was prepared
- Name of person preparing sketch
- An arrow showing the approximate direction of North, as it would be read on a compass

The rough sketch should be used to prepare a finished sketch for submission with the investigative report.

### **Preliminary Evidence Collection**

Provisions must be made to safeguard the crime scene until photographs and sketches are made and a search for evidence is conducted.

All articles likely to be valuable evidence must be collected.

If possible, wait until ID Detectives arrive to collect evidence in major crimes.

### **Accurate Reporting**

The results of the initial investigation must be accurately reported. Care must be exercised, since accurate reporting can assist in the future apprehension and prosecution of a suspect. Properly completed and accurate reports are of great assistance to follow-up investigators.

### **Follow-up Investigation**

If the arrest of the criminal cannot be effected within a reasonable period of time, or if extensive follow-up investigation is necessary, the investigation may be assumed by the Detective Bureau. The Detective Bureau may also assume a case when directly assigned by the Chief or Deputy Chief.

The Shift Commander and the Detective Bureau Commander will determine if and when an investigation will be turned over to the Detective Bureau. This decision will be based on department policy and procedures.

Generally, the assigned Patrol Officer will complete his report. The assigned Detective will work with the Officer and combine their efforts, whenever possible, to further the investigation.

### **Investigative Task Forces**

When the Stratford Police Department participates in any investigative task force, the agreement to participate shall be in writing and will be considered a directive of this Department. Such agreement shall contain, at a minimum, statements defining the following elements:

- The purpose of the task force
- The authority, responsibilities, and written agreements of the task force
- The establishment of accountability for the actions of the members of the task force
- The identification of resources available to the task force
- The methodology used to evaluate results and determine the need or justification for continuing the task force
- The criteria governing the use of the task force

### **Intelligence Function**

The Intelligence function involves the coordination of crime-related information developed by Department staff. It is imperative that the information be reviewed and disseminated to personnel, when appropriate.

All agency personnel are encouraged and responsible for ferreting out information related to criminal matters and documenting such information.

The Detective Division Commander will coordinate the Intelligence and make information available to Department staff to the extent possible and appropriate. Supervisors from the Detective Division and Patrol Division will share information. Staff from both units are encouraged to share information and work together to clear cases. Information may be received from citizens, informants, or other police personnel and will be reviewed by the Detective Division Commander for reliability.

All Intelligence information will be securely stored with the Detective Division Commander, who will conduct an annual review of policies and procedures. He/she will also review Intelligence files on an annual basis to identify files that may be purged. Any files purged will be shredded.

The Detective Division Commander will assure that information collected is related to criminal conduct or relates to activities that potentially threaten the jurisdiction.

### **Desk Officer and Dispatcher**

In the initial stages of a preliminary investigation desk personnel and dispatchers are the communication link by which investigative resources are connected to the field. Their duties will normally consist of, but shall not be limited to the following:

- Gather sufficient information from a complainant, including complainant identity, location of the crime, whether or not injuries were sustained, and a description of any suspect(s)
- Assign personnel to the initial investigation
- Notify the shift supervisors of all serious incidents
- Notify the Chief, Deputy Chief, or other command personnel, when so directed by the shift supervisor
- Notify the Detective Bureau Commander when assistance is necessary
- Notify the Traffic Division Commander when assistance is necessary
- Coordinate all additional requests for assistance