


Department of Public Safety
Police Division
Policies and Procedures

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Crime Scene Processing and Evidence Collection	14.1.100
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Crime Scene Processing and Evidence Collection

- I. **Purpose:** It is the purpose of this policy to provide officers and other crime scene personnel with guidelines to document, collect, package, and preserve evidence.
- II. **Policy:** Documentation, collection, and preservation of evidence are crucial steps in criminal investigation and often provide the basis for effective identification, documentation, prosecution, and conviction of perpetrators. Crime scene personnel shall take all care reasonably possible to ensure the integrity of evidence collected at crime scenes by adherence to this policy and associated Divisional training.

III. Definitions:

Crime Scene: The location(s) at which a crime has been committed and/or where evidence of a crime is located or presumed to be located, and the site(s) of accidents and suspicious incidents where foul play could be involved.

Dying Declaration: A statement made by a declarant, while believing that his or her death was imminent, concerning the cause or circumstances of what the declarant believed to be his or her impending death.

Testimonial Evidence: Evidence collected through interviews or interrogation.

Real or Physical Evidence: Any material in either gross or trace quantities collected at a crime scene for examination and analysis.

IV. Procedure:

A. Crime Scene: Initial Response

The first responding officer or senior officer at the crime scene shall ensure that the following tasks are performed as appropriate and in the order deemed necessary:

1. Make a careful and limited walk-through of the crime scene first to secure the location from the threat of perpetrators. Thoroughly assess the crime scene for hazards, to include blood-borne pathogens, explosives, firearms, gasoline, natural gas, chemicals, and other toxic substances. Relay information on the nature of any dangerous situations to communications.
2. Take all measures reasonably possible not to disturb potential sources of evidence, such as footprints or tire marks, or cross contaminate potential sources of DNA evidence. Officers should identify a path of entry for themselves and make sure to exit using the same path they entered so as to minimize any impact on evidence.
3. Be aware of persons and vehicles in the vicinity. Record vehicle license plate numbers in close proximity to the crime scene and, where possible and appropriate.

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4. Assess the overall extent and severity of the incident; note the location of evidence in plain view and the location of weapons in particular; request police backup or a supervisor as appropriate.
5. Where human victims are encountered, make a direct approach to the victim, assess their condition, request medical assistance, and provide emergency first aid if feasible. Where deceased persons are encountered, do not move the victim, but do request assistance from the coroner's office and criminal investigator. Retrace the path of entrance when exiting the crime scene, and document the original position of the victim(s).
 - a. Attempt to secure a "dying declaration" if there is a chance a victim may die.
 - b. Direct emergency service providers into the scene, pointing out potential sources of evidence. Remind medical technicians to preserve items of clothing. Record their activities and the victim's condition and position when found. Instruct medical personnel not to unnecessarily alter the scene or clean it up.
 - c. If a victim or suspect is transported to a medical facility, send a law enforcement officer for security, to document any comments, and to preserve clothing and related evidence.
6. Create a log to record the identities of any persons (including EMTs or other emergency service responders) who access the scene before or after the first officer's arrival. All persons irrespective of rank who wish to enter the crime scene are required to secure approval of the officer in charge and log in.
7. Secure and separate suspects and witnesses. Take steps to prevent the movement of family, friends, or bystanders into the crime scene.
8. Secure a perimeter for the crime scene with identified points of entry and exit. The perimeter should be expansive enough to reasonably ensure that evidence of the crime will be contained and protected.
 - a. Protect the crime scene using physical barriers (e.g., crime scene tape, rope, cones, vehicles, or personnel) or existing boundaries (e.g., doors and gates) as appropriate, and ensure that only persons with a need and right to enter the scene are permitted inside.
 - b. Take appropriate steps to protect the crime scene from degradation due to weather conditions, such as rain, snow, or wind, or the intrusion of other devices, such as vehicles.
 - c. Keep persons other than those directly involved in the investigation and other essential first responders outside the crime scene perimeter. Keep any pets or other animals outside the perimeter as well.
9. If victims, firearms, or other items at the scene must be touched for safety or related reasons, put on latex or other nonporous gloves. Ensure that persons do not smoke, chew tobacco, use the telephone or bathroom at the scene, eat,

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- drink, move any items, adjust windows, doors, or thermostats, reposition anything, or discard items other than those related to medical service providers.
10. The scope of crime scene processing is dictated by the seriousness of the crime and complexity of the crime scene. The supervisor in conjunction with the 11.2.800 Command Staff Situational Awareness Notification policy will determine whether to call out the on-call investigator for crime scene processing and evidence collection or if outside investigative resources are necessary. For crimes that do not require the assistance of a criminal investigator, or where exigent circumstances demand that immediate steps be taken to preserve evidence, first responders shall be prepared to do the following:
 - a. Locate and preserve items of evidence.
 - b. Photograph, video, and/or sketch the crime scene to include measurements where warranted. Use color photographs where warranted. Diagram should be accurately drawn but not to scale.
 - c. Collect and preserve evidence in plain view.
 - d. Transport and submit evidence for storage or for laboratory examination.
 11. Brief arriving supervisors or investigators if summoned to the crime scene, review actions taken thus far by all first responders, evidence located, witnesses identified, victims or perpetrators located or identified, and provide the supervisor or investigator with any other pertinent information.
 12. Prepare the initial offense report unless otherwise directed by a supervisor. Record, at a minimum, information on the time of arrival, appearance and conditions upon arrival, any items at the scene that are known to have been moved, modified, or touched; personal information on witnesses, victims, suspects, and any statements or comments made; and actions taken by yourself or others at the scene.

B. Investigator Crime Scene Assessment

UCPD maintains an on-call schedule from the Investigations Section for 24-hour access and availability of personnel trained in crime scene processing and evidence collection. The Investigation Section will maintain the equipment and supplies for crime scene processing and evidence collection. The supervisor, in conjunction with the 11.2.800 Command Staff Situational Awareness Notification policy, will determine whether to call out the on-call investigator for crime scene processing and evidence collection. Once assigned, the criminal investigator shall develop an investigative plan and specific responsibilities for processing the crime scene.

1. Once assigned, the criminal investigator shall develop an investigative plan. Specific responsibilities of the criminal investigator when planning the processing the crime scene include:

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- a. Evaluate measures and steps that have been taken, to include safety procedures, perimeter security and access control, the adequacy of investigative resources, whether witnesses and suspects have been identified, and the degree to which preliminary documentation of the crime scene has been made.
2. Conduct a crime scene walk-through in cooperation with the first responder and individuals responsible for processing the crime scene to identify any threats to crime scene integrity and conduct an initial identification of evidence.
3. Determine the need for a search warrant prior to collection of evidence keeping in mind there is no “crime scene exception” to the warrant requirement. If the processing of a crime scene occurs in a public place or a place the officer has a right to be, then no warrant is required. Unless an exception to the warrant requirement exists sufficient to allow for the collection of evidence and/or the processing of a crime scene, then a search warrant must be obtained.
4. Assess the overall crime scene prior to evidence collection in order to develop a plan for working within the crime scene without unnecessarily destroying or contaminating evidence.
5. Identify evidence collection and documentation team members to include specialists such as bomb technicians, arson investigators, or others.
6. Identify protective equipment and clothing that are required to safely process the crime scene.
7. Identify a separate area if necessary for equipment and personnel staging and for gathering and sanitizing tools, equipment, and personal protective gear between evidence collections.
8. Assign one officer primary responsibility for recording and collecting items of evidence. This will increase efficiency, establish the chain of custody, help prevent loss, and reduce the number of officers who must appear in court.
9. Determine the evidence search method to be used and the point(s) at which the search will begin, and establish a working route around the scene to minimize disruption and contamination.
10. Develop a collection plan for identified items of evidence detailing the process and the order of collection.
 - a. Focus initially on easily accessible areas in open view and work outward.
 - b. Select a systematic search pattern.
 - c. Select the best progression of processing and collection so as not to compromise subsequent processing and collection efforts.

C. Evidence Collection

1. The [Physical Evidence Training Manual](#) produced by the Ohio Attorney General may be used by officers and investigators as a resource to assist with current

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- best practice evidence collection methods. The location and condition of all items of evidence shall be documented in an evidence log and by means of photographs, sketches, and video when deemed necessary and appropriate.
2. Sketches shall be drawn to accurately depict the location and placement of evidence. Sketches may be made in addition to any photographs or video made of the crime scenes as directed by the supervisor.
 - Sketches shall include the following information:
 - General layout
 - Offense or case number
 - Title or description of area
 - Date
 - Sketcher's name
 - Scale of measurement (to scale or not to scale)
 - Location of items or other significant features
 - Compass direction
 - Names of streets or landmarks or both
 - Person who prepared the final diagram
 - Person(s) who took the measurements
 3. Photographs and/or video of the overall crime scene shall be considered. Individual photographs shall be taken of items in the position found prior to collection.
 4. Photographs shall also be taken of tool marks, footprints, tire marks, blood spatter, serial numbers, latent fingerprints prior to being lifted, and any other related items of potential evidentiary value where possible. Two photographs of sufficient quality to serve as permanent record shall be taken in series, the first in its true or natural state and the second to scale. A ruler or other appropriate measuring instrument shall be used for scaled photographs.
 5. Photographs and video will only be taken with Division equipment.
 6. All personnel handling evidence of any kind shall wear latex or other nonporous gloves. Individual items of evidence shall be examined carefully for trace evidence prior to being moved or packaged.
 7. Some items of evidence may require special handling and packaging and should be examined for trace evidence prior to packaging.
 8. Evidence containers shall be marked when collected. The collecting officer shall fully describe each item, package each item of evidence separately and place his or her initials, date of discovery, and case or exhibit number on the sealed container and the tape used for closure. Staples should never be used for sealing evidence containers. Large items shall be packaged appropriately with paper or other suitable packaging. Take care not to damage the item's evidentiary value.

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9. The collection of firearms and related evidence shall be conducted in a manner that will ensure the safety of all personnel involved and the integrity of evidentiary items.
 - a. If a firearm must be moved to protect it as evidence or because it cannot be safeguarded, its location and position shall be accurately marked and photographed where found if possible. The condition of the weapon, the number of cartridges contained, and the position of the safety shall be recorded.
 - b. If moving the weapon, lift it by grasping gently on the serrated surface of the handle. Never insert a pencil or other object into the barrel to lift or move, as it may destroy evidence inside the barrel. The weapon shall be placed in an appropriate container.
 - c. Generally, firearms shall be unloaded before being transported for evidence. If it must be transported loaded (because the weapon is damaged, for instance), it shall be conspicuously tagged to indicate this fact and sealed in a rigid container similarly marked. When unloading a revolver the position of the cylinder shall be recorded, as should the markings on cartridges and conditions of primers.
 - d. Fired bullets and cartridge cases shall be protected and photographed, and their relative positions from each other and from fixed locations sketched and photographed before being bagged.
 - e. Bullets shall not be pried from objects or surfaces. Portions of the objects in which they are embedded shall be removed with the bullet intact.
9. Evidence suitable for DNA analysis can be found at many crime scenes and is a powerful investigative tool for linking suspects to crimes, eliminating suspects, and identifying victims. All officers shall be aware of common sources of DNA evidence, ways to protect against contamination of samples, and basic collection and packaging guidelines.
 - a. Blood and semen are the two most common sources of DNA evidence. However, other body tissues and fluids can be used for analysis even in microscopic quantities.
 - b. DNA is particularly sensitive and subject to contamination. Therefore, first responders in particular must be familiar with situations that will degrade, destroy, or contaminate DNA evidence and shall observe the following precautions.
 - 1) Change gloves between collections of samples in different areas.
 - 2) Use disposable instruments or clean them thoroughly with a 10 percent bleach before and after handling each sample.
 - 3) Avoid touching the area where you believe DNA may exist.
 - c. Air-dry evidence thoroughly before packaging. If it cannot be air-dried, refrigerate and submit to the laboratory in not more than seven (7) days.
 - d. Put evidence into new paper bags or envelopes, not into plastic bags.

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- e. Sterile swabs shall be used to collect liquid blood. Vials containing blood samples should be refrigerated as soon as possible and submitted to the laboratory in no more than seven (7) days.
 - f. Bloodstained items shall be photographed first, then packaged or wrapped carefully in paper so that the bloodstain is not dislodged or disturbed. Smaller objects can be placed in envelopes or cardboard boxes.
 - g. Wet bloodstained materials must be air dried prior to submission to a laboratory. Officers shall not use heaters, free-standing room fans, or intense light to facilitate drying as this may destroy the evidentiary value of the samples. Low-humidity cold environments that are well ventilated are suitable for this purpose.
 - h. If exigent circumstances dictate immediate action to prevent destruction of evidence, wet bloodstained materials may be rolled or folded in paper or placed in a brown paper bag or box, sealed, and labeled. Folding garments through stains shall be avoided.
 - i. Bloodstained articles and blood samples shall be transported as soon as possible and should never be stored in patrol vehicles or otherwise exposed to heat.
 - j. Use a cotton Q-tip or swab lightly moistened with distilled water to collect dried bloodstains or other bodily fluids on fixed objects too large to transport or on porous surfaces.
 - k. As in the case of blood samples, clothing and bedding that may retain semen evidence shall be air-dried if wet , packaged separately in paper containers, and labeled.
10. Microscopic and trace evidence almost always require standards of comparison in order to be of value. Examples include the following:
- a. Pulled pubic hair from a suspect to compare with hair evidence combed from a victim.
 - b. Paint chips in relation to a crime scene.
 - c. Vegetation, such as weeds, near the scene of a homicide to compare with the seedpods found in the cuffs of a suspect.
11. Digital electronics, computer and data evidence require special procedures.
- a. Because of the possibility of losing digital evidence, immediately move everyone away from the keyboard and the computer.
 - b. Don't allow the suspect to save the file he/she was working on, to shut down open applications or to power down/turn off the computer.
 - c. If the computer is turned on, look at the screen and attempt to determine if any destructive programs are running.
 - d. If you see something such as "formatting C:." or "wiping", you should immediately power down the computer by disconnecting the power cord from the rear of the computer. If it is a laptop computer, remove the power cord and remove the battery.
 - e. If the computer is not on, DO NOT TURN IT ON.
 - 1) Turning on the computer, whether at the scene or back at the office, makes changes to the data that could actually destroy evidence crucial to your case. Only someone prepared to perform a proper forensic exam

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using accepted practices should deal with the computer once it is in your custody.

- f. If there are no destructive programs running, see if any evidence of value is visible on the screen.
 - 1) You may have interrupted him/her in the act and might find child pornography images, chats where the suspect is trying to entice a child to engage in sexual conduct, threatening e-mail messages, fraudulent Internet transactions, etc.
 - 2) If found, document any evidence thoroughly in your notes and photograph the screen to preserve the evidence.
 - 3) If this procedure is going to take awhile or interviews and other investigative tasks intervene, disconnect the phone line (modem) or network cable (DSL/cable modem/ broadband) from the rear of the computer to prevent a co-conspirator offsite from accessing the computer and destroying evidence.
- g. You can now power down the computer.
 - 1) The generally recommended procedure is to disconnect the power cord from the rear of the computer instead of doing a normal operating system shutdown. (This procedure can vary if it is not a Microsoft© Windows©-based operating system) This procedure is not recommended for business network servers.
- h. Photograph the entire computer system, front and back. Get a close up photograph of the rear of the computer where the various cables connect to the computer.
- i. Label each cable and its connection point, using stickers or masking tape, so that the system can be re-assembled for court if necessary.
 - 1) For example, the end of the printer cable might be labeled "1" or "A" and the corresponding place where it plugs into the back of the computer would also be labeled "1" or "A".
- j. Once the labeling is complete, photograph the rear of the computer again with the labeling showing. If a port or connection point is open/empty, mark it as such.
- k. The various cables can now be disconnected from the computer and the individual parts of the system collected.
- l. Be on the lookout for passwords or other information scribbled on Post-it® Notes and stuck to the monitor or scraps of paper near the computer or under the keyboard/desk blotter, etc.
- m. Seize all forms of digital storage media and external drives.
 - 1) Seize books, notes, manuals, software, etc., as these items may later be found to contain passwords or other important notations or may be needed during the ensuing forensic processing and analysis.
- n. Package any items containing digital storage media in paper boxes or bags. Avoid using plastic bags which may disrupt the data through static electricity discharges.

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- o. Don't transport or store the digital evidence near radio transmitters or large magnets. Very high and very low temperatures can damage some of the sensitive electronic devices as well.
 - p. If the suspect is being cooperative, ask for any passwords/pass phrases that he may have enabled on the computer or that were used to encrypt files or folders.
 - q. If the computer or digital device is University property, notify UCIT of the collection of the property as evidence.
12. Maintain evidence at the scene securely and in a manner that will prevent degradation and preserve the chain of custody.

D. Releasing the Crime Scene

1. Prior to releasing the scene the supervisor or investigations supervisor shall ensure that the following steps are taken to the degree and in the order deemed appropriate:
 - a. Conduct a debriefing of members of the crime scene team to share information and identify priorities for follow-up investigation. Review evidence collected, discuss preliminary findings, and identify potential forensic tests and any actions needed to complete the crime scene investigation.
 - b. Complete overall measurements and photographs of the crime scene.
 - c. Conduct a final walk-through of the crime scene to determine if any items of evidentiary value have been overlooked and to double check for equipment or materials that may have been left behind.
 - d. Determine when the crime scene can be released.

E. Reports

1. All documentation from the crime scene processing and evidence collection will be summarized and submitted as a report in the Division's Record Management System (RMS).
2. If photographs or video are taken as evidence during the investigation, the original file(s) will be added to the report in the RMS system.
 - a. When attaching photographs or video files to a report, users must connect the device that captured the files to a computer, open the report in the RMS, open the "Other Media" section (not the "Picture" section), choose the option to add files, browse directly to the device, and add the files directly from the device.
 - b. Users should not copy the files to a different location before adding them to the report.

F. Chain of custody

1. Whenever possession of physical evidence is transferred from one person to another, a record will be made of the transfer.
2. The transfer will be recorded on the evidence receipt, to include name and function of the receiving party, name and function of the releasing party, and the date and items involved.

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3. Physical evidence submitted to an outside agency for examination will be handled in the same documented manner as above, in addition to using the outside agency's report form.
4. Generally the Evidence and Property Specialist will be responsible for the submittal of evidence to a forensic laboratory.
5. The Evidence and Property Specialist will ensure the evidence submitted is packaged appropriately for lab submission.
6. An appropriate transmittal document shall be submitted to the laboratory and shall detail the nature of the request and a synopsis of the incident. The transmittal shall also contain the chain of custody information, to include the name of the member last having custody of the items, date and time the items were submitted for examination, date and time the items were received by the laboratory, and the name and signature of the person receiving the items at the laboratory.
7. A completed evidence receipt provided by UCPD must accompany property and evidence submitted to the property section of this Division.
8. Evidence and property retrieved from the property section will follow procedures detailed in the Division's policy on Property and Evidence control.

References

UCPD policy 11.2.800 Command Staff Situational Awareness Notification