

**GENERAL ORDERS MANUAL  
WESTERN MICHIGAN UNIVERSITY  
DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC SAFETY**

**I. PURPOSE**

The purpose of this general order is to provide officers with guidelines on processing a crime scene.

**II. POLICY**

Documentation, collection, and preservation of evidence are crucial steps in a criminal investigation and provide the basis for identification, prosecution, and conviction of perpetrators. Officers shall take reasonable care to ensure the integrity of evidence collected at crime scenes by adherence to this policy and associated 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.

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. PROCEDURES**

**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 necessary order.

1. Make a careful and limited walk-through of the crime scene first to secure the location from the threat of perpetrators, if possible. 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 dispatch.
2. The scene should also be assessed to identify and preserve physical evidence. The officer should take all measures reasonably possible not to disturb or cross-contaminate potential sources of evidence, including but not limited to, fingerprints, footprints, tire marks, and potential sources of DNA. When possible, the officer should retrace their steps, and exit using the same path of entry. (4.2.2.a, 4.2.2.b)
3. Be aware of persons and vehicles in the vicinity. Record vehicle license plate numbers near the crime scene and, where possible and appropriate, videotape the

- same. Assess the overall extent and severity of the incident. Assist the injured, call for medical assistance if required, and request other appropriate police backup such as supervisor, criminal investigator, or evidence technician.
4. Where human bodies are encountered, make a direct approach to the victim, assess their condition, request medical assistance, and provide emergency first aid if feasible. Where dead bodies are encountered, do not move the victim, but do request assistance from the medical examiner 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. 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.
    - c. 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.
    - d. 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.
  5. Secure and separate suspects and witnesses. Take steps to prevent the movement of family, friends, or bystanders into the crime scene.
  6. 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, personnel) or exiting 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, 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.
  7. 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, drink, move any items, adjust windows, doors, or thermostats, reposition anything, or discard items other than those related to medical service providers.
  8. The scope of crime scene processing is dictated by the seriousness of the crime and complexity of the crime scene. For crimes that do not require the assistance of a crime scene technician or criminal investigator, or where exigent circumstances

demand that immediate steps be taken to preserve evidence, officers should be prepared to do the following:

- a. Locate and preserve items of evidence
  - b. Photograph 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.
9. 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 with any other pertinent information.
10. 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. Crime Scene Assessment and Processing (4.2.2.c)**

The investigator or on-scene supervisor should develop an investigative plan for processing the crime scene. Officers should be aware of what to look for while initially assessing the crime scene before detectives or KDPS/KCSD/MSP lab personnel are on scene.

1. 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.
2. Determine the need for a search warrant prior to collection of evidence.
3. Identify protective equipment and clothing that are required to safely process the crime scene.

**C. For any major crime or traffic crash scene on campus requiring of evidence collection, KDPS, KCSD or MSP crime lab personnel shall be requested to process the scene. This department has access to KDPS, KCSD or MSP on a 24-hour basis. (4.2.1)**

**D. Crime Scene and Evidence Processing (4.2.2.c) – The following is a guide for those officers responding initially to a scene for the processing minor crimes.**

1. The location and condition of all items of evidence should be documented in the police report.
2. If a sketch of the scene is made, it should include the following information:
  - a. General layout
  - b. Case number
  - c. Description of area
  - d. Date

- e. Sketcher's name
  - f. Scale of measurement (to scale or not to scale)
  - g. Location of items or other significant features
  - h. Compass direction
  - i. Names of streets or landmarks or both
3. Photographs and/or videotape of the overall crime scene should be considered. Individual photographs should be taken of items in the position found prior to collection.
  4. Photographs should 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. A ruler or other appropriate measuring instrument may be used for scaled photographs.

**E. Evidence Collection (4.2.2.d)**

1. To assist with collection and packaging of evidence at a crime scene, officers should refer to *General Order CRI-5, Section V: Collection and Packaging of Specific Items*.
2. When in doubt concerning appropriate collection or packaging procedures of any evidence, officers may contact a detective or an evidence room custodian.
3. When an officer has doubts about their ability to maintain the integrity of the evidence while collecting and packaging it, the officer shall request the assistance of KDPS, KCSD, or MSP crime lab personnel.
4. Officers collecting evidence should be aware of common sources of DNA evidence, ways to protect against contamination of samples, and basic collection and packaging guidelines.
5. DNA is particularly sensitive and subject to contamination. Therefore, officers collecting this evidence should be familiar with situations that will degrade, destroy, or contaminate DNA evidence.

**F. Releasing the Crime Scene**

Prior to releasing the scene, the lead investigator shall ensure that the following steps are taken, in the order deemed appropriate:

1. Conduct a debriefing of members of the crime scene team to share information and then identify priorities for the follow-up investigation. Review evidence collected, discuss preliminary findings, and identify potential forensic tests and any actions needed to complete the crime scene investigation.
2. Complete overall measurements and photographs of the crime scene.
3. 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.
4. Determine when the crime scene can be released.

**G. Transfer of Physical Evidence (4.2.2.e)**

1. Documentation is required when possession of physical evidence is transferred from one person to another.
2. Evidence transferred from one person to another, prior to being submitted to the evidence room and entered into the evidence module, must be documented in the police report, to include the name of the receiving party, name of the releasing party, date, and items involved.
3. When physical evidence is submitted to an outside agency for examination, this information shall be documented in the police report and/or evidence module.

**H. Evidence Submissions to Forensic Laboratories**

1. Evidence room custodians may release evidence to detectives for transport to a forensic laboratory. On occasion, when a detective is not available, a sworn police officer may receive custody of evidence for transport to a forensic laboratory. (4.2.3.a)
2. The evidence shall be transmitted/transferred in original packaging, when possible. All evidence should be packaged in such a way to maintain integrity of the evidence, while also being safe for transport. In addition, some evidence may need to be repackaged to meet standards set forth by the forensic laboratory to allow receipt. (4.2.3.b)
3. The agency evidence module documents the chain of custody of evidence, including the transfer of evidence from the evidence/property room to sworn personnel who receive evidence for the purpose of transporting to a forensic laboratory. (4.3.2.c)
4. Laboratory results are submitted to detectives in writing or electronic transmission that can be saved as an electronic document or printed out. Detectives shall supplement the case report with the result information. The laboratory results shall either be uploaded to the case file or added to the case file by records staff. (4.3.2.d)

**Issued Date:** 09/09/2020

**Issued by**



**Scott Merlo**  
**Director of Public Safety**