

## *Crime Scene Search*

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**Crime scenes involving suspected or confirmed weapons of mass destruction (WMD) (nuclear and/or radiological, biological, chemical, or explosive agents) should be handled only by qualified personnel. The FBI is the lead federal agency of a suspected or confirmed WMD crime scene. Specific information on how to process a hazardous materials crime scene is not covered in this section. Upon notification or suspicion of a possible WMD incident, contact the FBI's Strategic Information and Operations Center at 202-323-3300 and ask for the Weapons of Mass Destruction Operations Unit Duty Officer.**

A crime scene search is planned, coordinated, and executed by law enforcement officials to locate physical evidence.

### **Basic Principles**

- The best search options are usually the most difficult and time-consuming.
- Physical evidence cannot be overdocumented.

- There are two search approaches:
  1. A cautious search of visible areas, avoiding evidence loss or contamination.
  2. A vigorous search of concealed areas.

## **Preparation**

- Obtain a search warrant, if necessary.
- Discuss the search with involved personnel before arriving at the scene, if possible.
- Establish a command headquarters for communication and decision making in major or complicated crime scene searches.
- Ensure that personnel are aware of the types of evidence usually encountered and the proper handling of the evidence.
- Make preliminary personnel assignments before arriving at the scene, if possible.
- Establish communication between the medical examiner, laboratory personnel, and prosecutive attorneys so that questions that arise during the crime scene search can be resolved.

- Coordinate agreements with all agencies in multijurisdictional crime scene searches.
- Accumulate evidence collection and packaging materials and equipment.
- Prepare the paperwork to document the search.
- Provide protective clothing, communication, lighting, shelter, transportation, equipment, food, water, restroom facilities, medical assistance, and security for search personnel.
- In prolonged searches, use shifts of two or more teams. Transfer paperwork and responsibility in a preplanned manner from one team to the next.
- Ensure that assignments are in keeping with the attitude, aptitude, training, and experience of search personnel. Personnel may be assigned two or more responsibilities:

*Team Leader*

- Ensure scene security.
- Prepare administrative log.

- Conduct preliminary survey (initial walk-through).
- Prepare narrative description.
- Resolve problems.
- Make final decisions.

### ***Photographer***

- Photograph and log evidence and scene.

### ***Sketch Preparer***

- Sketch and log scene.

### ***Evidence Recorder***

- Serve as evidence custodian and log evidence.

### ***Evidence Recovery Personnel***

- Ensure that evidence is located and documented (photo and sketch).
- Initial and date all evidence collected.

### ***Specialists***

- Brought in from the FBI Laboratory, private industry, academia, other

laboratories, etc., on a case-by-case basis to assist in their area of expertise.

- Should be identified prior to the time they are actually needed.

## **Approach**

- Be alert for evidence, especially transient evidence.
- Take extensive notes.
- Consider the safety of all personnel.

## **Secure and Protect**

- Take control of the scene immediately.
- Determine the extent to which the scene has been protected. Obtain information from personnel who have knowledge of the original condition.
- Continue to take extensive notes.
- Keep out unauthorized personnel.
- Record who enters and leaves.

## Preliminary Survey

The preliminary survey is an organizational stage to plan for the search.

- Cautiously walk through the scene.
- Maintain administrative and emotional control.
- Select a narrative technique (written, audio, or video).
- Take preliminary photographs.
- Delineate the extent of the search area. Expand the initial perimeter as needed.
- Organize methods and procedures.
- Recognize special problem areas.
- Identify and protect transient physical evidence.
- Determine personnel and equipment needs. Make specific assignments.
- Determine the need for any specialists.

- Develop a general theory of the crime.
- Take extensive notes to document the scene, physical and environmental conditions, and personnel movements.

## **Evaluate Physical Evidence Possibilities**

This evaluation begins upon arriving at the scene and becomes detailed in the preliminary survey stage.

- Ensure that collection and packaging materials and equipment are sufficient.
- Focus first on evidence that could be lost. Leave the least transient evidence for last.
- Consider all categories of evidence possibilities.
- Search the easily accessible areas and progress to out-of-view locations. Look for hidden items.
- Evaluate whether evidence appears to have been moved inadvertently.
- Evaluate whether the scene appears contrived.

## Narrative

The narrative is a running description of the crime scene.

- Use a systematic approach in the narrative.
- Nothing is insignificant to record if it catches one's attention.
- Under most circumstances, do not collect evidence during the narrative.
- Use photographs and sketches to supplement, not substitute for, the narrative.
- The narrative should include the following:
  - Case identifier.
  - Date, time, and location.
  - Weather and lighting conditions.
  - Identity and assignments of personnel.
  - Condition and position of evidence when an evidence recovery log is not used.



## Photography

- Photograph the crime scene as soon as possible.
- Prepare a photographic log that records all photographs and a description and location of evidence.
- Establish a progression of overall, medium, and close-up views of the crime scene.
- Photograph from eye level to represent the normal view.
- Photograph the most fragile areas of the crime scene first.
- Photograph all evidence in place prior to recovery.
- All items of evidence should be photographed by close-ups, first without a scale and then with a scale, filling the frame.
- Photograph the interior crime scene in an overlapping series using a normal lens, if possible. Overall photographs may be taken using a wide-angle lens.

- Photograph the exterior crime scene, establishing the location of the scene with a series of overall photographs including a landmark. Photographs should have 360 degrees of coverage. Consider using aerial photography, when possible.
- Photograph entrances and exits from the inside and the outside.
- Prior to entering the scene, acquire—if possible—prior photographs, blueprints, or maps of the scene.

## Sketch

The sketch establishes a permanent record of items, conditions, and distance and size relationships.

- Sketches should supplement photographs.
- Sketch number designations should coordinate with the evidence log number designations.
- Sketches normally are not drawn to scale. However, the sketch should have measurements and details for a drawn-to-scale diagram, if necessary.

- The sketch should include the following:
  - Case identifier.
  - Date, time, and location.
  - Weather and lighting conditions.
  - Identity and assignments of personnel.
  - Dimensions of rooms, furniture, doors, and windows.
  - Distances between objects, persons, bodies, entrances, and exits.
  - Measurements showing the location of evidence. Each object should be located by at least two measurements using an established measurement system, e.g., triangulation, transecting baseline, or azimuth.
  - Key, legend, compass orientation, scale, scale disclaimer, or a combination of these features.

## **Conduct Detailed Search**

- Use a search pattern (grid, strip or lane, or spiral).
- Search for evidence from the general to the specific.
- Be alert for all evidence.
- Search entrances and exits.

## **Record and Collect Physical Evidence**

- Ensure that all items are photographed prior to collection.
- Mark evidence locations on the sketch.
- Complete an evidence log noting all items of evidence collected. If possible, have one person serve as evidence custodian.
- Two people should observe the evidence in place, then as it is collected, initialed, and dated. Evidence items are marked directly only when positive the marks will not interfere with subsequent forensic examination.

- Wear latex or cotton gloves to avoid leaving fingerprints.
- Do not excessively handle the evidence after recovery.
- Seal all evidence packages at the crime scene.
- Obtain known standards (e.g., fiber samples from a known carpet).
- Constantly check paperwork, packaging, and other information for errors.

## **Final Survey**

- The final survey is a review of all aspects of the search.
- Discuss the search with all personnel.
- Ensure that all documentation is correct and complete.
- Photograph the scene showing the final condition.
- Ensure that all evidence is accounted for before departing the scene.

- Ensure that all supplies and equipment are removed from the scene.
- Ensure that no areas have been overlooked in the detailed search.
- Reconsider the need for additional specialists.

## **Release**

- Release the crime scene after the final survey.
- The scene should be released only when all personnel are satisfied that the scene was searched correctly and completely.
- Only the person in charge should release the scene.
- Ensure that the appropriate inventory has been provided, consistent with legal requirements, to the person to whom the scene is released.
- Crime scene release documentation should include the time and date of release, to whom released, and by whom released.
- Once the scene has been released, reentry may require a warrant.

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