

CRIME SCENE PREPLANNING

AUTHOR: Cpl. Timothy F. Hahn
Unit Supervisor, Evidence
Greenbelt Police Department
25 Crescent Road
Greenbelt, Maryland 20770

The Officer on the radio has just requested an Evidence Technician, and you respond to the call. What do you do while enroute to it? It's not a hazardous call like a man with a gun or a domestic. The scene should be secure and safe by the time you get there. So is there a need to preplan what you're going to do? Of course there is. Every Police Officer knows that a proper response includes a little bit of preplanning. But the task required of an Evidence Technician is different. It requires a great deal of training and skill, as well as the ability to "talk" to the scene. The type of crime which this scene consists of makes no difference. You must still be prepared to recognize, preserve and collect, and properly identify any evidence that you may find.

The beat Officer has to preplan each and every individual call that he or she receives. You, as an Evidence Technician have an advantage. By developing and following a proper plan, you can be well ahead of the game and know in advance that the job you do will be a correct one that will stand up in court. Following the same plan EVERY time makes it easy.

Remember that evidence is anything that can connect a suspect to a crime, or a crime to a suspect. It's

always there at the scene when you get there. You just have to be good enough to find it. Keep the Theory of Transfer in mind. It states that any object that comes into contact with any other object, will leave evidence of it's passing. This includes people. This theory is also why Evidence Technicians have a job. Because when PEOPLE commit a crime they leave EVIDENCE behind.

Once you arrive on the scene, talk to the first officer to have arrived. That officer, unless there was an eye-witness, (we all know the possibilities of that) knows more about that scene than anyone around. They can tell you who was in the area, what direction they (the officer) came from, if they touched anything, and exactly what they observed when they got there. This little talk, plus a brief walk through of the scene to establish it's perimeters, is known as a preliminary search. You don't touch, collect, dust, or photograph anything at this point. Just look, talk, and question.

Now that you have an idea of what the scene is all about, start in on your primary search. Go over the scene in detail. Find every single piece of evidence that you possibly can without moving it around. Attempt to form an opinion of what happened, when, and how. Photograph the scene completely. Start from the outside

areas to show where the scene is. This includes addresses, street names, etc. Now photograph the entire interior area of the scene. Make certain that all of the evidence has been recorded in the location it was discovered. And above all else, take notes constantly.

Once the scene has been fully recorded on film, you can begin collecting the evidence that you already located. Start collecting the smaller items, remembering that if you pick up larger ones first, you'll miss items that are on or in it. If you find anything new, photograph it prior to collection. Fingerprints are the last thing to worry about as far as looking for them. If you start out from the beginning throwing powder around, all the hairs, fibers, and other types of trace evidence will become contaminated. Get all of the other evidence out of the way first, and then look for latents.

The most obvious place to begin with latents is any type of point of entry, be it a window in a house or the door of a car. Always work from the outside in. Don't overlook the obvious. Suspects leave evidence behind from touching objects even if that evidence is glove prints. Check everywhere. You never know when a latent you never even dreamed of will suddenly appear. If you come up with something that you don't have the equipment to do, then collect it and have a lab do the processing.

Now it's almost time to do a final search. Gather up all of the evidence, all of your equipment, and review your notes. Make certain that everything you did was recorded. With this out of the way, go back over the scene. Double check everything you did. Make sure that you have not overlooked anything, that all of the evidence was found, all of the pictures taken, and that you did not leave anything behind.

No, I didn't forget crime scene sketches. They just deserve a little extra space of their own. Sketches are a much hated, and much underused tool of the Technician. Sketches show depth, photographs do not. Each and every scene that you do should be drawn. One of the tricks that I have picked up on is to go to apartment complexes, commercial management corporations, and maintenance sections. Most every establishment has floor layouts of their buildings, and done in scale to boot. A rough sketch at the scene is real easy when you have the layout already in front of you. A properly drawn sketch can also make a difference in court. While a photograph may show that an object was in a room, it probably will not show how far from any given point it actually was.

Keep a plan in mind. Whether it's this one, or one that particularly works for you. follow it. It makes you're job easier, and you look more professional.