

**SANTA BARBARA COUNTY
SHERIFF'S OFFICE
FORENSICS UNIT**

GENERAL CRIME SCENE GUIDELINES

1.0. SCOPE

In most circumstances, personnel from the Santa Barbara County Sheriff's Office Forensics Unit respond to a scene at the request of the Sheriff's Office or its contract cities. Other personnel (ex: DOJ Criminalists) are also sometimes requested to assist in the investigation, to lend expertise in particular areas such as blood spatter interpretation, or aid in the reconstruction of the event and/or the collection of a particular type of evidence. This SOP contains general guidelines on responding to scenes and procedures to be used at crime scenes as they relate to the Forensics unit.

2.0. LIMITATIONS

2.1. Preliminary Considerations

- a. Each crime scene is unique (rarely following a textbook example) and tends to have its own momentum. This procedure does not attempt to establish absolute methods for processing crime scenes but provides a set of general guidelines from which to process a crime scene.
- b. The specific procedures used for particular tasks at crime scenes such as latent fingerprint processing and shoe impression photography are not presented in this procedure but can be found in separate sections of this manual.
- c. It is best to be cautious with possible evidence at crime scenes. It is better to protect evidence for different types of future processing (like collection of DNA and processing for fingerprints) than to assume that those examinations are not necessary to begin with.

3.0 PROCEDURES

3.1 Arrival on the Scene (Initial Scene Contact)

- a. Prior to arriving at the scene, make a note as to who requested Forensic Unit personnel to respond and the manner in which you were notified.
- b. Note the time you arrived at the scene and, if the scene is off road, the approximate mileage from the road to the scene (this can be done as you leave the scene as well). If a GPS (Ground Positioning Satellite) unit is used, note the location's coordinates.
- c. If a crime scene log is kept at the scene, sign in, and contact the detective/deputy in charge of the scene. You can also ask to have the person in charge of the scene be pointed out to you.

- d. Make contact with the requesting officer if they are present at the scene or the detective(s) in charge at the scene. The following information should be initially obtained from the requesting agency:
 - 1. Agency and case number
 - 2. Case date (it may be different than that day's date)
 - 3. Requesting deputy or lead detective (to be noted in the Forensics BOC request)
 - 4. Victim's name (if known, if unknown, Jane or John Doe can be used)
 - 5. Suspect's name (if known), DOB, and CII number (if available)
 - 6. Type of case (ex: homicide – 187 PC, sexual assault – 261 PC, suspicious circumstances, officer involved shooting (OIS), outside agency assist – 012 (OAA), etc.)
 - 7. Discuss if a search warrant is required before entry
- e. Make sure that the scene has been cleared and is secure.
- f. Discuss with the detectives the known circumstances of the event, what type of investigation they are conducting and what specifically they need from the CSI unit (i.e. any particular type of evidence they might be interested in or particular processing they want). Note any specific requests for processing, especially if certain normal crime scene processing techniques are NOT needed (ex: not conducting a latent search on an item that was removed from the suspect's hand). Forensic responders should communicate with their unit supervisor if they are unsure about what staffing is needed. The detective in charge of the scene or the deputy on scene should confer with the Forensics Unit supervisor regarding Forensic staffing to assure that the needed personnel are called to the scene.
- g. If the response is in support of mutual aid to a non-Santa Barbara County Sheriff's Office agency, the SBSO Forensics unit personnel arriving on scene should confer with the lead investigator for the other agency or with the SBSO detective liaison to determine what has been done prior to the arrival of SBSO Forensics unit responders. In some cases, Forensics personnel may be responsible for all aspects of crime scene processing, including photography and evidence collection.
- h. Forensic responders should be made aware of any additional developments in the investigation relevant to the scene by the detectives. This information may aid in the processing of the scene or may expand the scope of the processing.
- i. Forensic responders should also keep the detectives informed on information developed during scene processing. This information may either support the agency's theory of events or lead them in a new direction.

3.2. Initial Crime Scene Walk-Through

- a. After discussing the known circumstances of the event, Forensic responders along

with the detectives should carefully enter the scene to establish a path of entry and exit from the scene. This path should avoid the possible path used by the suspect(s) (and/or victim(s)) and preserve the scene from contamination.

- b. At the time of the initial walk-through, an evaluation should be made as to the best way to proceed with the scene processing. This evaluation should include the collection of evidence and help with establishing who will be responsible for what tasks during the crime scene processing.
- c. After the initial walk-through, a determination should be made regarding the need, if any, for additional personnel to aid in the processing of the scene or the need for specialized equipment. This information will be relayed to the Forensics Unit supervisor.
- d. Discuss with detectives any particular items of evidence they may be interested in which were noted during the walk-through.
- e. Begin taking notes regarding the crime scene. These observations will be documented in your crime scene report.

3.3. Video-Documentation and Photo-Documentation of the Crime Scene

- a. Video-documentation is often a very useful tool in documenting a crime scene. Prior to undertaking still photography, discuss with the lead detective whether video-documentation is desired. Video-documentation is to be done on all major incidents (ex: homicides, officer involved shootings, etc.).
- b. Video-documentation will be the first step after the walk through. If any of the other law enforcement agencies are present and the scene is being handled by them, then under most circumstances their crime scene unit staff will be responsible for the video-documentation and photo-documentation (the official crime scene photographs). SBSO Forensics Unit personnel may take additional digital photographs to supplement their notes.
- c. If an outside agency (such as the Lompoc Police Department, Guadalupe Police Department, the Santa Maria Police Department, or the Santa Barbara Police Department) requests assistance from the SBSO Forensics Unit, then the SBSO Forensic responders will most likely be responsible for crime scene video-documentation and photography. Follow the guidelines in SOP CSI-008, Photography and Cameras, for specifics on what type of photographs to take.
- d. The type of photographs taken will depend on the type of scene. In general, a three-step photographic process will be used:
 - 1. A long or wide angled photograph of the scene from various angles;
 - 2. A medium or mid-ranged photograph, which focuses on particular areas or objects within the crime scene and establishes a general relationship

between different objects within the scene;

3. A close-up photograph showing the condition of an item and its position at the crime scene. An extreme close-up photograph may be required to show such evidence as bloodstains or tool marks. The above photo-documentation process should be repeated with and without a scale.
- e. If a crowd is present, photographs of the crowd and people within the crowd may be useful and should be taken in some cases.
- f. If SBSO Forensic responders are required to photo-document the crime scene, a photo placard will be used at the beginning and end of a sequence of photographs to assure that essential photographs have been taken. These photo placards are especially useful when two photographers are used to document a scene, or when the photographer gets called away to document a different portion of the scene and then returns to the area that was being photographed earlier.

3.4. Crime Scene Notes

- a. Notes should be taken at the scene to record observations, techniques used in processing the evidence, to list those items which were collected, and any pertinent information regarding the case. Keep in mind that each scene is unique and those items or conditions noted may or may not have any value at the time they were noted; however, their value may be established at a later date. Notes should include, but are not limited to, such things as:
 1. The following items listed in 3.1 of this SOP:
 - a. Agency and Case number.
 - b. Case date.
 - c. Requesting Deputy or lead detective
 - d. Victim name (if available).
 - e. Suspect name (if available), DOB, and CII number (if available)
 - f. Type of case or crime type.
 2. Date and time of arrival at scene of Forensics unit responders.
 3. Detectives and pertinent personnel (including Forensics unit responders).
 4. Location of crime scene (GPS coordinates if available).
 5. Name of deputy/detective in charge of the crime scene log.
 6. Evidence inventory (items collected: notation should be made as to location and condition of item collected, name of person collecting item/date/time of collection). This information can also be documented in the SBSO Property Form (later attached to the crime scene report).
 7. Weather conditions (including whether or not it was a night scene or a daytime scene).
 8. Conditions of doors, windows, whether locked, unlocked or damaged.
 9. Overall condition of area, items moved, missing, altered, etc.
 10. Vehicles parked near crime scene.
 11. Condition of street or area near crime scene, e.g., dark, well lit, etc.
 12. Chain of custody information regarding any evidence transferred to or from the requesting agency at the scene.

13. Time at which Forensics unit personnel departed from the scene including what time they arrived back at the laboratory.
- b. Notes will be written by hand on a notebook. If available, a laptop or other electronic device can also be used either alone or in conjunction with hand written notes.
- c. Notes will be made as contemporaneously as possible during the investigation of the crime scene.
- d. The final crime scene report will be a result of the transferring of all case notes onto a Forensics BOC report.
- e. No entry made on case notes or other documentation will hide, obscure or disguise the true nature of any description of the scene, examination, result, conclusion and/or interpretation made at the crime scene.
- f. The final Forensics report may also include additional attachments such as crime scene diagrams, evidence measurement tables, latent information reports, CAL-ID print-outs, etc.

3.5. Sketches/diagrams

- a. A rough sketch of the crime scene, especially those involving a building should be made. This sketch should include such things as location of the victim(s) and the relationship of various items of evidence. This may include an overall sketch of the entire area, such as a house, and a more detailed (separate) sketch of the area of interest, which may be only a single room. This type of sketch does not need to be a scale diagram. Unlike notes, the sketch may be in pencil, including colored pencil entries as appropriate to identify key areas or features of the scene. When dealing with an extensive crime scene, the SBSO Traffic Unit can be called upon to assist with measuring evidence at the crime scene and diagraming.
- b. A dimensional sketch (which will eventually be used to make a scale diagram of the scene) will require measurements of all objects in the area relative to a stationary object such as a wall. This sketch will include location of the body, weapons, bullet holes, furniture or other items in the crime scene. Symbols can be used to represent items within the diagram as long as they are represented in a key. Again, at this time the sketch does not need to be drawn to scale but measurements must be included so that at some later date an accurate diagram can be made.
- c. If SBSO Forensics personnel are working with Forensic staff from another law enforcement agency, a decision should be made regarding who will make the crime scene sketch that will be used for the accurate diagram. Only one set of

measurements should be made and only one official diagram should be made using those measurements. If Forensic personnel from another agency are present, they will most likely be responsible for the crime scene diagram; however, SBSO Forensics personnel can make a diagram(s) for their notes and can include information (including measurements) that will be needed for their report.

- d. All crime scene sketches must include a title describing what is depicted in the sketch and include the phrase "Not to Scale" somewhere on the diagram. The person that prepared the sketch must include their initials on the sketch and the date the sketch was created. The sketch should also include an arrow indicating the compass direction of north.

3.6. Evidence Collection

- a. Evidence should be collected in a systematic manner and the order in which it is collected will depend on a number of factors including, but not limited to:
 1. The location of the scene: outdoors, indoor, in a vehicle or other location.
 2. The nature of the evidence including how fragile or stable it is.
 3. The weather conditions.
 4. Management of the scene and available Forensic responders.
 5. Any additional processing of particular types of evidence such as blood spatter which may require certain types of evidence to be collected first.
- b. Evidence will be collected using proper safety protocols, collection methods, evidence handling procedures and documentation procedures. The methods and protocols for handling, collecting and documenting the evidence will be dependent on the type of evidence being collected.
- c. The evidence packaging used to collect the various items of evidence should be marked with the item number, item description, date collected, time collected, case number, and the initials of the person collecting the item.
- d. All items will be packed separately. Exceptions to this rule includes those items such as bedding, which are all heavily blood soaked and any item whose separating from another may cause the loss of trace evidence or otherwise damage the item (e.g., bullet fragments collected from a single source). If the reason to place items together can be justified, a few other items may also be packaged together.
- e. All evidence items will be placed inside and locked in an SBSO Forensics response vehicle pending being transported back to the laboratory for further processing.

3.7 Chain of Custody

- a. Evidence Transfer at the Crime Scene

1. Evidence collected by Forensics Unit responders will remain under control of the responding Forensics Unit members during the crime scene investigation. All items collected by the Forensics Unit response team should have the agency case number, item number, date of collection, initials of person collecting the item, time of collection, and a brief description of the item on the exterior of the packaging.
 2. Under most circumstances, evidence collected by Forensic responders will be transported to the SBSO Forensics laboratory (North County/South County labs) upon completion of all crime scene processing. The exceptions to this rule are 1) malfunctioning firearms needing immediate attention and 2) rare instances of items that require immediate processing in the laboratory. Transportation of evidence can occur at any time during processing of the scene but will most often occur when laboratory personnel are about to depart from the scene. All evidence will be placed inside/locked in the forensics response vehicle(s) prior to transporting these to the SBSO Forensics laboratory.
 3. A member/member(s) of the Forensics Unit response team will transport the evidence items collected at the crime scene to the appropriate Forensics laboratory. The Forensic report will reflect the date, time and names of persons who conducted the transportation of the evidence. The crime scene report should also indicate all items collected by the Forensics Unit, the item number or identifying information associated with that item, and who collected the item at the scene.
- b. Evidence Collected and Transported Directly to the Forensics Laboratory
1. SBSO personnel or personnel from other agencies (who are not members of the SBSO Forensic response team) will transfer custody of any items that they collect at the crime scene to the responding Forensics Unit members. Forensic response team members will transport evidence to the laboratory at the completion of the crime scene processing. Members of the responding Forensics team will note when they left the scene and when they arrived back at the laboratory.
 2. Items brought from crime scenes by members of the forensics Unit will be documented in an SBSO Property Form. The final list of these items will be generated for printing and review by authorized SBSO investigating personnel. During this period, the items will remain in the custody of the Forensics Unit and kept secured/locked inside the SBSO Forensics laboratory. Chain of custody transactions will be recorded at all times. Once all of the evidence information is transferred into the Automated Reporting System (ARS), the electronic record will become part of the official record. However, any time the electronic recordkeeping is not available, a paper record, generated at the time of the transaction, will constitute a valid chain of custody.

3. After completion of the SBSO Property Form, the items will be booked into Property/Evidence Room (normal working hours between 8:00a.m. to 5:00p.m. Monday through Friday), unless items require special treatment, such as drying before storage.
4. For items requiring special treatment, the chain of custody will be maintained by noting where the item was placed within the laboratory.
5. The evidence drying cabinet constitutes a secure storage facility for items needing to be air-dried which were collected from crime scene. The transfer of items into the evidence drying cabinet must be recorded in the forensics report.

3.8. Evidence Labeling (Marking)

- a. All evidence collected at crime scenes suitable for packaging will be packaged in such a manner as to prevent it from loss, contamination and/or deleterious change.
- b. Each package will contain an adhesive label containing the following information: Case number, tag number, supplement report number, crime type (charge), date, time, suspect's name, victim's name, location, name/body number of the deputy or Forensic Technician who collected the item, and the item number/description of item.
- c. In addition any safety concerns, such as *Biohazard, Chemically Treated "Handle with gloves", Rendered safe, or Keep Frozen/Refrigerated* will be noted on the packaging as well as specific storage information where appropriate.

3.9. Additional Crime Scene processing

- a. Depending on the nature of the scene and involvement in the overall crime scene, the Forensics unit may be responsible for additional processing, such as the recovery of impression evidence (fingerprints, shoe impressions, or tire track impressions), recovery of biological evidence and trace evidence. These particular procedures are contained within the set CSI and FP SOPS.
- b. Bloodstain pattern analysis, bullet trajectory, or other specialized reconstruction interpretation may require the expertise of a DOJ Criminalist from the DOJ Crime Laboratory. The Forensics Unit supervisor is authorized to request the presence of DOJ Crime Lab personnel (a lead investigating detective will make his/her request through the Forensics Unit supervisor).
 1. The Forensics Unit typically works with the DOJ Criminalist to document the necessary information, mostly with photography. Documentation performed by the Forensics Unit can also include sketches and measurements.
 2. Blood stain patterns: The determination that bloodstain pattern analysis

or its interpretation is going to be needed should be made prior to the collection of any of the blood evidence at the scene, unless the samples are likely to be lost before crime scene processing is complete.

3. Bullet trajectory and other types of firearms analyses: The determination that firearm examination or interpretation is going to be needed should be made prior to the collection of any of the firearms evidence at the scene, unless the evidence is likely to be lost before processing is complete. Possible bullet holes and impacts should not be altered until the examiner (DOJ Criminalist) has had a chance to analyze them.

3.10. Exiting the Scene

- a. Prior to exiting the scene, meet with the lead investigating detective/deputy and discuss any of your findings with them. Ask if there is any additional processing that they require. If no additional processing is needed, make sure to note who the scene was released to (SBSO detective/deputy) prior to Forensics departing the scene. If a search warrant was written for the crime scene processing, then a copy of the Property Form listing those items collected must also be left inside of the scene.
- b. Before departing the scene, ask the lead detective if they will need your presence at the autopsy. If Forensic assistance is needed at the autopsy (which may occur on the same day or on the following day) find out when/where the autopsy is scheduled for. Arrangements can be made to have member(s) of the forensics response team be present at the autopsy.
- c. Note the time you departed the scene and include this time in your report.
- d. Members of the Forensics response team may be required to sign out of the crime scene if a crime scene log is kept.

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