

Crime Scene Search and Processing

Objective:

Crime scene search scenarios involve significant teamwork. Each team member should be assigned a specific duty during the crime scene processing. Explorers handle the crime scene as if they are the actual evidence technicians collecting and processing the evidence. Each Explorer should make clear their assignment, then follow through with the task. Explorers should be able to process a scene, have a clear understanding of what has happened and take appropriate action.

Foreword:

The purpose of crime scene investigation is to help establish what happened (crime scene reconstruction) and to identify the responsible person. This is done by carefully documenting the conditions at a crime scene and recognizing all relevant physical evidence. The ability to recognize and properly collect physical evidence is oftentimes critical to both solving and prosecuting violent crimes. It is no exaggeration to say that in the majority of cases, the law enforcement officer who protects and searches a crime scene plays a critical role in determining whether physical evidence will be used in solving or prosecuting violent crimes.

Responding to a crime scene: initial search

Hot Search

“High Risk” response, weapons drawn, quick building searches
Assumes that perpetrator is still in vicinity of crime scene
Thorough search of crime scene and surrounding area
Done immediately after crime scene is discovered

Cold Search

No chance suspect is still on scene or in the area
Done hours or days after crime scene has been discovered
Covers surrounding neighborhood
Residents, etc, canvassed for potential witnesses

An organized approach

Once the scene is secure, determine an organized approach. An organized approach insures:

1. a thorough and legal search is conducted.
2. expeditious processing without compromise.
3. proper scene documentation.
4. proper methods and techniques for evidence recovery.
5. proper use and knowledge of resources and equipment.
6. all pertinent evidence is recovered.
7. proper handling and packaging of evidence.
8. proper distribution points for evidence analysis.
9. proper safety precautions are followed.

Team Structure:

The team leader is responsible for the over function of the evidence team. The team leader should assist in coordinating the other members of the team and their job functions. Jobs may be delegated or changes, so long as the job is completed properly and the appropriate people are notified.

Team Leader

1. Assume control - ensure safety of personnel and security at scene. Ensure personnel use appropriate protective equipment and follow standard recommendations to protect them from any health hazard which might be presented by blood or any other human body fluid.
2. Conduct initial walk-through for purposes of making a preliminary survey, evaluating potential evidence, and preparing a narrative description.
3. Interview any witnesses, suspects etc.
4. Coordinate any arrests with other officers.
5. Ensure that sufficient supplies and equipment are available for personnel.
6. Control access to the scene and designate an individual to log everyone into the scene. Use crime scene tape or other control techniques.
7. Continuously reevaluate efficiency of search during entire course of operation.
8. Designate command post location, if needed, and ensure exchange of information between search and investigative personnel.
9. Determine search patterns, and make appropriate assignments for team members.
10. Release the scene after a final survey and inventory of the evidence has been done.

Photographer and Photographic Log Recorder

Photographs should be taken as soon as possible, to depict the scene as it is observed before anything is handled, moved, or initiated into the scene. The photographs allow a visual permanent record of the crime scene and items of evidence collected from the crime scene. There are three positions or views that the crime scene investigator needs to achieve with the photographs. Those views consist of overall scene photographs showing the most view possible of the scene, mid-range photographs showing the relationships of items and a close up of the item of evidence.

A close up should be taken of items that have serial numbers, tags and vin's. All stationary evidence where the photograph will be used to assist in the analytical process should be taken using a tripod with the proper lighting techniques for creating any needed shadows. A second photograph adding a measuring devise should be taken of items where the photo will assist in the analytical process.

1. Photograph entire area before it is entered.
2. Photograph victims, crowd, and vehicles.
3. Photograph entire scene with overall, medium and close-up coverage, using measurement scale when appropriate.
4. Photograph major evidence items before they are moved; coordinate this effort with Sketch Preparer, Evidence Recorder, and Evidence Recovery Personnel.
5. Photograph all latent fingerprints and other impression evidence before lifting and casting are accomplished.
6. Prepare photographic log and photographic sketch.

Sketch Preparer

Sketches are used along with the reports and photographs to document the scene. A crime scene sketch is simply a drawing that accurately shows the appearance of a crime scene. The sketch is simply drawn to show items, the position and relationship of items. It does not have to be an architectural drawing made to a scale, however it must include exact measurements where needed. The advantage of a sketch is that it can cover a large area and be drawn to leave Diagram immediate area of scene and orient diagram with sketch.

1. Use a point of reference.
2. Set forth major items of evidence on sketch.
3. Designate and label areas to be searched and advise team leader and all other search members of nomenclature for designated areas.
4. Obtain appropriate assistance for taking measurements and double check measurements.
5. Ensure necessary administrative information, such as scale disclaimer (not drawn to scale), is recorded on sketch.

Evidence Recorder/Custodian

After the evidence has been photographed and sketched, the evidence should be collected. The number cards used on individual items of evidence should correspond to the photographic log, evidence log and sketch.

1. Use gloves or other protective equipment to keep from contaminating the evidence or endangering yourself.
2. Have significant evidence photographed before collection.
3. Describe evidence and its location on appropriate bag or envelope.
4. Sign and date evidence container/maintain chain of custody.
5. Appropriately collect and package evidence to maximize evidence integrity.
6. Maintain evidence log.
7. Use paper bags for items that can deteriorate in a sealed container.

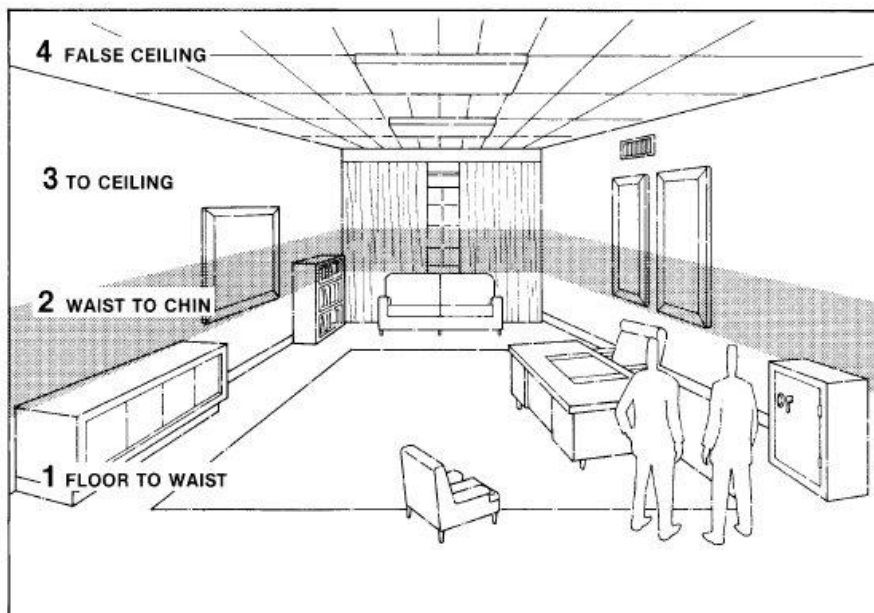
Finishing the crime scene processing:

Final Survey:

- The final survey is a review of all aspects of the search.
- Discuss the search with all personnel.
- Ensure all documentation is correct and complete.
- Photograph the scene showing the final condition.
- Ensure all evidence is secured.
- Ensure all equipment is retrieved.
- Ensure hiding places or difficult access areas have not been overlooked.

Release

- Release the crime scene after the final survey.
- Crime scene release documentation should include the time and date of release, to whom released, and by whom released.
- Ensure that the evidence is collected according to legal requirements, documented, and marked for identification.
- Consider the need for specialists such as a blood-pattern analyst or a medical examiner to observe the scene before it is released.
- Once the scene has been released, reentry may require a warrant.
- 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.

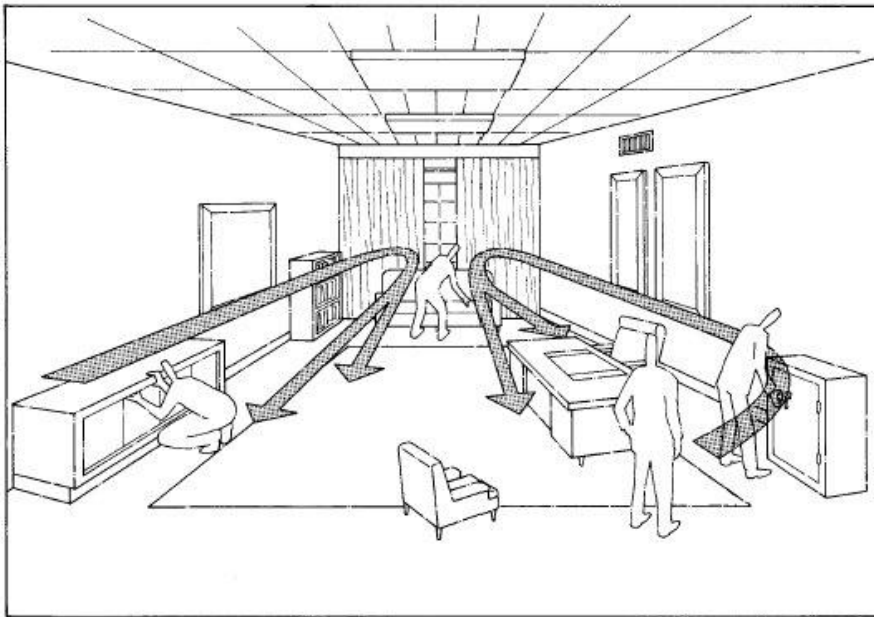


Types of crime scene searches:

Elevation Zone Search:

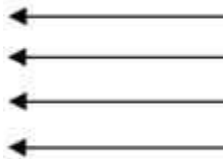
This type of search is used with indoor crime scene where evidence may be on the walls or in the ceiling (example: bullet holes, blood splatters etc.)

Only one elevation zone should be checked at a time.

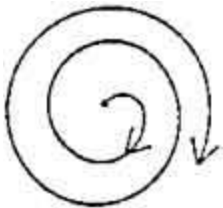


Overlapping Zone Search:

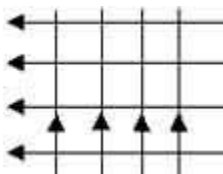
The Team Leader should observe and supervise the search while other team members perform the search. With an overlapping search items are unlikely to be missed.



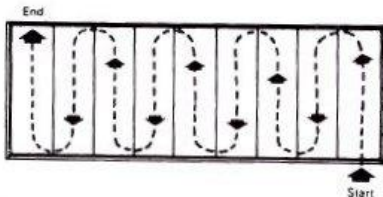
Strip Search: Commonly used when searching a large area looking for a large object. Several Explorers will stand in one long line and all walk the same direction. Stakes and string can also be used to create “lanes” for which each Explorer would be responsible.



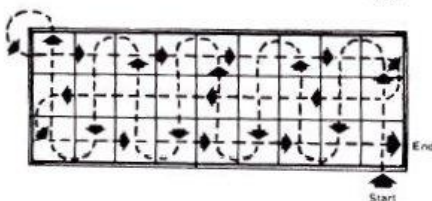
Spiral Search: Commonly used when looking for an object that is suspected to be a specific distance from another, for example: shell casing from a gun or an object thrown by hand from a specific location, but thrown in an unknown direction. A stake in the center with a string attached will assure proper distance and avoid overlapping already searched areas or missing areas not yet searched.



Grid Search: This is the most thorough search technique. Similar to a strip search but also done in opposite directions.

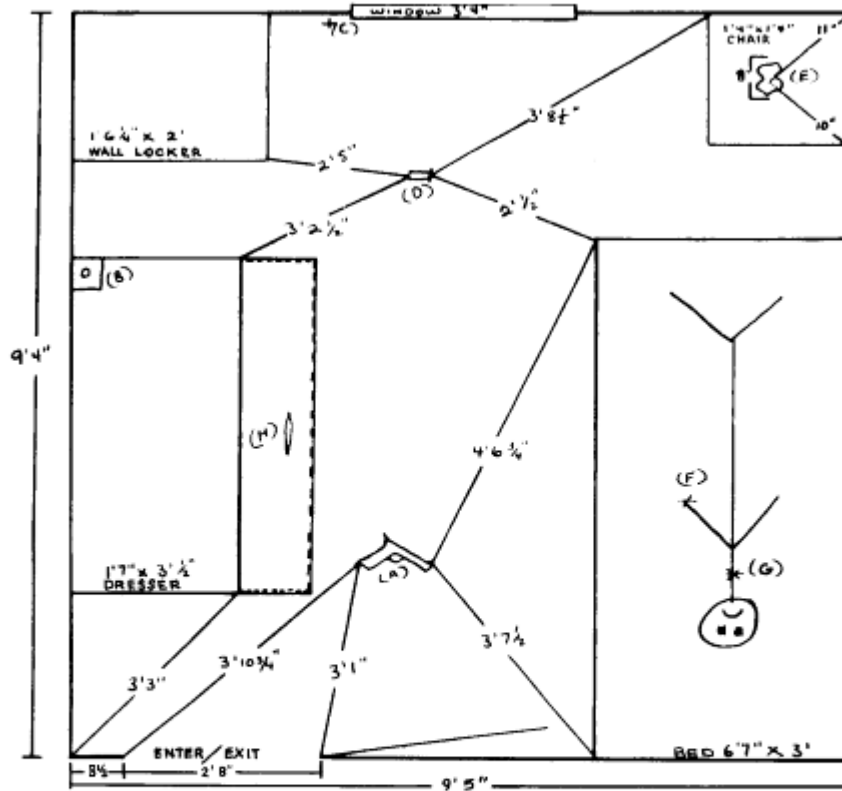


Another example of a strip search.



Another example of a grid search.

ROUGH SKETCH SHOWING EVIDENCE MEASUREMENTS AND TRIANGULATION



LEGEND

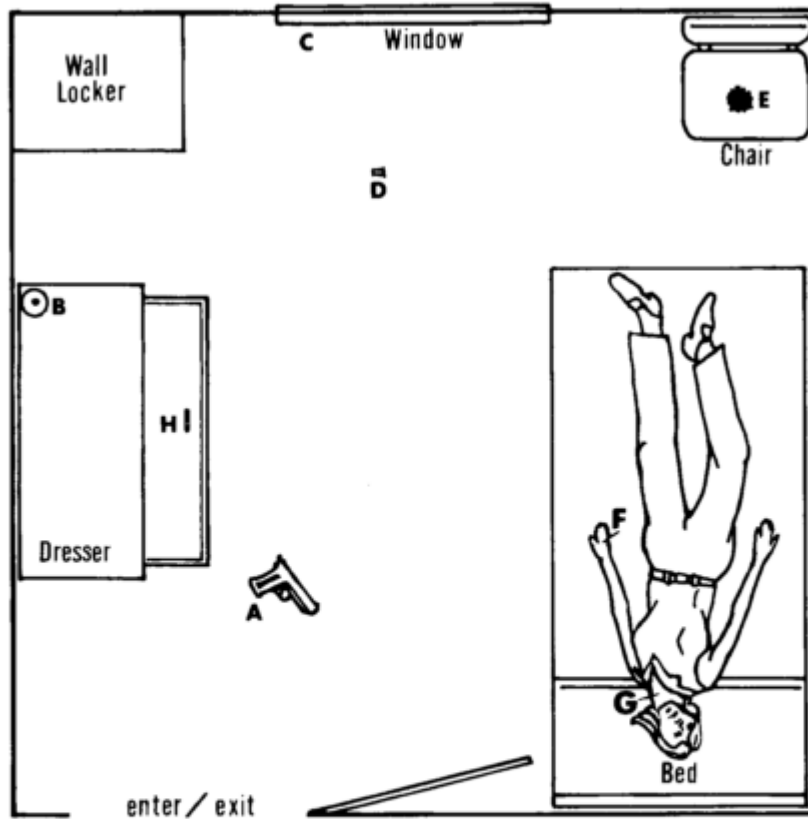
- A. PISTOL
- B. BOTTLE
- C. LETTERS "BR"
- D. SHELL CASING
- E. RED STAIN
- F. FIBERS
- G. GUN SHOT WOUND
- H. CIGARETTE INSIDE OPEN DRAWER

NOT TO SCALE

TITLE BLOCK

CASE # 043-85-4809
 OFFENSE: DEATH INVESTIGATION
 SCENE PORTRAYED: ROOM #7
 BLDG: S-3251-B, TROOP BILLET
 LOCATION: FT McCLELLAN, AL
 VICTIM: SP4 FAYE M. MILLER
 TIME & DATE BEGAN: 1000 12 JAN 85
 SKETCHED BY: SA TIM C. WINKLER
 VERIFIED BY: SGT BETTY C. GOODWIN

FINISHED SKETCH DRAWN TO SCALE



LEGEND

SCALE: 15/32=1FOOT

- A. Pistol
- B. Bottle
- C. Letters "BR"
- D. Shell casing
- E. Red stain
- F. Fibers
- G. Gun shot wound
- H. Cigarette inside opened drawer

TITLE BLOCK

Case # 063-85-4809
 Offense: Death Investigation
 Scene portrayed: Room #?
 Bldg S-3251-B, Troop Billets
 Location: Ft McClellan, AL
 Victim: SP4 Faye M. Miller
 Time's Date Began: 1000 12 Jan 85
 Sketched by: SA Tim C. Winkler
 Verified by: SGT Betty C. Goodwin

