



Crime Scene Investigation

A Guide for Law Enforcement
research report



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Crime Scene Investigation: A Guide for Law Enforcement

Written and Approved by the
Technical Working Group on Crime Scene Investigation

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Opinions or points of view expressed in this document are a consensus of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the official position of the U.S. Department of Justice.

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Message From the Attorney General

Actions taken at the outset of an investigation at a crime scene can play a pivotal role in the resolution of a case. Careful, thorough investigation is key to ensure that potential physical evidence is not tainted or destroyed or potential witnesses overlooked.

While many agencies have programs in crime scene processing, the level of training and resources available varies from jurisdiction to jurisdiction, as does the opportunity to practice actual investigation. To help these agencies, the National Institute of Justice supported the development of this guide.

I commend the hard work of the 44 members of the technical working group that created this guide. They are representative of law enforcement, the prosecution, the defense, and forensic science, and their collective expert knowledge, experience, and dedication to the task made this effort a success.

The guide is one method of promoting quality crime scene investigation. The type and scope of a crime scene investigation will vary from case to case. Jurisdictions will want to carefully consider the procedures in this guide and their applicability to local agencies and circumstances.

Janet Reno

Attorney General

Technical Working Group on Crime Scene Investigation

The Technical Working Group on Crime Scene Investigation (TWGCSI) is a multidisciplinary group of content-area experts from across the United States, from both urban and rural jurisdictions, each representing his or her respective agency or practice. Each of these individuals is experienced in the area of crime scene investigation and evidence collection in the criminal justice system from the standpoints of law enforcement, prosecution, defense, or forensic science.

At the outset of the TWGCSI effort, the National Institute of Justice (NIJ) created a planning panel—composed of distinguished law enforcement, legal, and science professionals—to define needs, to develop initial strategies, and to steer the larger group. Additional members of the technical working group were then selected from recommendations solicited from the planning panel, NIJ’s regional National Law Enforcement and Corrections Technology Centers, and national organizations including the American Academy of Forensic Science, National District Attorneys Association, National Association of Criminal Defense Lawyers, National Legal Aid and Defender Association, International Association of Chiefs of Police, National Sheriffs’ Association, International Association for Identification, and the American Association of Crime Laboratory Directors/Laboratory Accreditation Board.

Collectively, over a 1-year period, the 44 members of TWGCSI listed below worked together to develop this guide, *Crime Scene Investigation: A Guide for Law Enforcement*.

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NIJ also wishes to thank Attorney General Janet Reno, whose support and commitment to the improvement of the criminal justice system made this work possible. In addition, appreciation is extended to David G. Boyd, Director of NIJ's Office of Science and Technology, and to Richard M. Rau, Ph.D., the NIJ Project Monitor, for his unwavering support of, and guidance through, the process and production of this guide.

NIJ would like to thank all the individuals from various national organizations who responded to the request for nominations of experts with a wide expanse of knowledge and experience in the field of crime scene investigation. It was from their recommendations that the members were selected. In particular, thanks to Jim Polley from the National District Attorneys Association, Dan Rosenblatt from the International Association of Chiefs of Police, Stuart Statler from the National Association of Criminal Defense Lawyers, Clinton Lyons from the National Legal Aid and Defender Association, Aldine N. "Bubby" Moser, Jr., from the National Sheriffs' Association, and Ronald C. Jackson from the International Association for Identification. NIJ would also like to thank Mike Grossman, Director of NIJ's Technology Assistance Division, for his nominations of law enforcement candidates and his help in obtaining

recommendations from NIJ’s regional National Law Enforcement and Corrections Technology Centers (NLECTC), as well as the directors of those centers: James A. Keller, Robert Pentz, Chris Aldridge, John Ritz, Thomas Sexton, and Tom Burgoyne. NIJ would also like to thank the more than 120 individuals and organizations who were sent a copy of the draft guide for review and comment.

NIJ thanks CSR, Incorporated—particularly Tammy Kilgore, Terrylynn Pearlman, and Stephanie Tiller—for their support in arranging all of the meetings necessary to develop this guide. In addition, special thanks are extended to Aspen Systems Corporation and its editors who participated: Michele Coppola, Gayle Garmise, Rita Premo, and Jackie Siegel.

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Introduction

Note: A ☞ appears after terms that are defined in the glossary and is used the first time a glossary word or phrase occurs in each section of the document.

This guide is intended for use by law enforcement and other responders ☞ who have responsibility for protecting crime scenes, preserving physical evidence, and collecting and submitting the evidence for scientific examination. Physical evidence has the potential to play a critical role in the overall investigation and resolution of a suspected criminal act. Realization of this potential depends on actions taken early in the criminal investigation at the crime scene. Developments in technology and improvements in the analysis and interpretation of physical evidence recovered from crime scenes will place even greater importance on properly documented and preserved evidence. An important factor influencing the ultimate legal significance of this scientific evidence is that investigators follow an objective, thorough, and thoughtful approach. The goal of this process is to recognize and preserve physical evidence that will yield reliable information ☞ to aid in the investigation.

Investigators should approach the crime scene investigation as if it will be their only opportunity to preserve and recover these physical clues. They should consider other case information or statements from witnesses or suspects carefully in their objective assessment of the scene. Investigations may change course a number of times during such an inquiry and physical clues, initially thought irrelevant, may become crucial to a successful resolution of the case.

It is recognized that all crime scenes are unique. The judgment of the investigator on the scene, with the assistance of other responders, such as the prosecutor, should be given deference in the implementation of this guide. It is impossible to propose a single, step-by-step procedure to approach every type of situation. There are, however, fundamental principles of investigating a crime scene and preserving evidence that

should be practiced in every case. This document is not intended as a comprehensive or rigid scheme of activities, but as a guide for law enforcement, while recognizing the authority of Federal and State statutes, case law, and local policies and procedures.

Although the development of a guide for crime scene investigation is instructive in addressing issues surrounding the management of crime scenes, the Technical Working Group on Crime Scene Investigation (TWGCSI) recognizes that local logistical and legal conditions may dictate the use of alternative procedures. Further, crime scene investigation procedures that differ from the practices in this guide may not necessarily invalidate or detract from the evidence in a particular case.

The authors encourage crime scene personnel to develop and continually update their knowledge, skills, and abilities with respect to the processing of a crime scene through training. In fact, successful implementation of this guide can be realized only if staff possess basic (and in some cases advanced) training in the fundamentals of investigating a crime scene. However, this document does not address the mechanics of evidence collection or the training requirements of investigative personnel.

The application of this guide may vary from case to case. Most of the procedures described in this document are typically ones that would be followed in a major crime scene investigation. Some of the procedures listed may not necessarily be followed in less serious or less complex investigations. In addition, the order in which actions may be performed will vary depending on the nature of the particular crime scene. In some investigations, the responsibilities described in each section may be performed by the same individual. The authors acknowledge that law enforcement agencies may be faced with the dilemma of responding to more reported crimes than their resources allow. It is one of the primary responsibilities of the investigator to assess the case at hand and, after judging the seriousness of the case and the availability of resources, to decide the level of investigation that will take place. For potentially devastating situations, such as biological weapons or radiological or

chemical threats[Ⓔ], the appropriate agencies should be contacted. The user should refer to the National Institute of Justice's (NIJ's) publications for fire and arson investigation, bomb and explosives investigation, electronic crime investigation, and death investigation where applicable.

The authors recognize that the size of the agency, availability of resources, and the level of expertise vary greatly from jurisdiction to jurisdiction. The experts who have proposed this guide strongly suggest that agencies unable to adhere to it seek assistance from other agencies. Assistance may take the form of securing additional training, sharing resources, forming partnerships with neighboring jurisdictions, and/or seeking additional funding. The authors also recognize that many agencies already have programs in crime scene processing, and much of the information contained in this document is derived from these sources, including many of the resources identified in the reference list.

Based on this guide, agencies may determine that improvements are needed in their training and policies concerning the investigation of crime scenes. This guide may be a justification for strengthening an agency's resources.

Background

NIJ was asked by Attorney General Janet Reno in 1995 to study cases in which convicted sex offenders were later exonerated by DNA testing. This study resulted in the 1996 publication, *Convicted by Juries, Exonerated by Science: Case Studies in the Use of DNA Evidence to Establish Innocence After Trial*. After being briefed on this publication, Attorney General Reno asked NIJ to develop a consistent approach to the processing of crime scenes. As a result, NIJ initiated the Technical Working Group on Crime Scene Investigation to develop recommended practices for crime scene management.

Origin of the National Crime Scene Planning Panel and the Technical Working Group on Crime Scene Investigation

In the spring of 1998, the American Society of Crime Laboratory Directors/Laboratory Accreditation Board (ASCLD/LAB) and ASCLD supported the principle of NIJ's establishment of TWGCSI. The NIJ Director selected an 11-member planning panel called the National Crime Scene Planning Panel (NCSPP). The NCSPP members represent independent, multidisciplinary organizations whose constituents are responsible for investigating, evaluating, and analyzing evidence from crime scenes. The rationale for their involvement was twofold: they represent the diversity of the professional disciplines and each organization is a key stakeholder in the conduct of crime scene investigations and the implementation of this guide.

The NCSPP was charged with the development of the outline for a guide for crime scene investigations using the format in *Death Investigation: A Guide for the Scene Investigator*. The NCSPP also was charged with identifying the expertise necessary for the composition of a Technical Working Group on Crime Scene Investigation, a task the panel completed at a meeting in Washington, D.C., in August 1998.

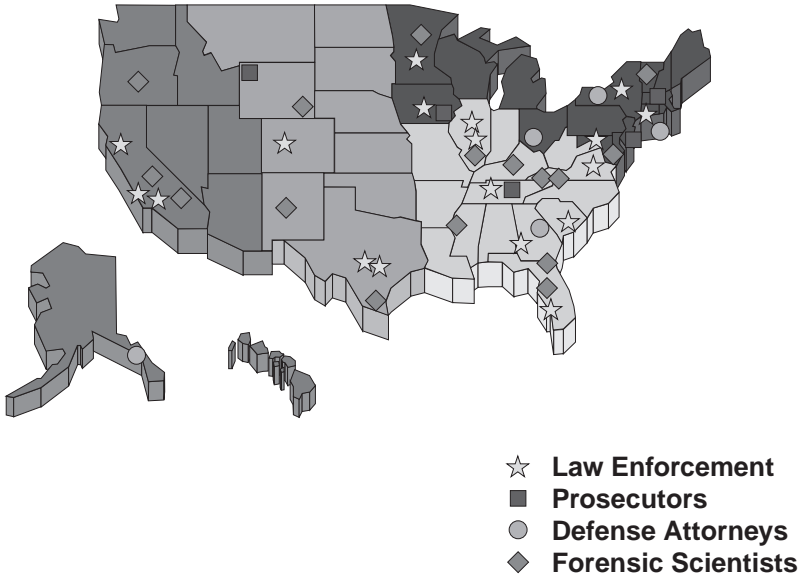
Candidates for TWGCSI were recommended by organizations representing law enforcement, forensic science, crime scene training, the prosecution, and the defense. The following criteria were used to select TWGCSI members:

- ◆ Each member was nominated/selected for the position by the NCSPP, national organizations, and NIJ's four regional National Law Enforcement and Corrections Technology Centers—Northeast, Southeast, Rocky Mountain, and West.
- ◆ Each member had specific knowledge regarding the investigation of crime scenes.
- ◆ Each member had specific experience with the process of crime scene investigation and the outcomes of positive and negative scene investigations.

- ◆ Each member could commit to the project over at least a 6-month period.

The experts invited to TWGCSI consisted of 44 members from 25 States. Their expertise was distributed among 18 law enforcement officers and trainers, 16 forensic analysts and educators, 5 prosecutors, and 5 defense attorneys. This distribution of expertise, detailed below, brought together all the nonmedical crime scene investigators to develop this guide.

Technical Working Group on Crime Scene Investigation Membership Distribution



| Region | Number of Participants | Percentage |
|----------------|------------------------|------------|
| Northeast | 14 | 31.8% |
| Southeast | 16 | 36.4% |
| Rocky Mountain | 7 | 15.9% |
| West | 7 | 15.9% |
| Total: | 44 | 100% |

Chronology

NCSPP meeting. In August 1998, the NCSPP met in Washington, D.C., to review the existing literature and technology, prepare the project objectives, and begin the guide development process. The NCSPP's objective was to develop an outline for a guide based on existing literature and present it for review to the assembled TWGCSI at a later date. During this initial session, four investigative tasks were identified. Each task included subsections which when developed provided a guide for investigators to follow while conducting a crime scene investigation.

The guide's format has the following content:

- ◆ A statement of *principle*, citing the rationale for following the guide.
- ◆ A statement of *policy* to the investigator on performing each section of the guide.
- ◆ The *procedure* for performing each section of the guide.
- ◆ A *summary* statement citing justification for performing the procedures.

TWGCSI meetings. In December 1998, TWGCSI assembled in Washington, D.C., and, after introductory remarks, separated into four breakout sections to draft the guide. The four sections were: Arriving at the Scene: Initial Response/Prioritization of Efforts, Preliminary Documentation and Evaluation of the Scene, Processing the Scene, and Completing and Recording the Crime Scene Investigation. An editor from Aspen Systems Corporation attended each breakout section to audibly record the proceedings. Once all breakout sections completed their work, the full TWG reassembled to review the initial draft.

The full TWG met again in January 1999 in Washington, D.C., to make revisions and complete initial review as a group. The draft was edited and TWGCSI members were asked to recommend organizations, persons, or agencies they felt should comment. The draft was then mailed to this wider audience and to all TWG members.

Organization review. The NCSPP reassembled in March 1999 in Washington, D.C., to review and incorporate comments received from the wider audience into the document. In April 1999, TWGCSI met in La Jolla, California, to review the latest draft, make revisions, and approve changes. The document was edited, and the NCSPP met in Washington, D.C., in July 1999 to review the glossary, title, introduction, and appendixes for the document.

This document is divided into five sections: Arriving at the Scene: Initial Response/Prioritization of Efforts, Preliminary Documentation and Evaluation of the Scene, Processing the Scene, Completing and Recording the Crime Scene Investigation, and Crime Scene Equipment. At the end of the document are appendixes containing a glossary, a reference list, and a list of organizations to which a draft copy of the document was sent.

Training Guide

The national crime scene investigation project includes tasks to develop training criteria to fit the investigative guide. For each of the investigative tasks presented in this document, “minimum levels of performance” will be developed and verified by TWGCSI members. This “training guide” will provide both individuals and educational organizations the material needed to establish and maintain valid training programs. A set of sample forms with suggested information to be recorded at the crime scene will be included in the training guide.

—Technical Working Group on Crime Scene Investigation

Crime Scene Investigation: A Guide for Law Enforcement

Section A

Arriving at the Scene: Initial Response/Prioritization of Efforts

Section B

Preliminary Documentation and Evaluation of the Scene

Section C

Processing the Scene

Section D

Completing and Recording the Crime Scene Investigation

Section E

Crime Scene Equipment

Authorization: Actions taken pursuant to this guide shall be performed in accordance with department policies and procedures and Federal and State laws.

This handbook is intended as a guide to recommended practices for crime scene investigation.

Jurisdictional, logistical, or legal conditions may preclude the use of particular procedures contained herein.

For potentially devastating situations, such as biological weapons or radiological or chemical threats, the appropriate agencies should be contacted. The user should refer to the National Institute of Justice's publications for fire and arson investigation, bomb and explosives investigation, electronic crime investigation, and death investigation where applicable.