Crime Scene Response

Crime Scene

The criminalist should keep in mind that if certain procedures and steps are not followed meticulously, his or her actions or inactions could very well jeopardize the case that the criminal investigator is trying to make against the responsible party. The criminalist should be mindful that what they do or do not do at a scene may result in a guilty party being set free and the possibility of that guilty party being given the opportunity to victimize the community once again.

The first step in working a crime scene is to make sure that the crime scene has been secured and that only the people necessary are allowed access to the crime scene. Law enforcement officials on the scene are responsible for keeping a list of personnel who come and go at the crime scene; however, the criminalist is ultimately responsible for making sure that the job is completed satisfactorily. For more serious criminal incidents, there will be witnesses, onlookers, police officers, the media and even other first responders on the scene. It has been said that often police officers and other first responders who are not directly involved in the case will want to visit a crime scene.

Another part of the response regarding securing the crime scene is setting up a proper perimeter around the crime scene. It is better to secure too much of a crime scene than not enough. Once the crime scene is set—even though it can be adjusted as needed—it will need to be explained in detail in the final report by the criminalist. There are a variety of locations for crime scenes, which will determine the actual size of the perimeter that is set up by the law enforcement organization or criminalist. Most law enforcement departments issue officers what is called crime scene tape to indicate the crime scene perimeter. However, if you do not have crime scene tape available, you may utilize other items to create a perimeter (e.g., rope, string, furniture, or even an automobile). These methods may not prove to be an effective deterrent in keeping unauthorized personnel from entering your crime scene.

The crime scene log is a record the personnel who would come and go on the crime scene. The log should have a place for the name or personnel on the crime scene, the time arriving on the crime scene, the time leaving the crime scene, and perhaps even the reason why an individual is on the crime scene. By not keeping an accurate log of who arrives at and leaves the crime scene, you are jeopardizing the integrity of that crime scene, which may jeopardize the identification and successful prosecution of someone responsible for committing the crime. This step should not be taken lightly.

Another important function on the crime scene is documenting the actions of personnel on the crime scene and observations made on that crime scene because a detailed report will be required at some point in the process. Often the smallest of details like the recording of the weather conditions; which doors were open and closed doors at the scene; lighting conditions; and the identification of witnesses, victims, and suspects on the scene upon your arrival may be valuable information. This information can be used
in the processing and analysis of the physical evidence recovered on the scene.

The investigator on scene is responsible for conducting a scene assessment. The purpose of the scene assessment is to "determine the type of incident to be investigated and the level of investigation to be conducted" (Lewis, 2004, p. 28). Some of the factors in the assessment identified by Lewis (2004) are as follows:

- a briefing of the criminalist by any first responders
- an evaluation of any safety issues that may be involved
- any pertinent legal issues that need to be considered
- establishing the entry and at some point
- the evaluation of the scenes boundaries
- the determination of the number of actual scenes if there is more than one scene

Also, a crime scene walk-through should be one of the first steps taken by the investigator on the scene. The purpose of this walk-through is to get a general sense of the crime scene itself before the collecting and recording of the physical evidence officially begins. During this walk-through, the investigator should record the results and make an initial assessment as to who will be needed on the crime scene. After collecting evidence from the crime scene and analyzing the evidence, the criminalist may also be called upon to interpret the findings for law enforcement officials as well as be called upon by the courts to testify about their findings in a court of law.

Reference