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Standard for Scene Response: Initial Response by Scene Investigators



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Standard for Scene Response: Initial Response by Scene Investigators

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410 North 21st Street
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Foreword

This document provides guidance for those who respond to scenes for the purpose of conducting field investigations in recognizing, preserving, documenting, and collecting items of potential evidentiary value. This document is intended to be utilized in conjunction with local regulations to inform or augment applicable policies. While it is recognized that additional actions and expertise may be required at specialized scene types, this document is not intended to detail specific additional requirements for those situations.

This document is not intended to provide comprehensive guidance on the actions taken by scene investigator(s) during the course of their investigation or reconstruction of the scene. This document makes the distinction between the duties of the first responding law enforcement officer(s) at a scene and the duties of the scene investigators.

This standard provides guidance on some safety issues but is not exhaustive. It is the responsibility of the appropriate agency to develop a full health and safety plan.

This document was revised, prepared, and finalized as a standard by the Crime Scene Investigation Consensus Body of the AAFS Standards Board. The draft of this standard was developed by the Crime Scene Investigation and Reconstruction Subcommittee of the Organization of Scientific Area Committees (OSAC) for Forensic Science and intended to be a part of a series of documents:

- Scene Response Series Part 1 of 3: ASB BPR 160, *Best Practice Recommendation for Initial Response at Scenes by Law Enforcement Officers*
- Scene Response Series Part 2 of 3: ASB Std 195, *Standard for Initial Response by Scene Investigators* (this document)
- Scene Response Series Part 3 of 3: *Standard for Scene Search* (not yet published)

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Standard for Scene Response: Initial Response by Scene Investigators

1 Scope

This document provides requirements for the activities and actions of an individual, however named, who is responsible for performing elements of a scene investigation, when responding to a scene, and the steps to be completed prior to conducting a scene search.

2 Normative References

There are no normative reference documents. Annex A, Bibliography, contains informative references.

3 Terms and Definitions

For purposes of this document, the following definitions apply.

3.1 contamination

The undesirable introduction of a substance to an item at any point in the forensic process. Note: This includes undesirable transfer of a substance within an item or between items, also referred to as cross-contamination.
(ISO 21043-1)

3.2 law enforcement officer LEO

Any public employee whose duties primarily involve enforcement or investigation of laws.

3.3 personal protective equipment PPE

Equipment worn to minimize exposure to a variety of hazards such as body-fluids, irritants, or contaminants (e.g., gloves, foot and eye protection, respirators, and full body suits).

3.4 scene

A place or object that is subject to and/or requires forensic examination.
(ISO/FDIS 21043-1:2018[E])

NOTE A crime scene is a common description of a scene where a presumed crime has been committed. The scene can be a person or an animal.

3.5 scene investigation

An examination of a scene to locate, document, collect, and preserve items of potential evidentiary value.

NOTE Investigations may involve criminal or non-criminal acts. Investigations into presumed criminal acts are referred to as crime scene investigations.

3.6 scene investigator

An individual, however named, who is responsible for performing elements of scene investigation.

NOTE Scene investigators are commonly referred to as crime scene investigators. Other personnel assisting in the investigation may also fulfill this role.

3.7 scene preservation

The intentional act of preventing and refraining from any activity that may alter a scene or anything contained within the scene.

3.8 staging area

An area designated to contain and deploy resources and conduct briefings, situated outside the boundaries of where evidence is likely to be located.

4 Requirements

4.1 General

4.1.1 ANSI/ASB BPR 160, *Best Practice Recommendation for Initial Response at Scenes by Law Enforcement Officers* details the responsibilities of the initial responding law enforcement officers (LEO). The first responding scene investigator(s) shall ascertain what steps were taken by the responding LEO to preserve and maintain the integrity of the scene prior to the arrival of the scene investigator(s). The scene investigator shall seek information regarding any actions taken and any known changes to the scene prior to the arrival of the scene investigators. If prior to arrival, personnel on-scene notify a responding scene investigator of existing conditions that could compromise the integrity or value of evidence, the scene investigator shall advise the personnel on-scene what risk mitigation, if any, should be performed. The scene investigator shall participate in a briefing with the responding LEO(s) upon the scene investigator's arrival to the scene.

4.1.2 Personnel from a variety of disciplines can, at times, perform specialized functions within the broader scope of scene investigation (e.g., medicolegal death investigation, digital forensics). When operating in such specialist capacities, these individuals are subject to distinct duties, requirements, and standards that pertain specifically to their area of expertise. Accordingly, they may have limited responsibilities outlined in this standard.

4.1.3 This standard is not intended to override, conflict with, or otherwise interfere with the established responsibilities or protocols governing those specialized investigative disciplines. However, in situations where a specialist serves as the sole scene investigator, the applicable elements of this standard shall be implemented.

4.2 Arrival at Scene

The scene investigator shall be aware of the potential for biasing and misleading information and consider steps to mitigate its influence on the investigation. The scene investigator(s) should obtain or have access to, at a minimum, the following information.

- a) The initial responding and primary LEO's names, agencies, agency identifications (e.g., badge number), and times of arrival.

- b) The primary authority for the scene (i.e., which agency is taking lead on the scene).
- c) The time of the original incident, if known.
- d) The conditions of the scene at the time of LEO's arrival.
- e) The presumed size and extent of the scene including the existence of known secondary scene(s).
- f) How long the scene has been controlled and any available information about access or interference with the scene.
- g) Any information regarding any alterations (e.g., items moved, disturbed, or removed) to the scene and any movement of items at the scene between the arrival of the initial responding LEO and the arrival of the scene investigator(s).
- h) Any information concerning hazards at the scene.
- i) Information from the LEO that is pertinent for conducting the scene investigation.

4.3 Safety Considerations

The scene investigator(s) shall take precautions to ensure their safety while minimizing changes to the scene. Mitigating actions shall include, but are not limited to the following.

- a) Verifying that the allocation of designated personnel responsible for scene security and personal safety for all individuals involved has been made. If the provisioning of safety measures have not been provided, the investigator should request for the allocation(s) to be provided.
- b) Requesting assistance from appropriate personnel or agencies if hazards such as chemical, radiological, biological, animal, physical, or utility (e.g., electrical or gas) are suspected or discovered.
- c) Wearing personal protective equipment (PPE) appropriate for the hazard(s) present at all times.
- d) Taking repeated breaks for rest and sustenance.

4.4 Scene Preservation, Containment, and Control

4.4.1 The scene investigator(s) shall verify the scene boundaries and physical barriers established by the initial responding LEO to assess whether both protect the integrity of the scene. The boundaries shall enclose the furthest, immediate physical evidence connected with the scene. Movement throughout the scene should be limited to essential scene investigation personnel only.

4.4.2 The scene investigator shall verify if a scene entry/exit log has been established. If such documentation has not been started, the scene investigator shall request/cause the process to begin.

- a) Such logs shall include the documentation of all personnel entering or exiting the scene including the time of their arrival and departure and their reason for entry.
- b) This log should not be the responsibility of those personnel tasked with processing the scene.

4.4.3 The scene investigator(s) shall ensure that a path for authorized personnel to enter and exit the scene has been established for the preservation of evidence.

4.4.4 The scene investigator(s) shall ensure that a staging area is designated. The staging area may be located in any secured area (e.g., vehicle, trailer, tent, or within a building). The staging area should be positioned outside of present or potential hazard zones but close enough to the incident to maintain command and deploy response resources.

4.4.5 The scene investigator(s) shall establish areas or receptacles designated for waste, (e.g., general trash, used PPE, biohazardous waste).

4.4.5.1 In this area, biohazards and other hazardous materials shall be placed into marked receptacles designed for the hazard(s).

4.4.5.2 If it is not practical to have this area or receptacle within the staging area, an area shall be carefully chosen within a confined portion of the scene. If this area is established within a scene, the scene investigator shall ensure the designated area has been documented, searched, and deemed safe to assume that role.

4.4.5.3 Upon departure from the scene, waste generated by the scene investigators shall be disposed of.

4.4.6 The scene investigator(s) shall establish a secure area on scene for the temporary storage of evidence following initial collection in accordance with preserving evidence integrity and chain of custody.

4.5 Legal Considerations

The scene investigator(s) shall conduct themselves with the expectation that their work may be used in every step of the legal process, and therefore shall ensure that they comply with applicable legal standards.

4.6 Assessing the Scene

4.6.1 The scene investigator shall conduct a preliminary scene evaluation which includes initial observations and information obtained from the responding LEO(s) to determine resources and response necessary for a safe and thorough investigation.

4.6.2 The scene investigator shall conduct a scene assessment (also known as a “walk-through”) using precautions, to obtain an overview of the entire scene, identify any hazards or threats to scene integrity, and ensure the protection of physical evidence. Items should be left in situ (i.e., in place) unless doing so would compromise safety or the potential evidence. This assessment should include all features of the scene, case circumstances, and available resources that would influence the scene investigation (e.g., time available for the investigation, environment, scene location, personnel, equipment required, safety considerations).

4.6.3 The scene investigator shall use the scene assessment phase to develop a plan for the coordinated identification, collection, and preservation of evidence.

4.6.3.1 The plan should be continuously assessed to address such things as new information, changes in scene conditions, and new material located at the scene.

4.6.3.2 Measures shall be instituted to preserve and protect evidence that may be lost or compromised due to environmental conditions or the nature of the evidence item. Such measures may include prioritized collection or use of protective measures that also prevent contamination, tampering, alteration, or loss of evidence.

4.6.3.3 If, during the scene assessment phase, it becomes apparent that evidence could become contaminated, altered, or lost, immediate documentation (e.g., photograph, notes, or sketch) and collection of the at-risk evidence shall occur prior to the completion of the scene assessment. This includes the consideration of resources, the existence of multiple scenes, and/or exigent circumstances.

4.6.4 The scene assessment shall also be used to determine the need for specialized reconstructive efforts or additional resources and need for coordination with those resources.

4.7 Documentation

The scene investigator(s) shall document all information, but not limited to scene conditions, observations, and actions taken, thereby providing a permanent investigative record.

Scene documentation may take the form of notes, reports, photographs, videos, sketches, and diagrams, but is not limited to these modalities.

4.8 Scene Processing

Information gathered during the initial scene response and assessment shall determine the actions taken by the scene investigator in processing the scene. The information-gathering, observation, and assessment processes are cyclical and shall be repeated and revised as necessary throughout the entirety of scene processing.

Annex A (informative)

Bibliography

The following bibliography is not intended to be an all-inclusive list, review, or endorsement of literature on this topic. The goal of the bibliography is to provide examples of publications addressed in the standard.

- 1] ANSI/ASB Standard 159, *Standard for Scene Investigation and Reconstruction—Foundational Principles*. 2023. 1st Ed.^a
- 2] ANSI/ASB Best Practice Recommendation 160, *Best Practice Recommendation for Initial Response at Scenes by Law Enforcement Officers*. 2023. 1st Ed.^a
- 3] National Forensic Science Technology Center. *Crime Scene Investigation: A Guide for Law Enforcement* [supported under cooperative agreements by BJA, NIJ, and NIST]. NFSTC, 2013.^b
- 4] Federal Bureau of Investigation. *Standard ERT 12-Step Process*. Undated.^c
- 5] ISO 21043-1:2018(E) *Forensic sciences- Part 1: Terms and definitions*, 2018.^d
- 6] ISO/FDIS 21043-2:2018(E) *Forensic sciences- Part 2: Recognition, recording, recovery, transport and storage of material*, 2018.^d

^a Available from: <https://www.aafs.org/academy-standards-board>

^b Available from: National Forensic Science Technology Center. 8285 Bryan Dairy Rd #125, Largo, FL 33777
<https://www.nist.gov/sites/default/files/documents/forensics/Crime-Scene-Investigation.pdf>

^c Federal Bureau of Investigation, 935 Pennsylvania Avenue NW, Washington, DC 20535

^d International Organization for Standardization, 1, ch. de la Voie-Creuse, Case postale 56, CH-1211 Geneva 20

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Academy Standards Board
410 North 21st Street
Colorado Springs, CO 80904

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