



Odontology Section – 2003

F30 What's a Nice Doctor Like You Doing in a Place Like This? (Crime Scene Protocols for Forensic Odontologists)

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The goals of this presentation are to familiarize forensic odontologists with crime scene protocols and techniques that will ultimately aid in their contribution to being a part of the forensic team.

While many Forensic Odontologists are very clear about their specific duties once human remains are presented in the morgue, less attention has been attributed to the role of the Forensic Odontologist at the crime scene. The crime scene can be a wealth of information (and potentially lost evidence) for the savvy Forensic Odontologist; however, certain protocols must be adhered to when visiting any crime scene.

Upon the arrival of any law enforcement entity, the primary objective is to freeze the crime scene in place and time once exigent matters such as arrests of subjects and caring for injured parties are accomplished. This is accomplished through established security protocols such as posting guards, crime scene tape, establishing entry and exit corridors, and sign in/sign out logs. The Forensic Odontologist should be familiar with this protocol and have business cards and other forms of identification ready for checkpoints and log entries. The entry and exit corridors should be strictly adhered to, as well as limiting any movement within the crime scene other than what is absolutely necessary in order to perform one's duties.

Once the crime scene is secured, the lead investigator briefs the lead crime scene investigator as to the nature of the crime and any immediate evidentiary requirements. The lead crime scene investigator then performs a "walk-through" of the scene. Upon completion of the "walk-through," the crime scene team is briefed as to the condition of the crime scene, safety aspects, and evidence recovery requirements.

The lead crime scene investigator will record the time and date of crime scene acquisition, note the security level containing the scene, record the weather conditions, lighting, personnel and their duties, and prepare a narrative description of the crime scene and its eventual processing. The lead crime scene investigator is responsible for calling upon forensic specialists to assist in any crime scene processing specific to their specialty. The Forensic Odontologist should report to and work under the guidance of the lead crime scene investigator while inside the perimeter of the crime scene.

The initial processing of any crime scene is accomplished through photography, videography, and crime scene sketching. Nothing is to be moved until the scene is captured "as-is" via the aforementioned modalities. Overall (or long range) photographs are taken first, followed by intermediate distance photographs and finally close up photographs of any item of evidentiary value. Sometimes onlookers and surrounding vehicles are also photographed. A log is maintained for every photograph taken. This log records the photograph number, subject matter, the type of camera, lens utilized, lighting, film speed and type, and the use of scale.

The Forensic Odontologist can request the crime scene photographer to assist in the photographic processing of odontological specific items such as jaws, teeth, and/or bite marks "*in situ*". The advantage of utilizing the crime scene photographer is that the integrity of the photographic logs is maintained. In the event that a crime scene photographer is unavailable, it would behoove the Forensic Odontologist to utilize photographic logs and procedures that are complimentary to the law enforcement entity responsible for investigating the crime.

Evidence collection follows initial crime scene photography. At least two persons should see the evidence in place and observe its recovery. It should be noted that evidence collection and crime scene photography are not mutually exclusive. Many times, as items of evidence are examined prior to collection, additional physical evidence is noted which might be fragile or transient in nature. This type of evidence is immediately photographed and collected. Examples of this type of evidence would be hairs and fibers at an outdoor crime scene.

In addition to the immediate collection of transient evidence, all items determined to be of evidentiary value are numbered and photographed in place (with a corresponding number placard). As each item of evidence is recovered, its description, location, time and date of recovery, recovering official, and case number are recorded on an evidence recovery log and on the appropriate packaging for that item. The evidence recovery log also records the photograph number (from the photographic log), the packaging method, the type of evidence marking (direct or indirect), and any miscellaneous comments relative to the collection of that item of evidence. As a cross-reference, the photographic log would record the evidence item number and description of same, along with the approximate time of the photograph. The sketch would be continually updated as each item of evidence is recovered.

The Forensic Odontologist should attempt to utilize crime scene personnel for the collection of odontological evidence by direction. Again, this method is preferable in that the crime scene documentation would be consistent with the odontological documentation and chain of custody issues would reside within the investigating law enforcement entity. If the odontologist personally collects evidence, appropriate entries should be made in an evidence recovery log, photographic log, and on a sketch. It is not recommended that the



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Forensic Odontologist directly remove any evidence from the crime scene for examination. All evidence should be entered into the investigating agency's evidence recovery system prior to being examined at a remote location.

The odontologist should bear in mind that human remains are items of evidence. To that end, such items should not be collected prior to being photographed in place, added to any crime scene sketch, and entries completed in the appropriate logs. Because human remains are of evidentiary value, forensic dental computer programs such as "Win ID" which record the results of the odontologist's examination of human remains, should be shared with the investigative agency as work product, but may be subject to discovery in a court of law.

Once all evidence collection is complete, the lead crime scene investigator will conduct a final survey of the crime scene. In cases of crime scenes processed after dark, the decision may be made to secure the scene until daylight for additional processing. The Forensic Odontologist should be aware of the fact that, in many cases, once the lead crime scene investigator releases the crime scene, there are no additional opportunities to revisit the scene. Examples of these scenarios would be transient outdoor scenes on busy streets, crime scenes processed as a result of a consent search, and crime scenes processed as a result of a search warrant. Should the lead crime scene investigator conclude that no further processing of the crime scene is warranted, exit photographs and log entries will then be taken. The scene will then be released to a responsible party with narrative entries as to that party's name, identifying information, date and time of release, and the name of the releasing investigator.

Walkthrough, Transient Evidence, Chain of Custody