



Criminalistics Section – 2004

B38 Forensic Scientists at the Crime Scenes—Past, Present, and Future

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After attending this presentation, attendees will understand that what may be eroding the role forensic scientists could be playing in the criminal justice system.

This presentation will demonstrate how to begin thinking about the implications to crime scene processing and forensic scientists' criminal justice role

The Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives has utilized scientists at major fire and explosion scenes since the late-1970s. They are an integral part of ATF's National Response Teams (NRT) and have played important roles in major investigations ranging from the recent DC sniper investigation to overseas terrorist bombings.

At these major scenes the scientist, often a chemist, plays many roles. He/she assists in the scene processing, provides technical information about materials at the scene and most importantly is an advisor to the team supervisor and a consultant to the team members. Examples of these roles will be discussed.

ATF's NRTs are continually evolving to incorporate new technologies that include crime scene mapping, and other technical and scientific specialties. One of the newest additions to the NRTs has been engineers with a variety of specialties...fire protection, mechanical, and electrical. The Fire Research Laboratory's mission is to support fire investigations in the field, as well as the laboratory. The FRL scientists approaches will be discussed and illustrated.

What about the other 99% of the cases? What is the role of the laboratory scientist versus that of the crime scene technician? One does not replace the other. What is the appropriate quality assurance standard required for scientists working in the field? To which field role do the standards apply?

Are we inadvertently restricting the role that forensic scientists play? Misinterpretation or misunderstanding of accreditation and certification standards may be restricting the effective use of forensic scientists. Laboratory management may be unintentionally eroding scientists' roles, both in the laboratory and in the field, and reducing highly skilled examiners to technicians. Once there is a perceived limitation about what role the laboratory examiner should be playing an insidious erosion in what the scientist is able or qualified to perform begins.

How do we maximize the role of the forensic scientist to provide bulletproof evidence in court, as well as provide forensic intelligence to support investigations in a way that only a scientist can?

Crime Scene, Forensic Scientist, Laboratory