



A71 The Imperial Avenue Strangler: Issues in Crime Scene Documentation and Evidence Collection

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After attending this presentation, attendees will understand challenges to documenting a complex homicide scene involving multiple victims killed at various times and will become acquainted with existing and emerging technology for crime scene processing and documentation.

This presentation will impact the forensic science community by serving as a key aspect of crime and/or death scene documentation by augmenting traditional still photography with full spherical images, scene diagrams, and other pertinent information relevant to the ongoing investigation, presenting viewers with an ability to have unrestricted views of crime and death settings as if they were on-site.

The Imperial Avenue Strangler case presented the challenges of documenting the locations of 11 fatalities within the same crime scene area, the collection of evidence pertaining to the 11 fatalities from both inside and outside of a three story residence, and the recognition and collection of evidence from inside of the residence from an unknown number of non-fatal sexual assaults. Of the 11 fatalities, six were located within the residence and five were buried in shallow graves in the rear yard. Recognition and collection of probative evidence linking the suspect to the 11 fatalities, regardless of the location from which each body was recovered, was also a major consideration. Recovery and documentation of the buried remains located in the rear yard proceeded in typical fashion. The overburden covering the shallow graves was removed mechanically. Recovery of bodies and foreign material was performed by shovel, trowel, and hand. Each of the victims recovered from the rear yard was wrapped in plastic, cloth, or a combination of both. The wrappings were robust enough to keep each victim's remains encapsulated. Had the victims not been wrapped, it would have necessitated an "archeological" style dig to recover all of the victim's clothing, property, and remains.

Inside the residence, an in-depth multi-format photographic documentation scheme was employed. Still photography combined with 360 degree panoramic high dynamic range image capture ensured a complete digital image recording of each room within the scene. Using software, the photographic narrative was then overlaid onto detailed drawings allowing for "virtual" navigation within the resultant digital scene. Any documentation and evidence collection had to be exhaustive because there was a real possibility that the residence would be completely destroyed once the scene was released. Once the scene documentation was complete, each room was subjected to evidence collection focused on obtaining probative items pertaining to the known fatalities and/or suspected non-fatal sexual assaults. It was decided that any items with potential probative value would be collected from the residence. The broad spectrum collection scheme would ensure that a high percentage of useful evidence items would be collected, even if the probative value of a specific item wouldn't be realized until a later date or at all. Specific attention was applied to the collection of known samples from the residence which could at a later date be compared to evidence items collected from the wrappings received with the victims' bodies. Examples of reference samples collected from the residence included tape, plastic bags, carpet fibers, and carpet pad. The experience of the Imperial Avenue Strangler case has shown that to be effective in scene documentation and evidence collection for a complex multi-victim crime scene, a strategic plan incorporating input from investigative agencies is necessary. Also, a comprehensive image capture scheme beyond typical still images is desirable to ensure that the condition of the crime scene is recorded and can be accessed at will even if the physical scene is ultimately destroyed.

Crime Scene Documentation, Evidence Collection, Serial Homicide