



A73 Quality Control on Crime Scene for First Response and “On the Spot Activities”

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After attending this presentation, attendees will understand that the lack of Standardized Operation Procedures (SOPs) for the management of crime scene evidence in the judiciary system commonly leads to acquittal decisions due to the unreliable nature of the scientific investigations of the police.

This presentation will impact the forensic science community by highlighting the importance of Standardized Operation Procedures (SOP) in the first response and “on the spot activities” at the crime scene. It is intended to be a call to action to the scientific community to become involved and proactive in the creation of such procedures in the countries where a void still exists in this area.

Introduction: Crime scenes that involve offenses of a violent nature are worthy of special note for two reasons. Such crime scenes very often involve the distribution of blood, body tissue, and several types of traces from the offender. For this reason, they can provide excellent contact trace material and potential evidence. But the investigation of these violent crime scenes can be quite complex both in the first response and in the crime scene investigation. There are a variety of techniques and tools that can be used to visualize and collect all types of evidence. Mistakes or oversights made during the management of crime scene can have a great impact on the final outcome of the case. For a crime involving scientific evidence, it needs to be processed with Standardized Operation Procedures (SOP) which detail the sequential steps of the investigation.

Objective: Standardized Operation Procedures (SOP) for the management of forensic evidence at the crime scene are missing in many countries, including a large part of the European nations. The study presents a statistical analysis of several Italian and other European countries’ decisions in which, despite the large amount of scientific evidence collected at the crime scene, the supreme criminal courts were unable to condemn the accused. The forensic investigations were not considered reliable enough to determine the standard of proof required by the law because the management of the process of the evidence in the first response and “on the spot activities” (such as initial assessment, identification of key evidence areas, preservation of the scene, crime scene documentation and recording, packaging and removal of traces) were conducted by the police without complying with Standardized Operation Procedures (SOP). Commonly, the practices introduced by the police for the processes of recovery, packaging, and storage of scientific material have been considered inadequate by the court to avoid contamination.

Goal: The goal of the study is to underline the importance of incorporating an accreditation process into crime scene investigations and to highlight the role played by SOP in ensuring both the quality of scientific investigations at the crime scene and the fairness of the judicial outcome.

Result: As a result of the efforts described in this study, a committee was recently formed in Italy to create the first Italian SOP for the activities of first response and crime scene investigations. This multidisciplinary working group is composed of members of police forces, magistrates, lawyers, forensic sciences experts, and academics. At the moment, it has drafted standardized guidelines on each step of crime scene investigation (such as observation, pre-examination, multi-communication, preservation, initial report, initial strategy, choice of methods and techniques, collection, packaging, chain of custody from crime scene to office/lab, storage items, and final report).

The procedures have been submitted to a large group of crime scene investigators attending training courses at the high schools of the police departments. At the end of the training courses, investigators have been asked to highlight the advantages of the introduced procedures, to focus on possible points of weakness of the procedures, and to strictly apply them when investigations are in progress.

Crime Scene, Forensic Investigation, SOP