



E22 Shot in the Back: A Case Study of a Murder Investigation in Indiana

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After attending this presentation, attendees will understand the importance of law enforcement officers and prosecutors working together during an investigation through the collection of evidence at the crime scene, the processing of the forensic evidence collected, the release of information to the public regarding the investigation, and the prosecution of the accused.

This presentation will impact the forensic science community by providing a case example of the importance of collecting forensic evidence by law enforcement officers and coordinating with the prosecutor on the progress of the investigation. In addition, it will demonstrate how the release of certain information about an investigation prior to the analysis of evidence obtained can interfere with the prosecution of the accused. The case example will illustrate how vital it is for the law enforcement officers, forensic experts, and prosecutors to collaborate from the first moment a murder is reported.

The primary goal of this presentation is to present a case study of a homicide investigation in a rural county in Indiana. Jasper County, a rural northwest county in Indiana with a population of less than 40,000 people, has had less than ten reported homicides over the last 25 years. In Jasper County, law enforcement officers and prosecutors rarely have the opportunity to investigate homicides. Therefore, when a homicide investigation arises, the investigation has the potential of becoming problematic based on the lack of frequency with which they occur.

In this particular case study, law enforcement officers responded to a shooting at the home of a man and his son. When they arrived, the father was found lying dead on the front porch, with a gunshot wound to his back. The son told the officers that he shot his father in self defense and in defense of his girlfriend, whom his father had been sexually assaulting. A crime scene technician arrived and processed the scene and collected forensic evidence for analysis. Law enforcement officers continued to investigate the crime by questioning witnesses about what they observed. Based on the initial information, the law enforcement agency issued a press release regarding the alleged crime and the suspect, before all elements of the case were in. This press release was issued without consulting the prosecutor's office and prior to the crime scene technician providing his report. Of significance in the press release was the statement that the shooting was the result of a domestic dispute that started because of the father's sexual advances on the girlfriend. Eventually, law enforcement officers and the prosecutor assembled to discuss the investigation and ensure that necessary evidence was obtained that had previously not been considered, such as DNA analysis of the girlfriend's clothing, toxicological results of both the suspect and the victim, and retrieving phone records of the suspect. When the evidence and statements were obtained, they presented evidence that contradicted the story of the accused.

Law enforcement and prosecutors learned many valuable lessons on how to investigate a crime, the necessity of being informed of the investigation, and the importance of when to release information about the investigation. In response to the case, a policy was established for responding to a murder investigation and how the collaboration of law enforcement, prosecutors, and forensic experts is essential.

Criminal Justice, Evidence Collection, Case Study