



---

### **E66 Forensic Archaeology and Surface Scatter Body Recovery: A Contested Missing Person Case**

*Sharon K. Moses, PhD\*, Northern Arizona University, 555 E Pine Knoll Drive, Bldg 98D, PO Box 15200, Flagstaff, AZ 86011*

---

After attending this presentation, attendees will have a clearer understanding of complications that can result from non-professionals in charge of and participating in a surface scatter body recovery, as well as issues that arise when county jurisdictions inadvertently prevent information sharing when a protocol is not in place.

This presentation will impact the forensic science community by demonstrating: (1) how simple protocols enable law enforcement to avoid unnecessary delay or failure to link pertinent data in a missing person case across jurisdictional lines; and, (2) the need to exercise discernment and limitations in allowing non-professionals to document a recovery scene.

This presentation will provide an overview of a case that resulted in a lawsuit that changed a state's policy on cross-referencing the data banks of abandoned cars with missing person cases. It is also a cautionary tale intended to motivate establishment of standards, limitations, and parameters for volunteer organizations with little or no professional background in archaeology that assist law enforcement in missing person body recoveries that may later prove to be criminal cases.

It will also demonstrate how to avoid unnecessary delay or failure to link pertinent data relevant to investigating missing person cases across jurisdictional lines. Furthermore, it will show how minimally trained or untrained volunteers participating in a surface body scatter can complicate and negatively affect community and law enforcement relationships and documentation of the scene for future reference.

Forensic archaeologists can offer more to interpretation of a body recovery scene than individuals who have not had the benefit of an in-depth education that equips them with understanding landscape and geological considerations, human behavior, animal behavior, taphonomy, and documenting a body recovery for future reconstruction within a scientific paradigm, should it become necessary.

In Fall 2012, contact was made by a county sheriff's department, its coroner, and by the family of a missing person, for assistance of a forensic archaeologist in a body recovery and professional documentation of the site to quell unrest. A 54-year-old male had been missing for nearly two years until a timber worker stumbled upon a human bone in the course of marking trees for harvest. What followed was a body recovery wherein previously missed opportunities had led to a six-month delay in locating the last known whereabouts of the missing individual, insinuations of a police cover-up, and unfounded speculations by volunteer non-archaeologists involved in the surface scatter body recovery. Furthermore, because of the fomented distrust of law enforcement and due to their ignorance about recovery sites, the volunteers had compromised the recovery area in an effort to make the work of the forensic archaeologist "easier."

---

#### **Forensic Archaeology, Human Remains, Surface Scatter**