



D19 Checking Canine and Handler Credentials Entering a Crime Scene and Evidence Contamination

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After attending this presentation, attendees will understand the techniques of checking cadaver canine credentials before entering a crime scene, what the cadaver canine credentials are, and how they affect the case. Cadaver canine handlers receive national certification by taking courses that are accepted by the National Incident Management System (NIMS). Attendees of this presentation will discover what happens when a cadaver canine personnel spoils the scene by intentionally dropping physical evidence onto the scene that is not related to the case, only to have it turned over to police personnel as physical evidence.

This presentation will impact the forensic science community by demonstrating the importance of relying on the real physical evidence at hand and by illustrating how to treat unrelated spoiled evidence brought into the scene by someone else.

This case involves a single motor vehicle accident. The vehicle traveled off the right side of roadway, missed the guardrail, went down a ravine, and struck the embankment. The creek was full of water and no body was recovered with the vehicle. A cadaver canine with handler was called into the scene to check for the driver. The cadaver canine personnel “planted” a human toe on the scene when no one was looking. The canine alerted the handler to the human toe. The toe was submitted as evidence to police personnel. Eight weeks later, the body surfaced approximately one mile down the river. This body had work boots on and all toes were accounted for by the medical examiner. Two medical examiners were working on this case and neither would sign the death certificate due to foul play, not knowing whose toe was in police possession. It was difficult to confirm if the body was correctly identified as the driver of the vehicle, because the body was decomposed. As the driver in question had only visited the dentist twice in the driver’s life, dental records were unable to confirm the driver’s identity. Cross-parenting DNA was then utilized to determine the identity of the driver. The next step was to determine whose toe the police had and whether it pertained to the crash.

The investigator examined the body and the interior of the vehicle for cross-matching evidence to confirm the driver’s movement inside the vehicle. Also, the investigator needed to determine how the body exited the vehicle after impact with the embankment. The vehicle had a clothing imprint transfer to the “A” pillar. This “A” pillar was cut from the vehicle and shown to the medical examiners to assist in the investigation. The investigation turned to the canine cadaver handler and a search warrant was issued for the canine handler’s residence. The toe was not a part of the collision. The canine cadaver handler was charged with planting physical evidence on several crime scenes in many different states.

When evidence is found, it is accepted as fact without question by the forensic community. Once accepted, it is part of the investigation and submitted to the pertinent parties. In this case, the evidence was accepted and ruled out. In general, tampering with evidence leads to disciplinary action. The body that was found with ten toes was a crucial finding, leading to the discovery of evidence planting at the scene. Accepting the toe as physical evidence made it difficult to complete what should have been an easy investigation of a single-death motor vehicle crash.

Canine cadaver handlers have certifications for both the canine and the handler. These certifications should be checked upon entry to the scene. If the scene involves water, there are water Human Remains Detection (HRD)



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certifications available for both the handler and the canine. Canines have a special enhanced ability to recover human remains when trained to do so. Canines do an outstanding job in covering large amounts of area in detecting human remains, with the canine and the handler generally working together as a team. The certifications are not transferable between handlers.

Cadaver Canine Credentials, Scene Spoilation, Trusting Scene's Real Evidence