



Luncheon Seminar - 2017

L1 Murder on Campus — Understanding the Critical Incident and Forensic Response to a Targeted Murder on a College Campus

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After attending this presentation, attendees will gain a better understanding of the events surrounding a brutal targeted murder on the campus of Purdue University, including lessons learned from the initial response to the scene of a critical incident and the coordination of processing multiple scenes in separate jurisdictions.

This presentation will impact the forensic science community by detailing the facts surrounding the response to a critical incident, the communication challenges faced by first responders, safety concerns when responding to an active scene, and the forensic tasks employed to process multiple crime scenes properly. Subsequent laboratory analysis and court preparation will also be discussed.

In recent years, professional police agencies around the nation and world have trained to confront and to neutralize active shooter events. The Purdue University Police Department is among those agencies. While this incident did not claim multiple victims, as it was a targeted murder, lessons from the initial police response, crime scene investigation, and meeting the subsequent community expectations will be of great impact to the forensic community.

Tuesday, January 21, 2014, was a frigid winter day in West Lafayette. Students had recently returned to campus after the holiday break and were settling in to a new semester. Community members were making lunch plans without an inkling that tragedy was about to strike.

At 12:03 p.m., the Purdue University Police Department started receiving numerous Emergency 911 calls reporting that shots had been fired within the Electrical Engineering Building and that a killer was on the loose. As this report was dispatched via police radios, officers from three area agencies began to respond to the area. Responding officers made entry into the academic building, prepared to confront an active shooter. In accordance with their training, they rushed past the panicked students and faculty and made their way toward the basement. When the first officers made it to the scene, they found to their surprise, that the classroom laboratory was still full of students. Some of the students were even standing over their deceased teaching assistant, too shocked to move. Police quickly took control of the environment by ensuring that the student witnesses were taken care of and sequestered. Officers then began to search the area, looking for the killer. These searches quickly bore positive results, as the suspect surrendered himself outside of the building, not 100 yards from where he had claimed a life. Secondary searches of the building commenced as officers began to look for additional threats to the public. Investigators closest to the apprehension of the suspect were given strong reason to believe that the suspect had acted alone. To the rest of the responding officers, the “fog of war” had descended and situational awareness became the greatest of currency. Rumors of additional shooters abounded in the early minutes of the response. These rumors were compounded by confusing radio communication and the activation of the fire alarm, which triggered a full evacuation of the building.

Even while the scene remained chaotic, crime scene professionals from four separate agencies began to descend upon the scene. A true team effort would take place in the processing of the murder scene. This effort would include many specializations such as blood spatter analysis, photogrammetry, medicolegal death investigation, and computer forensics.

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Murder, Critical Incident, Crime Scene Investigation

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