



E35 Crime Scene Reconstruction in an Organization of Scientific Area Committees (OSAC) World

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Learning Overview: After attending this presentation, attendees will understand the important role crime scene reconstruction has in the understanding and interpreting of forensic evidence in both criminal and civil cases. The conspicuous absence of a separate crime scene reconstruction subcommittee as part of the National Institute of Standards and Technology (NIST) Organization of Scientific Area Committees (OSAC) tacitly suggests that the interpretation of the physical evidence is best handled in a courtroom or otherwise as part of the legal process.

Impact on the Forensic Science Community: This presentation will impact the forensic science community by starting a conversation about what happens to the evidence we analyze. Specifically, should we develop and apply scientific standards to how we interpret evidence in much the same way we apply standards to how we examine evidence?

With the creation of the OSAC under NIST, considerable progress has been made to strengthen the scientific foundations and processes in many forensic disciplines. What is lacking is the development of a similar process for crime scene reconstruction. When the significance or interpretation of forensic evidence is disputed, and in particular when that information needs to be integrated into the body of investigative information, a crime scene reconstructionist can help evaluate possible scenarios. With so much emphasis on solidifying forensic science, why has the interpretation of that information been left to be decided in a courtroom? Shouldn't the interpretation of forensic science (in the context of a case) be subject to the same types of guidance we seek to codify as part of the OSAC standards development process?

The absence of a reconstruction committee suggests that either the forensic science community does not concern itself with the interpretation of its work product or that we believe that this is adequately handled as part of the adversarial court system. Neither is (or should be) true. While an OSAC crime scene investigation subcommittee already exists, the sheer amount of work before them in addition to reconstruction makes this too large a task for a single subcommittee to handle. Additionally, with all the potential disciplines reconstruction can draw their information from, a dedicated committee with representation from many disciplines should be developed.

At the root of many legal cautionary tales on the use of forensic science are issues of interpretation and presentation of forensic evidence. If we fail to act decisively, we run the risk of having this critical function curtailed. Shouldn't we provide guidance for the reasonable interpretation of forensic evidence just as we do for understanding the results in a specific discipline?

Crime Scene Reconstruction, OSAC, Standards