



### B36 Criminalists at the Crime Scene: Where Do They Come From and Where Can They Go?

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**Learning Overview:** After attending this presentation, attendees will better understand the myriad ways organizations recruit crime scene investigators, with emphasis on the variation in required education, training, and experience. The goal of this presentation is to encourage attendees to address what is needed to be a successful crime scene investigator and what educational and career paths are necessary to ensure a sustainable solution to crime scene staffing.

**Impact on the Forensic Science Community:** Crime scene investigation and reconstruction are scientific endeavors requiring individuals educated and trained in the principles of criminalistics, as well as the fundamentals of critical thinking and reasoning. This presentation will impact the forensic science community by explaining that the technical “bag and tag” approach is not sustainable for the complexity of today’s cases and the increased momentum toward robustness and accountability in forensic science endeavors. Panelists from the United States, Europe, and Australia will share their experiences with these different solutions, and provide opinions on what the critical elements for success are and what still needs to be improved on a system scale in order to ensure that forensic science is used to its full potential at the crime scene.

Attendees will be encouraged to provide their own experiences and concerns in an effort to facilitate discussion and broaden the scope of the presentation topic.

Crime scene work is arguably the most critical part of the forensic science process. The changing crime and security environment, including increased traceability (e.g., more varied trace sources, larger volume of traces, pace, blurring of physical and digital lives, etc.), continue to add complexity to crime scene work. Developments in quality assurance and accreditation within the discipline of crime scene investigation have increased the pressure on these actors to reflect on how to validate their standard operating procedures and how to demonstrate the competence of their staff.

Some jurisdictions follow a testing lab model based on the “bag and tag” approach (i.e., the scene investigator collect traces, perhaps triaging the packaged items, and then sends “test tubes” to a forensic laboratory that is increasingly disconnected from the forensic science problems). In this model, crime scene investigation is often undertaken by sworn officers and the scientific education, training, and experience of these individuals can be quite diverse.

In some jurisdictions, there has been a push for civilian scientists at the crime scene, with science graduates being recruited. This alone does not necessarily solve the problem—a science graduate does not necessarily translate to an effective examiner. Only a few of these individuals manage to find a path of appropriate career progression, perhaps because the culture remains that to progress you must be a sworn member of law enforcement.

In other jurisdictions, generally those with an integrated lab/forensic service within police agencies, the situation has been more seamless, and there is less obvious distinction between sworn and unsworn members of the crime scene investigation unit. An example of this is the Australian Federal Police (AFP) who now apply a problem-oriented/consultancy model within their organization. Crime scene investigation is undertaken by sworn and unsworn employees, and there are ample opportunities for people to move from one space to the other.

The critical point is to have staff with the appropriate education, skills, and abilities to do the job properly. If the crime scene poses a scientific problem, then appropriately trained scientists are necessary to provide the solutions.

The feature of sworn vs. unsworn crime scene staff may seem to be of importance mainly for law enforcement organizations, but it can also have wider implications on the staffing and oversight of crime scene units under diverse management models. How can law enforcement attract, screen for, and retain critically thinking scientists for crime scene work? Is the strategy to recruit scientists and educate/train them to operate in the context of police work or to recruit police officers and educate/train them to be scientists? How can these strategies be successful? What positions can sworn or unsworn criminalists apply for when they want to or need to move on from operational crime scene work? What role can and should the forensic laboratory play in this framework?

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#### Crime Scene, Competence, Career Path