

SCRANTON POLICE DEPARTMENT POLICY

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Policy Subject:
Crime Scenes

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PLEAC Standard(s):

I. Purpose

The actions taken by patrol and investigative officers at crime scenes often determine the course and success of a criminal investigation. Initial responding officers play the lead role by protecting the crime scene, rendering emergency services and initiating the investigation. Thus, it is the purpose of this policy to provide officers with guidelines for responding to and dealing effectively with the operational demands at crime scenes.

II. Policy

It is the policy of the Scranton Police Department that all officers understand and follow applicable procedures established herein to effectively protect, collect and preserve evidence of a crime scene and conduct initial investigative and other essential tasks at crimes scenes. It is the policy of the Scranton Police Department that all officers treat all scenes as crime scenes until determined otherwise.

III. Procedures

A. Initial Response

Initial responding officers shall initiate the preliminary investigation and perform tasks as designated below until otherwise directed by a supervisor, detective or other officer specifically assigned to criminal investigations.

1. In transit to crime scenes, officers shall be cognizant of suspects/vehicles that may be in flight.
2. Upon arrival, verify that a crime has been committed and relay essential information to communications.
3. Administer first aid and/or summon emergency medical assistance if required and take those necessary steps to protect victims or others.

4. Arrest the perpetrator if at the scene. A decision to leave the crime scene to arrest or pursue the perpetrator should be made based on weighing the immediate needs of victims and others against the safety of the public if the perpetrator were to escape.
5. Provide communications with such information as
 - a. nature of the crime committed;
 - b. description of the perpetrator;
 - c. description of any vehicles used by the offender and any accomplices;
 - d. use of firearms or other deadly weapons;
 - e. any support required at the crime scene; and
 - f. notify a supervisor to respond.
6. Identify any witnesses to the crime, secure their identities and request that they remain immediately outside the perimeter of the crime scene until they can be interviewed.
 - a. Where reasonably possible, obtain the identities on any other persons who were present upon arrival at the crime scene.
 - b. Note the license tags of vehicles parked near the crime scene and be aware of suspicious persons on hand at or near the crime scene.
7. Provide superior officers and any other investigative personnel arriving on the scene with complete information on the offense and the measures taken thus far by officers and others.

B. Preservation of the Crime Scene

1. **Initial** responding officers shall enter crime scenes **only** for purposes of aiding victims or bystanders in need of immediate assistance, apprehending perpetrators or securing the scene.
 - a. Officers making initial entries for the above purposes shall, where feasible, avoid touching, walking upon, moving objects or otherwise altering or contaminating the crime scene.
2. Once **initial officers** have immediately rendered the scene safe, they shall reasonably determine and define the boundaries of the crime scene to include all areas that may reasonably be searched for evidence. **Once the scene has been rendered safe by initial responding officers, No other individual(s), including attorneys, officers, detectives and/or supervisors, shall enter the crime scene. The next person to enter the crime scene shall be the Crime Scene (processing) Detective(s), or Coroner or Deputy Coroner. *The processing officer (Crime Scene Detective) may, after his/her initial processing of the scene, authorize the investigating officer/detective to assist him/her within scene.***

- a. Officers shall retreat to the perimeter or threshold of the crime scene;
- b. officers should request backup, if necessary, to restrict access to the crime scene and control any onlookers;
- c. erect barricade tape or otherwise restrict access to defined crime scene perimeters;
- d. officers are to maintain the crime scene from the perimeter or threshold of the crime scene, not from within the scene itself;
- e. assign an officer(s) to start a crime scene log(s). The log is two sided with the first side to contain the names of persons that had been in the crime scene, reason for entering the crime scene and times inside the scene. The second side is to contain the names of the officers that are maintaining the crime scene (crime scene log), but not entering it;
- f. record any alterations made at the crime scene due to emergency assistance to victims, the actions of persons reporting the crime, handling of any items or evidentiary value or other actions; and
- g. officers shall hold the crime scene and continue with the crime scene log(s) until instructed otherwise by an authorized supervisor.

C. Collection of Evidence

Unless exigent circumstances exist or authorization of a supervisor is received, initial responding officers at crime scenes **shall not** engage in collection of items of potential evidentiary value.

1. See section H on Digital Photo Policy 07-012.

D. Interviewing Witnesses

Witnesses at the crime scene shall be identified and preliminary interviews conducted as soon as possible. As soon as possible, the neighborhood surrounding the crime scene should be canvassed in order to identify additional witnesses or others who may have some knowledge of the crime. The purpose and scope of these interviews is to gather as much basic information as possible about the crime at the earliest point possible in order to identify the perpetrator and establish the basis for follow-up investigation.

E. Crime Scene Reporting

Officers conducting the preliminary and follow-up investigations shall complete appropriate and thorough reports in accordance with agency policy. At a **minimum**, reports shall include

1. date and time of arrival at the scene;
2. any relevant weather or situational conditions at the scene to include the status of the crime scene upon arrival (e.g., fire,

crowds, and initial observations) and the initial observations of the first responding officer(s) on the scene (i.e. upon arrival I observed....);

3. how the crime was discovered and reported and the relationship of reporting individuals to victims or others if appropriate;
4. identity of individuals, other officers/detectives/supervisors and/or emergency personnel present upon arrival and those who responded to the crime scene thereafter;
5. physical evidence discovered and officers responsible for collection;
6. names, addresses and telephone numbers, and/or other appropriate identification of witnesses or potential witnesses to the crime;
7. results of interviews with victims and witnesses to include in particular the identity or best possible description of suspects, method of operation, means of escape, and any other pertinent identifying information;
8. diagrams, sketches, photographs, video tape or other similar information made at the scene or the identity of officers or civilians who made such recordings; and
9. names of other individuals and/or investigative tools/resources that may be able to provide additional information to help identify the perpetrator(s) of the crime.

By Order Of:

Chief Carl R. Graziano
Superintendent of Police
Scranton Police Department