

# Forensic Investigation Protocols for the Search Dog Handler



# Introduction

This course is offered to help familiarize Search Dog Handlers and other forensic specialists with various aspects of crime scene investigation. It may be used by organizations as training for their members or by individuals. It is not intended to replace an organization's protocols or procedures.

The authors welcome your feedback. Contact information and brief biographical sketches are located at the end of this presentation.

# Overview

- Search Dog Handlers are called upon to find evidence, people, and possible locations of interest to a forensic investigation.
- It is important to have an understanding of the basic concepts of what constitutes evidence and how the integrity of the evidence is important to an investigation.
- It is important to have a well formed protocol for participating in the investigation.
- The investigation might be civil, criminal, or administrative. In all cases the method of participation should reflect one's protocol.

# Protocol

- To help manage all that needs to be done in a search dog operation it is best to have established protocols.
- A protocol is a way of going about doing something. It might be a written policy or procedure, an understood method of doing something, or a checklist.
- It is important that the protocol reflect an understanding of evidence, scene processing techniques, legal requirements for search and seizure, documentation of scene actions, integrity of evidence, and ethical behavior.
- The protocol should be based on training, experience, and communication among practitioners.

# Working Towards a Protocol

- The following information is intended to contribute to an understanding of forensic investigations.
- The object in presenting this information is for you to be able to develop and maintain a viable protocol for participating in a forensic investigation.
- A well developed protocol will ensure that you are thorough, not biased, objective, follow best practices, and establish yourself as a professional.
- Dr. Paul Kirk, a well known criminalist, provided some insightful comments on the role of a Criminal Investigator. You can substitute Search Dog Handler for Criminal Investigator.

# Dr. Paul Kirk (1902-1970)

“All criminal investigation is concerned either with *people* or with *things*. Only people commit crimes, but they invariably do so through the medium of things...

A balanced approach to criminal investigation must be dual, that is, it must concern itself with people and with the things that are involved in the crime... Many investigators have failed in some degree to make the most efficient use of this balanced approach to the investigation of crime. Their failures are often caused by insufficient realization of the enormous potentialities of physical evidence. The investigator, to realize his maximum goal, must understand: (a) what physical evidence is; (b) how to collect and preserve it; (c) how to obtain from it the information it carries; and (d) how to interpret the information so obtained.”

- Dr. Paul Kirk, Crime Investigation. New York: Interscience Publishers, 1953, p.3.

**One can substitute forensic investigation for criminal investigation.**

# It is not easy!

- This involves identifying and securing (protecting) the scene, the use of astute powers of observation and the recognition, documentation, and preservation of evidence.
- Scenes can be very busy, with a lot of things going on at the same time. Multiple tasking while maintaining personnel, animal and personal control is essential to good scene management.
- This necessitates management in all its various forms from the first moment of notice of a request for assistance, to the first moment of arrival, to leaving the scene to writing reports, to appearing in legal proceedings and consultations.
- Protocol(s) are the baseline for effective, efficient, and economical management of the total search.

# Three Important Concepts

- **Document**: Keep a record of everything you do related to the investigation from the time you got the call to the end of the case. Make a case file and keep everything in the file.
- **Personal Vitae**: Create a resume that presents all your personal information including contact information, qualifications to include education and work experience, times and dates of training, presentations you have made, articles you have written, and any personal research you have done. Keep all certificates of training in a folder that you can easily retrieve if need. Keep any relevant written articles to what you do as a dog handler in this folder. This is for quick reference and retrieval if you should be called to court or any legal proceeding.
- **Maintain Objectivity and Ethical Behavior**: Do not cheat, lie, or fudge. If you speculate say you did so. Following protocols and documentation are hedges against accusations of bias, subjectivity, and unethical behavior.

# The Forensic Scene

# The Scene

- It is the physical location or a physical item of legal interest. If it was a criminal event, it could be the physical location such as a field or house where a crime took place. If it is searching for a lost person, it might be the last known location of the person or an item of clothing that has the scent of the person.
- It is the location from which much of the ***physical evidence*** associated with the event will be obtained.
- There can be multiple scenes. As an example, a vehicle can be one scene, a business another scene, a residence a scene, an item of clothing a scene, and a burial or reburial site a scene.
- Scenes can be Indoor/Outdoor, and Simple/Complex, Primary/Secondary.

*The call comes in.....*

# First Responders



- Police arrive ensuring personal safety.
- First responders make mental notes, physical notes, tape recorder notes – observations from the senses, training, and intuition.

# The First Responder

- Crime Scenes and Failure Investigation Scenes can be very busy events. Many people have jobs to do, but only one has the responsibility to provide a final presentation of the information and data from the scene – the Scene Manager.
- Crime scene management starts with the first responder.
- The first responder must
  - stabilize the scene
  - secure the scene
  - call for resources
  - document observations



# Stabilize the Scene

- Identify the scene or scenes.
- Broadcast relevant information.
- Neutralize threats.
- Treat or assist in treating the injured.
- Retain and secure the scene, suspects, witnesses, and vulnerable evidence.
- Observe and record scene activities through personal notes, audio recorder, and digital camera. Record your activities as K9 Handler, and any briefing information you received from others at the scene.



# Observe

- Time of call and arrival on scene. Who was at the scene when you arrived.
- Weather and temperature.
- Doors open, unlocked?
- Windows secure?
- Lights on or off?
- Damage.
- What seems to be out of place? Was anything moved?
- You should do the same as a K9 Handler in the investigation.



# Secure (Protect) the Scene

- Once threats have been neutralized and emergency medical has left, set scene boundaries.
- Protect any fragile and frangible evidence.
- Once scene boundaries have been set, restrict access to the scene: keep a log.
- As a K9 Handler, make sure you understand what might be fragile or frangible evidence and what you must do to protect the evidence and the integrity of any evidence. Ask questions if you have a concern.



# Secure the Scene!

- Establish the Perimeter and tape it off.
- Establish path of entry and exit.
- Do not *unnecessarily* walk through crime scene.
- Only authorized personnel should be in the scene after it is secured.
- Keep an attendance log!
- Detain and separate witnesses/victims and suspects.
- Do not alter or move anything prior to documentation.
- As a K-9 Handler, make sure you understand the boundaries of the scene.

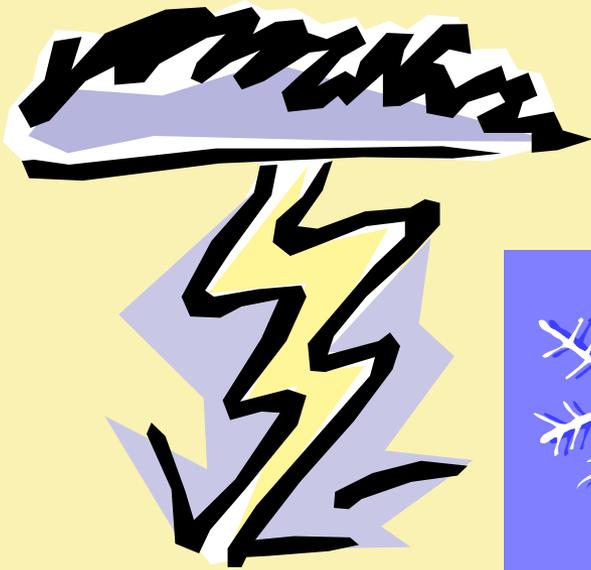


Photo courtesy of Det. Anna Romito, Akron, Ohio Police Department

# Tip of the Trade: The Barney Fife Method?

- The previous scenes illustrate that it is a difficult task to protect and secure the scene. It also establishes the importance of the role of the first responder. If the first responder is not properly trained, the integrity of the scene may be less than what would have been the best case. Crime Scene Management involves training and supervising, directly or situationally, the first responder. If the scene security needs to be addressed, the Crime Scene Manager needs to take charge and get it done correctly.
- Many agencies rely heavily on formal directives to deal with first responder activities and first responder miss-steps. First responders have a lot to do. Often gentle reminders and suggestions can go a lot further than hyper-criticism. We have all worked with the hyper-critical who seem to have a personal mission to find fault with others. I have heard of one who went so far as to formally issue “Barney Fife” awards to police officers who left their fingerprints at a crime scene. Do you think there could be another method to resolve this issue, if it was an issue?
- The search dog handler must be aware of the scene boundaries, what is secure and not secure, and what is critical to issues of contamination.

# Protecting the scene...



- Preservation of Evidence:
  - Weather: It might be necessary to cover evidence that might be destroyed by rain, snow, wind, heat.
  - Frangible and fragile (easily broken, lost or degraded) evidence may need to be collected immediately.
- Control: People and animals.
- Preserve Integrity: Set up a screen for a deceased person.

# The Many Faces of a Scene



# Ensure Compliance with Legal Requirements

- Search warrants, consent to search, issues of expectation of privacy, and exigent circumstances come into play whenever there is an official investigation.
- The crime scene investigator must make sure he has a legal right to be in a given place and a legal right to gather evidence. This includes information from interviews.
- All “permission” information must be carefully documented in reports.
- As a Kg Handler, make sure you fully understand the legal status of your participation. If you are in doubt, ask if there is a warrant, permission, or extenuating circumstances. Put this information in your report.

# Call for Resources

- Additional personnel may be needed to stabilize the scene, retain witnesses and suspects, and to protect the scene.
- Supervisors and upper management may respond to coordinate the investigation, authorize resources, and take over management.
- Crime scene investigators and forensic scientists may respond to do the crime scene investigation.
- Other agencies, often called OPS Agencies (Outside Police Service) such as Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) Occupational Health and Safety Agency (OSHA), Federal Aviation Administration (FAA), Forensic Specialists such as Search Dog Handlers, and numerous others may have an interest and venue in an investigation and need to enter a scene.

# Forensic Experts at the Scene?

- K9 Teams: locate human remains and other evidence.
- Entomologists: insects, post mortem interval, location.
- Archaeologists: excavation, identification, dating.
- Pathologists: illness, injury, and wound analysis.
- Soil Analysts: location, post mortem interval.
- Odontologists: dentition, identification, habit, age.
- Botanists: identification, location.
- Engineers: failure issues.
- Medical Examiners: injury assessment, cause of death.

# Expert Witnesses & Assistance

- Expert witnesses may charge fees, and outside agencies may charge for their work. The Crime Scene Manager must take any costs into account and have authorization to call in expert witnesses and assistance. As an example, the Douglas County Sheriff's Office, Nebraska often charges if they go to help process a crime scene. The University of Nebraska has an agreement with the Lancaster County Attorney's Office for forensic science services. There may not be costs for certain services, and there may be costs for other services.
- Hospitals may charge for medical records, and news agencies may charge for video and photographs.
- It is imperative that the crime scene manager take into account possible costs from outside agencies.
- If you are called for a K9 assist make sure any fees are fully understood up front before you accept the assignment.

# Who is in Charge of the Scene?

- The scene is a small portion of the overall investigation. It, however, is extremely important to the big picture.
- In most cases a Law Enforcement Officer, EMT, or Firefighter will be the first responder to a scene of a crime. In cases where a Detective does not respond, the Patrol Officer will be responsible for the preliminary investigation and the investigation of the crime scene.
- Someone must be in charge of the scene in order to formally establish who is ultimately accountable and responsible for management of the scene.
- In cases involving multiple agencies this may be determined by statute, memorandums of understanding, or worked out at the scene. In every instance someone must be designated and named in an official document as the person in charge of the scene.
- As a K9 Forensic Specialist, determine who you need to coordinate with for your participation. Get a briefing on what you are to do, any precautions you might need to take during your participation, and provide a briefing on your actions during your participation and your requirements for a successful participation.

# Who is in Charge of the Scene: Part Two

- The important point is to establish a chain of command and when appropriate smoothly pass responsibility for the scene from one person to another person. Within an agency or several geographically close agencies the chain of command is most often covered in protocols, policies, and procedures.
- On a larger scale the Unified Command System under the National Incident Management System (NIMS) may take precedence as the Incident Command. President George Bush mandated that all public safety personnel complete several training courses in Incident Command, Unified Command, and NIMS. This included every commissioned law enforcement officer in the United States, every commissioned fire fighter, and all military personnel.
- Someone, at all times, must be in charge! At the time you are conducting the search you, the K9 Handler, have a position within the chain of command. Make sure people who may be assisting you or observing you know what you need to conduct a successful search. As an example, observers should not do things to distract the dog.

# Who Is In Charge: Part Three

- Law enforcement agencies are usually structured as quasi-military organizations. There will be someone at the scene who is ultimately in charge. Identify and contact that person.
- Make sure you get their phone number, rank, position, and e-mail. Make sure you get the name of every person who assists you, accompanies you, or is in the scene when you are doing your search.
- Put this information in your report.

# The News Media

- Crime scene events are news. Television, newspaper, and independent reporters are usually at any major scene.
- It is important to address the news. It is traditional, and a good practice, for the person in charge to make any comments to the news. These comments should be very general: “We are investigating an alleged injury. We do not have much information at this time. Please check with the Chief, Duty Commander, or Public Information Officer.”
- Many agencies have a policy on who makes news releases. However, there are times when the mike suddenly appears in front of your face. The crime scene manager must be prepared. It does not do to snap at reporters, push them away, or generally be rude.
- Crime scene boundaries should be set so that news media personnel do not interfere with the crime scene investigators, but can have a reasonable view of the general area. They do have a right to report.
- You might be contacted to make a comment about the use of your dog and what you found from your search. Remember, there is not such thing as an off the record comment. Anything you say can be used against you. It is a good practice to refer them to the person in charge or the designated Public Information Officer.

# Thinking About Evidence

# Evidence

- Forensic evidence is anything that can be used to prove something in a legal proceeding.
- Evidence can be physical (blood, hair), testimonial (eyewitness statement), documentary (video recording), and demonstrative (cardboard model of crime scene). — James E. Girard. Criminalistics: Forensic Science, Crime, and Terrorism. Burlington, MA: Jones & Bartlett Learning, 2015, p. 34.
- It can be used to identify, exclude, and associate. It can be direct or circumstantial.
- Evidence is not fact. Facts are only that evidence which has been accepted by the court.

# A Consideration of Evidence

- Professor Edmund Locard philosophized about the exchange of evidence and the importance of evidence. Dr. Paul Kirk put the thoughts of Locard into a more comprehensive statement.
- The basic idea is that when you enter a scene you bring something with you, and when you leave a scene you take something with you. The goal is to minimize taking into and taking out of the scene. This can be done by wearing protective equipment, and by careful navigation of the scene.

# Locard Principle

As stated by Dr. Paul Kirk

"Wherever he steps, whatever he touches, whatever he leaves, even unconsciously, will serve as a silent witness against him. Not only his fingerprints or his footprints, but his hair, the fibers from his clothes, the glass he breaks, the tool mark he leaves, the paint he scratches, the blood or semen he deposits or collects. All of these and more, bear mute witness against him. This is evidence that does not forget. It is not confused by the excitement of the moment. It is not absent because human witnesses are. It is factual evidence. Physical evidence cannot be wrong, it cannot perjure itself, it cannot be wholly absent. Only its interpretation can err. Only human failure to find it, study and understand it, can diminish its value." - Dr. Paul Kirk, Crime Investigation. New York: Interscience Publishers, 1953, p.4.

Professor Edmond Locard(1877-1966): **Every contact leaves a trace.** See [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Locard%27s\\_exchange\\_principle](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Locard%27s_exchange_principle).

# Common Examples of Evidence

- Blood, body fluids
- Clothing
- Notes, letters, journals
- Latex gloves
- Pry bar, tools
- Cigarette butts
- Shoe prints, tire marks
- Fingerprints
- Structural damage and impressions
- Safes, containers
- Emails, texts messages, handwritten notes, journals.
- Weapons, casings, projectiles
- Soil and vegetation
- Insects
- Broken glass
- Drugs/paraphernalia
- Vehicles
- Adhesive tapes
- Video/audio tapes
- Hair/Fiber
- Drinking containers
- Cell phones, computers, iPods



# Evidence Example

- A dog finds a buried piece of clothing that has blood on it.
- The dog's actions are evidence. The location of the clothing is evidence. The clothing is a piece of evidence. The blood is evidence. The soil, vegetation, any footprints, and insects are evidence.
- Any hairs and fibers are evidence. If there was dog hair on the clothing it is evidence, and then the hair of the K9 at the scene would be evidence.
- Do you see why it is important to follow protocols, document, and consciously think about what you are doing to preserve the integrity of evidence?

# Catalog the History of Evidence

- The crime scene investigator is the one who establishes the chain of custody. This is the tracking record, so to speak, of a piece of evidence.
- It is one of the very most important duties of a crime scene investigator after collecting a piece of evidence. A history of a piece of evidence must be established and documented throughout the life of the evidence. This is called the chain of custody.
- **If the Kg Handler discovers a piece of evidence he/she must document by note, sketch, measurements, photographs, and chain of custody or written report. A Crime Scene Investigator might prepare all formal reports. However, it should be noted in the Handler's report and field notes. Unless the evidence is in immediate danger of being destroyed, it should only be collected by authorized personnel.**

# Document Your Dog and Yourself

- Check your dog over and yourself. Make notes on your condition so you can later speak about any possible contamination that might have come from you or your dog.
- As an example, it would be a good idea to have some hair samples, and some pay print samples of your dog somewhere in your files. If appropriate you might want to brush your dog before entering the scene. You can keep the brushings as proof of the condition of your dog. Photographs are another good way to document status of you and your dog.
- Document your dog and yourself after you leave the scene.
- Put this information in your report.

# Case Scenario

- Explain how you would resolve any involvement of your dog if crime scene investigators come up with animal prints somewhere around the scene, and/or came up with hairs on a buried body.

# Catalog the History of Evidence

- The crime scene investigator is the one who establishes the chain of custody. This is the tracking record, so to speak, of a piece of evidence.
- It is one of the very most important duties of a crime scene investigator after collecting a piece of evidence. A history of a piece of evidence must be established and documented throughout the life of the evidence. This is called the chain of custody.
- If K9 handler discovers a piece of evidence or collects a piece of evidence he/she must document by note, sketch, measurements, photographs, and chain of custody or written report. A crime scene investigator might prepare all formal reports. However, it should be noted in the handlers report and field notes.



# Documenting the Scene

- Photographs and video are the first step.
- Field notes, including times/dates/location/actions are the second step.
- Field sketches are the third step. The sketch does not have to be to scale. It should represent the general spatial relationships.
- Formal report is the fourth step
- Save all in a file folder is the last step.

# Search Report

(example form)

## Canine Search Report

Your Name  
Organization or Company  
Address  
And Other Contact Information

Date of call:  
Time of call:

Dog: The name of the dog that worked the search  
Search Location: General Location Information  
Time of Arrival: At the scene or designated meeting place

GPS and other files: List the names of any maps, logs or other supporting documents that you are submitting along with the report.

Approximate Temp: These should be noted as "approximate" unless they are from a verifiable source. Approximate RH: Cloud Cover:

Description of call:  
This is a description of what was said during the original contact, who called, what they told you and what you agreed to do. You should also include a synopsis of any briefing you received at the scene and a list of who you worked with during the search.

Description of Search Areas:  
This includes specific locations and sizes of the areas you searched. It should explain how you subdivided any large areas. You should characterize vegetation, terrain, size and type of buildings, etc.

Description of search:  
This includes a detailed description of what you did, when you did it and what, if anything was found. It may be best to do this as a chronology. For example:

1132 Started K9 Fluffy searching at the southwest corner of Search Area 3. Worked an east / west grid pattern with search lines spaced approximately 10 yards apart until we reached the north boundary of the search area. Detoured the exterior of two abandoned cars which were located in the northwest quadrant of the area. K9 Fluffy did not indicate in this area. 1158

This explains how the area was searched, that the search took 26 minutes and that nothing was found.

Summary:  
This is where you would note any other information you would like to include such as areas you think might need additional attention, an estimate of your Probability of Detection, etc. Any subjective comments could go in this area. Other parts of your report should be restricted to "just the facts".

Followup Information:  
This area is for notes on relevant information that became available after your report was submitted. That might include a call from the agency letting you know what the Crime Scene Team found after you departed. Nothing else on your report should be changed after the report is submitted. This includes correcting typos.

# Crime Scene Sketch



Item	Description
"A"	Knife stuck in a plastic seat on the kitchen floor
"B"	Empty and full liquor bottles on the kitchen counter
"C"	Knocked over chair in the living room
"D"	Pop bottle and purchase receipt on the floor by the entryway
"E"	Fraction of the victim and the knife
"F"	Yellow bed sheet on the bed
"G"	Pieces of hair, hairnets and white wash cloth
"H"	Piece of hair hairnet
"I"	Letters indicating occupancy and cell phone
•	Blood spatter on the bedroom floor
→	Blood spatter on edge of the bed

# A Crime Scene Processing Protocol

# The Crime Scene Investigation

- Management of the scene passes from the First Responder to the Medical Examiner, Forensic Scientists, and Crime Scene Investigators.
- A Protocol is important for the crime scene investigation: What do you do, who does what, and what is done first, second, next, and so forth.

# Crime Scene Protocol

- A protocol is a way of going about doing something. It is an established process that may be informal or formal.
- Most entities involved in investigations have a protocol, policy, procedure, manual or some document that generally establishes steps to be taken in a given task.
- Some people find a check list to be helpful as a form of a protocol.
- In all cases some understanding of a plan must be established with all participants in a scene investigation.

# Responsibility and Accountability

- Responsibility and Accountability.
  - A named person must be designated as the Crime Scene Supervisor.
  - All that does and does not take place is the responsibility of the Scene Supervisor.
  - It is up to the Supervisor to ensure that all other persons are responsible and accountable, but this in no way absolves each crime scene investigator from ethical and legal behavior.

# Crime Scene Protocol: Overall

- Secure: the scene and equipment.
- Interview: first responders and experts.
- Control Contamination: protective equipment
- Examine: initial scene (walk through and search)
- Evidence: identify, document, scale, placard, collect, secure. \*\*\*chain of custody\*\*\*
- Debrief: Has all been done?
- Reconstruct: In the minds eye and at the office.

# Legal Rules

- All protocols for crime scene investigation are grounded in legal rules. One must comply with the law for a successful crime scene investigation.
- Searches must be limited
  - As outlined in warrant or grant of permission
  - As defined by person of authority
  - As limited by physical circumstances
- Authority to search must be established.
  - Search warrant: authorized by court, or
  - Consent to search: right to give consent and knowingly given, or
  - Standing with the state: no one has an expectation to privacy, or
  - Exigent circumstances: immediate threat to life and property.

# When the Investigator Arrives...

- Immediately meet with the investigator and brief on what is known and what has transpired.
- Alert the investigator to any evidence discovered up to that point.
- Recognize that control of scene and investigation has transferred.
- Coordinate efforts in supportive manner.
- Assist the Investigator(s) in the investigation.

# When the Medical Examiner, Forensic Scientists, or Crime Scene Investigation Unit Arrives...

- The First Responder should immediately meet with them and brief them on what is known and what has transpired. The Crime Scene Manager should make sure this takes place.
- Alert them to any evidence discovered up to that point.
- Recognize that control of the crime scene investigation has transferred.
- Coordinate efforts in supportive manner.
- Assist the them in investigating the scene.

# Critical Thinking

- It is important to be a thinking person during the processing of a crime scene.
- All crime scenes are not the same. Although they are generally static in terms of physical aspects, they are dynamic in terms of predictability and discovery. That is, you never know what you will come across and what might be important.
- Protocols are the guidelines for correctly performing tasks. They are linear. Critical thinking is the application of crime scene investigation skill. It is non-linear. Critical thinking is like a quality assurance aspect of protocol. You think through what you are going to do.

# Documentation

- Documentation is the savior of all Crime Scene Management. If all that is done and is known is documented thoroughly in reports, through photographs and video, and statements of victims/witnesses/personal responsible a reasonable explanation can be forth coming to explain an event to the point of the available information.
- This is not as wide spread as one might think among criminal justice agencies. There are many reasons ranging from pure forgetfulness to minimizing potential for future criticism.
- For the purposes of this course, thorough documentation is considered a norm.

# Kg Handler Protocol

# General Protocol

- Start a Case File at the Time of Notice. A notebook is a good method
- Safely Arrive at Location
- Introduce yourself and get a briefing.
- Document arrival, person contacted, date/time, briefing information in your notes.
- Ensure that legal authority is present for you to conduct a search.
- Ask before you take any photographs or video before and during the search. You might ask if a crime scene investigator who will accompany you can take video and stills of your search. If granted do so.
- Explain your process (your search protocol) to others who have an interest.
- Conduct search: Document process.
- Document any discovery and any touching of evidence.
- End Search
- Debrief.
- Final Reports

# Behavioral Considerations

- Control for bias. There has been recent research in forensic science that indicates if a person is given information they will tend to produce results that confirm the given information. As an example, if a person is told that a certain person left a fingerprint at a scene and the fingerprint was identified by another examiner, a person who is a fingerprint examiner will more often agree with the identification than not agree.
- **When you, the K9 expert, arrive at the scene there may be a tendency for law enforcement or others to tell you what they would like for you to find and to try to direct your efforts. You need to know where to search and the nature of the search, but you do not want to be influenced to “find” what they want you to find. You can somewhat mitigate this by explaining your protocol and what you can and cannot do. This will send the message that you follow a protocol and conduct yourself as an objective forensic specialist.**
- Document all of this in your report.

# Written Protocols & Case Files

- It would be a good idea to have written protocols.
- You can have one for preparation, one for search, and so forth.
- The written protocols are discoverable by an attorney. If you have them you may be challenged to abide by them. **On the other hand**, it is a protection against bias and accusations of subjectivity and “junk science.”
- It is a good idea to keep all documents and information in a case file. This not only helps you keep your information organized, but it demonstrates that you have a method.

# Training and Education

- It is a good idea to prepare a curriculum vitae (CV). You should state all qualifications, training, and experience.
- Don't throw away training certificates. Keep them in a folder. You may need to produce them to qualify yourself.
- Engage in life long learning. There are many online forensic science and other course that are free.

# The Golden Rule

- Never pick up, touch, move, alter, or destroy anything until it has been photographed, entered into notes, and placed in space with measurements. It can never be put back exactly in its original place.

## Exceptions:

- (1) If the potential exists that an item of evidence (weapon) could cause harm/death to someone at the scene
- (2) If the item would interfere with emergency medical procedures or clearing the scene for safety purposes.
- (3) If the potential exists for an item/evidence to be lost, contaminated or destroyed:  
"Transient evidence" is that type of short-lived evidence which is subject to damage or destruction by exposure to the elements." "Evidence which changes with the passage of time." (Transient evidence is frangible and/or fragile evidence.)
- (4) If there was incidental contact with the evidence in the process of finding it.
- If you touch it, it is yours. If you touch it take custody until you transfer it to another person. Document this in your field notes, final report, and chain of custody report.

# Summary and Conclusion

- Take precautions for your personal safety and the safety of others.
- Identify and secure the scene in an effort to preserve data and minimize contamination.
- Document-Document-Document!!
- Establish, maintain and preserve the chain-of-custody.
- Take care to appropriately handle, package and store evidence.
- Take responsibility for your evidence and its analysis.
- Prepare for testimony.
- The goal is to collect as much useful data as possible.

**When the case goes to trial, you and others must be ready to testify to what they saw, explain what the photographs represent, present a crime scene sketch, and explain the evidence. You have to re-create the scene for the jury and explain the evidence and your technique to the jury.**

Who, what, where, when, how and why did you do or not do what you did at the scene?  
Why should anyone believe you? What are your qualifications?



If you touched it, it is yours. How did you alter the scene.  
Who was in charge.  
Did you control for bias. What is your method? Did you control for cross contamination?

# Authors

- Larry Barksdale: Assistant Professor of Practice Forensic Science, University of Nebraska, Lincoln. He continues to operate a consulting business. Sgt. Barksdale was Lincoln Police Officer for 41 years, and a crime scene investigator, detective, and supervisor for 35 years. He has a personal webs site at [www.lebinvestigations.com](http://www.lebinvestigations.com).
- John Beck: John has used his Cadaver Detection Dogs on numerous searches for local, state and federal law enforcement agencies in Nebraska and the Midwest. In addition to training his own dogs, John serves as a trainer and evaluator for Midwest Canine Alternatives, NASDN, SARDUS and other organizations. He has studied Crime Scene Investigation at the University of Nebraska. He can be reached at [jb30343 \(at\) windstream.net](mailto:jb30343@windstream.net)

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