A. Arriving at the Scene: Initial Response/ Prioritization of Efforts

Note: Words and phrases that are defined in the glossary appear in bold italics on their first appearance in the body of the Guide.

1. Initial Response/ Receipt of Information

Principle: One of the most important aspects of securing the crime scene is to preserve the scene with minimal contamination and disturbance of physical evidence. The initial response to an incident should be expeditious and methodical.

Policy: The initial responding officer(s), upon arrival, shall assess the scene and treat the incident as a crime scene. They shall promptly, yet cautiously, approach and enter the crime scene, remaining observant of any persons, vehicles, events, potential evidence, and environmental conditions.

Procedure: The initial responding officer(s) should:

a. Note or log dispatch information (e.g., address/location, time, date, type of call, parties involved).

b. Be aware of any persons or vehicles leaving the crime scene.

c. Approach the scene cautiously, scan the entire area to thoroughly assess the scene, and note any possible secondary crime scenes.

d. Be aware of any persons and vehicles in the vicinity that may be related to the crime.

e. Make initial observations (look, listen, smell) to assess the scene and ensure officer safety before proceeding.

f. Remain alert and attentive. Assume the crime is ongoing until determined to be otherwise.

g. Treat the location as a crime scene until assessed and determined to be otherwise.

h. Safely direct additional responding units into the area.
Summary: It is important for the initial responding officer(s) to be observant when approaching, entering, and exiting a crime scene.

2. Safety Procedures

Principle: The safety and physical well-being of officers and other individuals, in and around the crime scene, are the initial responding officer(s) first priority.

Policy: The initial responding officer(s) arriving at the scene shall identify and control any dangerous situations or persons.

Procedure: The initial responding officer(s) should:

a. Ensure that there is no immediate threat to other responders, scan area for sights, sounds, and smells that may present danger to personnel (e.g., hazardous materials such as gasoline, natural gas). If the situation involves a clandestine drug laboratory, biological weapons, or radiological or chemical threats, the appropriate personnel/agency should be contacted prior to entering the scene.

b. Approach the scene in a manner designed to reduce risk of harm to officer(s) while maximizing the safety of victims, witnesses, and others in the area.

c. Survey the scene for dangerous persons and control the situation.

d. Notify supervisory personnel and call for assistance/backup.

Summary: The control of physical threats will ensure the safety of officers and others present.

3. Emergency Care

Principle: After controlling any dangerous situations or persons, the initial responding officer(s) next responsibility is to ensure that medical attention is provided to injured persons while minimizing contamination of the scene.

Policy: The initial responding officer(s) shall ensure that medical attention is provided with minimal contamination of the scene.

Procedure: The initial responding officer(s) should:
a. Assess the victim(s) for signs of life and medical needs and provide immediate medical attention.

b. Call for medical personnel.

c. Guide medical personnel to the victim to minimize contamination/alteration of the crime scene.

d. Point out potential physical evidence to medical personnel, instruct them to minimize contact with such evidence (e.g., ensure that medical personnel preserve all clothing and personal effects without cutting through bullet holes, knife tears), and document movement of persons or items by medical personnel.

e. Instruct medical personnel not to “clean up” the scene and to avoid removal or alteration of items originating from the scene.

f. If medical personnel arrived first, obtain the name, unit, and telephone number of attending personnel, and the name and location of the medical facility where the victim is to be taken. In some instances, fingerprint and shoe impressions of medical personnel may need to be taken for elimination purposes.

g. If there is a chance the victim may die, attempt to obtain “dying declaration.”

h. Document any statements/comments made by victims, suspects, or witnesses at the scene.

i. If the victim or suspect is transported to a medical facility, send a law enforcement official with the victim or suspect to document any comments made and preserve evidence. (If no officers are available to accompany the victim/suspect, stay at the scene and request medical personnel to preserve evidence and document any comments made by the victim or suspect.)

j. Safeguard evidence, such as a weapon, that is taken into custody. Follow chain-of-custody procedures as soon as the evidence is confiscated.

Summary: Assisting, guiding, and instructing medical personnel during the care and removal of injured persons will diminish the risk of contamination and loss of evidence.

4. Secure and Control Persons at the Scene

Principle: Controlling, identifying and removing persons at the crime scene, and limiting the number of persons who enter the crime
scene and the movement of such persons is an important function of the initial responding officer(s) in protecting the crime scene.

**Policy:** The initial responding officer(s) shall identify persons at the crime scene and control their movement.

**Procedure:** The initial responding officer(s) should:

a. Control all individuals at the scene—prevent individuals from altering/destroying physical evidence by restricting movement, location and activity while ensuring and maintaining safety at the scene.

b. Identify all individuals at the scene, such as:
   - Suspects: Secure and separate.
   - Witnesses: Secure and separate.
   - Bystanders: Determine whether witness, if so treat as above; if not, remove from the scene.
   - Victims/family/friends: Control while showing compassion.
   - Law Enforcement, Medical and other assisting personnel.

c. Exclude unauthorized and nonessential personnel from the scene (e.g., law enforcement officials not working the case, politicians, media).

**Summary:** Controlling the movement of persons at the crime scene and limiting the number of persons who enter the crime scene is essential to maintaining scene integrity, safeguarding evidence and minimizing contamination.

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**5. Boundaries: Identify, Establish, Protect and Secure**

**Principle:** Defining and controlling boundaries provide a means for protecting and securing the crime scene(s). The number of crime scenes and their boundaries are determined by their location(s) and the type of crime. Boundaries are established beyond the initial scope of the crime scene(s) with the understanding that the boundaries can be reduced in size if necessary but cannot be as easily expanded.

**Policy:** The initial responding officer(s) at the scene shall conduct an initial assessment of the extent of the crime scene(s) and then establish and control its boundaries.
Procedure: The initial responding officer(s) should:

a. Establish boundaries of the scene(s), starting at the focal point and extending outward to include:
   - Where the crime occurred.
   - Potential points and paths of exit and entry of suspects and witnesses.
   - Places where the victim/evidence may have been moved (be aware of trace and impression evidence while assessing the scene).

b. Secure the scene. Set up physical barriers (e.g., ropes, cones, crime scene barrier tape, available vehicles, personnel, other equipment) or use existing boundaries (e.g., doors, walls, gates).

c. Document the entry/exit of all people entering and leaving the scene, once boundaries have been established.

d. Protect the scene. Control the flow of personnel and animals entering and leaving the scene to maintain integrity of the scene.

e. Institute measures to preserve/protect evidence that may be lost or compromised (e.g., protect from the elements (rain, snow, wind) and from footsteps, tire tracks, sprinklers).

f. Document the original location of the victim or any objects that you observe being moved.

g. Consider search and seizure issues to determine the necessity of obtaining consent to search and/or obtaining a search warrant.

Note: Persons should NOT smoke, chew tobacco, use the telephone or bathroom, eat or drink, move any items from the scene including weapons (unless necessary for the safety and well-being of persons at the scene), adjust the thermostat or open windows or doors (maintain scene as found), touch anything unnecessarily (note and document any items moved), reposition moved items, litter, or spit within the established boundaries of the scene. Do not allow suspect to use bathroom facilities, or to alter his/her appearance, including brushing hair or washing hands.

Summary: Establishing boundaries is a critical aspect in controlling the integrity of evidentiary material.
6. Turn Over Control of the Scene and Brief Investigator(s) in Charge

**Principle:** Briefing the investigator(s) taking charge assists in controlling the crime scene, helps establish further investigative responsibilities and assists with the managing of resources.

**Policy:** The initial responding officer(s) at the scene shall provide a detailed crime scene briefing to the *investigator(s) in charge* of the scene.

**Procedure:** The initial responding officer(s) should:

a. Brief the investigator(s) taking charge.
b. Assist in controlling the scene.
c. Turn over responsibility for the *documentation* of entry/exit.
d. Remain at the scene until relieved of duty.

**Summary:** The scene briefing is the only opportunity for the next in command to obtain initial aspects of the crime scene prior to subsequent investigation.

7. Document Actions and Observations

**Principle:** All activities conducted and observations made at the crime scene must be documented as soon as possible after the event to preserve information.

**Policy:** The initial responding officer(s) shall maintain documentation as a permanent record.

**Procedure:** The initial responding officer(s) should document:

a. Observations of the crime scene, including the location of persons and items within the crime scene and the appearance and condition of the scene upon arrival.
b. Conditions upon arrival (e.g., lights on/off; shades up/down, open/closed; doors and windows open/closed; smells; ice, liquids; movable furniture; weather; temperature; and personal items.)
c. Personal information from witnesses, victims, suspects and any statements or comments made.
d. Their own actions and actions of others.

**Summary:** The initial responding officer(s) at the crime scene must produce clear, concise, documented information encompassing his or her observations and actions. This documentation is vital in providing information to substantiate investigative considerations.

### 8. Establish a Command Post (Incident Command System) and Make Notifications

**Principle:** Setting up a location where crime scene investigation activities can be coordinated, media meetings can be held, and team meetings can occur is very valuable. This command post provides a central location for crime scene investigation activities and assessment of resources. The activities also relate to ensuring that other key investigative participants are told of the investigation and included in activities as needed.

**Policy:** The investigator(s) in charge shall set up a location where crime scene investigation activities can be coordinated, media meetings can be held, and team meetings can occur.

**Procedure:** The investigator(s) in charge should:

a. Set up a temporary command post in a location where media can take necessary photographs without jeopardizing the scene (and evidence) security.

b. Notify investigators or appropriate department(s) (such as Homicide) of information gathered at the crime scene. Discuss details of the scene during this step.

c. Notify Communications Department (Dispatch) of phone numbers at the command post.

d. Ask Communications Department (Dispatch) to notify surrounding agencies and send teletypes regionally and nationally when a suspect has fled the scene. These alerts should include a description of the suspect, vehicles involved and contact information for the person these agencies should contact if they locate the suspect.

e. Brief the supervisor as required.
f. Verify that a command post is established. If not, make the necessary arrangements to correct the situation.

g. Debrief with first responder and officer(s)/investigator(s).

h. Make necessary assignments, recording each on a formal assignment sheet.

i. Use assignment sheet to record assignment updates throughout the investigation. Make this assignment sheet available to personnel working on the case. Assign evidence recorder, entry/exit recorder (who is also responsible for keeping event timetable).

j. Ensure that the Communications Department is aware of important contact phone numbers including the command post.

k. Establish the status and locations of victims and suspects.

l. Establish the status of bulletins that have been broadcast regarding victims and suspects. Ensure that missing suspect alerts are broadcast. Establish a schedule for investigative team meetings (including all uniformed officers), during which status will be given, assignment updates will be made, and other key information will be shared.

Summary: The establishment of a command post is critical to the communication among the crime scene responders, Dispatch and others providing information to the crime scene responders.

9. Manage Witnesses

Principle: The timely interviewing of witnesses is crucial to the solution of a crime. Witnesses to crimes must be identified, secured, questioned at the scene, if applicable, and processed according to departmental regulations.

Policy: The investigator(s) in charge shall identify and secure witnesses to crimes, interview them at the scene, if applicable, and process them according to departmental regulations.

Procedure: The investigator(s) in charge should:

a. Interview any witnesses at the scene separately to best use their reported experiences to benefit the overall investigation. Obtain written/recorded statements from each witness at the police station.

b. Transport each witness to the police station separately from other witnesses or suspects.
c. When possible, the following tasks should be performed by the Supervising Officer:

- Establish the status and locations of each victim and suspect.
- Establish the status of bulletins that have been broadcast regarding each victim and suspect. Ensure that any necessary missing suspect alert is broadcast in a timely manner.

**Summary:** The timely separate interviewing of witnesses is important to obtain information about any crime.