B. Preliminary Evaluation and Documentation of the Scene

1. Conduct Scene Assessment

**Principle:** Assessment of the scene by the investigator(s) in charge allows for the determination of the type of incident to be investigated and the level of investigation to be conducted.

**Policy:** The investigator(s) in charge shall identify specific responsibilities, share preliminary information, and develop investigative plans in accordance with departmental policy and local, State, and Federal laws.

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

a. Converse with the first responder(s) regarding observations/activities.

b. Evaluate safety issues that may affect all personnel entering the scene(s) (e.g., blood-borne pathogens, hazards).

c. Evaluate search and seizure issues to determine the necessity of obtaining consent to search and/or obtain a search warrant.

d. Evaluate and establish a path of entry/exit to the scene to be utilized by authorized personnel.

e. Evaluate initial scene boundaries.

f. Determine the number/size of scene(s) and prioritize.

g. Establish a secure area within close proximity to the scene(s) for the purpose of consultation and equipment staging.

h. If multiple scenes exist, establish and maintain communication with personnel at those locations.

i. Establish a secure area for temporary evidence storage in accordance with rules of evidence/chain of custody.

j. Determine and request additional investigative resources as required (e.g., personnel/specialized units, legal consultation/prosecutors, equipment).

k. Ensure continued scene integrity (e.g., document entry/exit of authorized personnel, prevent unauthorized access to the scene).
l. Ensure that witnesses to the incident are identified and separated (e.g., obtain valid ID).

m. Ensure the surrounding area is canvassed and the results are documented.

n. Ensure preliminary documentation/photography of the scene, injured persons and vehicles.

Summary: Scene assessment allows for the development of a plan for the coordinated identification, collection, and preservation of physical evidence and identification of witnesses. It also allows for the exchange of information among law enforcement personnel and the development of investigative strategies.

2. Conduct Scene “Walk-Through” and Initial Documentation

Principle: The scene “walk-through” provides an overview of the entire scene, identifies any threats to scene integrity, and ensures protection of physical evidence. Written and photographic documentation provides a permanent record. A “walk-through” should only be completed if there will be no disturbing of evidence. There may be the need for the immediate documentation and collection of evidence prior to the walk through.

Policy: The investigator(s) in charge shall conduct a walk-through of the scene. The walk-through shall be conducted with individuals responsible for processing the scene.

Procedure: During the scene walk-through, the investigator(s) in charge should:

a. Avoid contaminating the scene by using the established path of entry.

b. Consider whether personal protective equipment (PPE) should be used.

c. Prepare preliminary documentation (e.g., notes, rough sketches) of the scene as observed.

d. Identify and protect fragile and/or perishable evidence (e.g., consider climatic conditions, crowds/hostile environment). Ensure that all evidence that may be compromised is immediately documented, photographed and collected.
c. When involved in the initial walkthrough, note the condition of the scene. Record relevant observations, which may include things such as:

- Ceilings
- Doors, including entry and exit points: Are they open, closed, locked or forced open? On which side was the key?
- Windows: Are they open or closed? Is there broken glass? Were they locked or forced open?
- Lights: On or off? If left on, which lights were on?
- Shades or shutters: Open or closed?
- Floors/Rugs
- Interior lighting conditions
- Odors: Cigarette smoke, gas, powder, perfume, etc.
- Description of perpetrator (when present)
- Description of crime-related people present
- Description of emergency medical or search-and-rescue personnel present
- Weapons observed
- Furniture present, including location relative to victim, as applicable and overall scene
- Signs of activity: Meal preparation, dishes in sink, condition of housekeeping (clean, dirty or items in disarray), appliances left on, television/stereo left on (note the channel), etc.
- Date and time indicators: Mail, newspapers, dates on milk cartons, stopped clocks, spoiled foods, items that should have been hot or cold, but are at room temperature
- Temperature of the room and environmental conditions

f. Develop a general theory of the crime

Summary: Conducting a scene walk-through provides the investigator(s) in charge with an overview of the entire scene. The walk-through provides the first opportunity to identify valuable and/or fragile evidence and determine initial investigative procedures, providing for a systematic examination and documentation of the scene. Written and photographic documentation records the condition of the scene as first observed, providing a permanent record.
3. Note-Taking and Logs

**Principle:** Note-taking and logs provide a permanent record of crime scene activities.

**Policy:** All personnel assigned to the crime scene investigation shall maintain notes and logs of their activities.

**Procedure:** Detailed entry/exit logs should be created. An entry/exit log is used to document the people who come to and go from a crime scene during the investigation. People who were at the crime scene before the investigation began are also noted in this log.

a. The officer monitoring the log, the “Log Officer,” is assigned the task by the Supervising Officer and is responsible for completing this task and monitoring the log at all times. The Log Officer is responsible for ensuring that the log is filled out thoroughly and anyone entering the scene has a stated purpose there.

b. Position the log so that it is clearly visible. Set up the log for people to use when arriving to and departing from the scene. Record the following information about the crime scene:
   - Crime scene location
   - Name of witnesses
   - Name of victims
   - Name of persons taken into custody
   - Name of first responders and approximate arrival times
   - Name of Supervising Officer and approximate arrival time (approximate time should be used if arrival time was before the log was established)

c. Record the information below for each person at the scene. If not using an *official log book or forms*, leave spaces where this information can be recorded:
   - Arrival date
   - Time of arrival
   - Name
   - Identification and Unit numbers
   - Organization (if not with the investigating department)
   - Reason for being at the scene

Log information should include:
The arrival and departure times of all personnel at the crime scene, including the Coroner or Medical Examiner, crime scene technicians, and State’s Attorney.

Information about: who is at the crime scene and why they are there; incident number; first responder names, Log Officer and Supervising Officer names, shield numbers, Unit numbers; location of crime scene; name of victim(s)

Before making it available to crime scene visitors, record logistical data (time, crime scene location, names of victims and witnesses, etc.) in the entry/exit log.

- Ensure that the departure time for any person departing from the scene is recorded prior to that person actually leaving.
- If someone exits the scene without reporting to the Log Officer, that officer can enter an estimated departure time along with a note stating the rationale for it being estimated.
- Store the log in a secure location and as mandated by departmental regulations.

Figure B-1. Sample crime scene entry log (see Appendix C-6 for full size document)

Summary: Note-taking and an entry/exit log records the persons present at a crime scene for investigative and prosecutorial purposes.