

# The Scene of Crime

## (Part 1)

### Scene of Crime

Only people commit crimes, but they do so through the means of things and these things and people together create the very vast field of physical evidence. Hence any crime must concern itself both with people and with things. However careful a criminal may be to avoid being seen or heard, he will undoubtedly leave a trail behind him because wherever he steps, whatever he touches, whatever he leaves will serve as evidence against him. Not only his fingerprints, and his footprints, but also his hair, the fibres from his cloths, whatever he breaks, his blood or saliva, all bear witness against him.

The member of the force who reaches and arrives first on the scene of crime, must at all cost keep the place intact and must always be on his alert to see that nothing is removed or tampered with. When it is established that a crime has been committed the Police Officer who is first called on the scene is to decide whether the attention of experts is needed.

On the scene of the crime anybody who is a suspect is not to be allowed to communicate with anybody and what is most important is that such person/s must not be allowed to clean any part of his body or clothing. These person/s are to be referred immediately to the scene of crime officer or Forensic Expert so that swabblings or other necessary measurements be taken to preserve as much evidence as possible before such evidence is removed.

In the case of murder, attempted murder or grievous bodily harm, the place is to be closed, until such time when investigations are carried out. In the case when we have a certified dead body, that body is NOT to be removed from its place and position for further examinations.

The forensic officer or the Duty scene of crime officer is to be in charge of a scene and the final word and decision is to be his and anything which is moved or taken from the scene of crime is noted. Nobody is to be allowed to enter such place and area except for the most important need and consent must first be sought from the scene of crime officer. Any person/s entering the scene of crime is to be properly dressed with special clothing as supplied by the laboratory personnel. All persons admitted on the scene of crime are to be registered.

Only in the case of firearms, which need to be removed to render the place/scene safe, must a Police officer

remove such evidence and when he does so great care is to be taken and notes on the precise position and place in which such firearm was found are to be taken.

On the other hand it is the duty of the Divisional Police or the C.I.D. Personnel not to allow members of the press and the public to enter the scene of crime.

In general physical evidence will inevitably be collected from these three main sources:-

- i. The scene of crime.
- ii. The victim (if any).
- iii. The suspect and his environment.

If the crime had been committed indoors the scene of crime officer in charge, first must prevent unauthorised persons from having access to the scene. One must bear in mind that every person present is contributing to the microscopic residues, materials which will only serve to confuse the work the Laboratory people will encounter.

- a) Photographs from different angles of the items found so that later one may be able to establish the exact position of the victim, if any; any firearm, furniture, etc... are to be taken.
- b) A general survey of the premises without disturbing items of importance is a primary must.
- c) The collection of evidence will be carried out after these measurements have been taken. Every item must than be carefully handled so that vital evidence such as fingerprints will not be disturbed or eliminated. If fingerprints are present it is best that these be a necessary search for them before moving anything.
- d) Every item collected for examination must be clearly marked by the Scene of crime Officer such as; any microscopic evidence such as hair, wood, metal, glass, mud, etc., as well as any other evidence such as toolmarks, paint scrapes. In crimes of violence, blood, semen and flesh may be collected.

If on the other hand a crime has been committed in an open space ie. outdoors it is to be treated in many respects similar to indoor scenes, but the fingerprints personnel should be called on the spot immediately because should there be any footprints, or other prints lying about at the scene surroundings, these are to be documented and preserved for further examinations at the laboratory before they may be damaged.

- a) The outdoor scene must also be photographed from several angles as in the case of an indoor scene, together with a sketch of the site.
- b) The general rule for the collection of evidence from outdoor scenes of crime is to take a little of everything at the time you are present on the scene and not to leave anything aside because after you leave the area, anything could occur which will not leave a trace of what you might be looking for.
- c) If a crime occurs in a vehicle this is treated similar to the one committed indoors.

## LOCARDS' PRINCIPAL OF EXCHANGE

"When any two objects come into contact, there is always a transfer of material from each object onto the other."

One must bear in mind that from the contact places there may be a transfer of evidence not only from a scene to the criminal but also from the said criminal to some part of the scene. Often this transfer is so small that it is not seen by the naked eye, but one knows that once the transfer from one object to the other has occurred there is always an amount of material that the forensic scientist will later identify at the laboratory. It is of utmost importance to reconstruct the probable movements of the criminal while on the scene, since vital evidence will be found at any point along his movements. Furthermore there are two types of evidence the criminal can supply:-

- 1) Any contact traces leading to his identification.
- 2) Any indication of a contact along the route and movements which suggest that material has been removed by the criminal.

In view of all this, it is of vital importance that all scene of crime personnel must wear protective cloths not to increase more foreign fibres and depositions on the scene of the crime. It is once more enhanced that it is the duty of the scene of crime officer to control all the movements of the various personnel on the scene of crime when performing their duties in the common aim of preserving as much evidence as possible in their field.

## PRESERVATION OF PHYSICAL EVIDENCE

In many circumstances the police investigator who succeeds to have enough proof to bring a person before the Court and charge him with a crime, is mainly due to that particular Police Officer who arrives first on the scene of crime and makes an effort to preserve it as precisely as he can. One has to bear in mind that after a crime has been committed the scene begins to change from that very moment onwards. Every Officer who arrives

first on the scene of crime has to bear in mind that the Criminal will always leave a trail of evidence behind him. It is therefore of the utmost importance that he sees that nothing is destroyed or changed from the position it was found at.

First and foremost the Police Officer who reaches first the scene of crime must be careful where to tread or otherwise footprints and shoe prints or tyre marks will be destroyed. He must not smoke on the scene and what's worst he must not allow anyone to smoke or throw any cigarette filters around.

Although scenes of crimes vary from one another and it is almost impossible to establish a fast set of rules that apply to all scenes, one must follow the most basic of rules in cases dealing mainly with homicide and theft-by-violence etc.:-

**Rule 1:** To take notes of the exact time you receive the report, the time the crime has been committed and the time when the first policeman arrived on the spot.

**Rule 2:** Attention must be paid while you are reaching the scene and when you arrive on the spot besides being careful not to disturb any evidence and destroy any prints on doors etc. The Police Officer must take note of the basic items around the scene. These main items consist of:-

- i). Take note of all doors to see which were found open or closed and if there were any keys.
- ii). Check if windows were open or closed.
- iii). Any lights that had been lit or put off.
- iv). Any particular smell like for example: gas fumes, cigarettes, perfume etc.,
- v). Any sign that food had been prepared or maybe if the house was clean or in a mess.
- vi). Any broken items around.

**Rule 3:** Also important on the scene is that in no circumstances whatsoever must a Police Officer use the toilet, use the water basin or the towel. The culprit could have used these things and evidence is therefore destroyed. A Police Officer must bear in mind that evidently he will be asked to give a detailed description of any action or anything he did until the investigating team arrives.

On other particular instances the relatives of the victim try to clean the mess prior the arrival of the police. If this happens one must stop them at once before all the evidence is destroyed.

**Rule 4:** To give the maximum protection to the scene of crime by not allowing people to idle about, not even relatives of the victim. If the crime is indoors the general rule is to close down the actual scene of crime and the

trails of entry and exit used by the criminal. If the crime was committed outdoors the surrounding area is to be barricaded properly giving special attention to the way the culprit used to get in and out of the scene. Only in exceptional cases must a Police Officer leave the scene of crime guarded by civilians.

**Rule 5:** In cases when we have an injured person, assistance is immediately to be given even if vital evidence will be lost. When any doctor arrives, the Officer in charge is to lead him on the scene, so as to preserve evidence as much as possible. If the victim is to be conveyed to hospital in an ambulance the Officer is to accompany such victim in case of any vital statements, he may give also to collect the clothing for the continuity of the case.

**Rule 6:** When we have a dead body on the scene and the Police Officer first on the spot can ascertain himself due to the "Rigor mortis", decomposition etc., he must at all cost leave the body as it is.

**Rule 7:** The general rule when we find firearms and ammunition on the scene is that these will not be touched or removed from the place they are found at, but in extreme circumstances when they have to be moved, special care is to be taken not to lose anything. When picking up small firearms one must not put a pencil inside the barrel to pick it up because gunpowder residues, blood or even body fragments may be inside and these are then spoiled. In these circumstances it is best that we wait for the arrival of the Ballistica personnel so that these handle the firearms properly. It is also important in similar cases that notes be taken in respect of firearms to see if 'safety catches' were on or off, cocked hammers and ammunition in chambers, magazine or cylinder.

**Rule 8:** In cases where on the scene we find explosives, the Police Officer reaching the scene first is NOT to touch anything and most important is that neighbours must be evacuated for at least 200 meters. If an explosion occurred people are to be evacuated at least 200 meters away from the scene in case there is a secondary device. No one is to be left to loiter around picking anything from the ground and/or destroying evidence.

Preservation of the scene of crime is the most essential thing an officer must perform in order to enable Forensic Experts and Scientists to perform their duties in finding clues through fibres, fingerprints, blood, saliva, urine, etc., A Police Officer should plan a split second programme to tackle in the quickest way the preservation of evidence by not allowing any other foreign clues to ruin the scene of crime.

If for example a man is found lying on the road and such officer is informed, about this matter by a passer-by the following actions are suggested. Full particulars of the

informer are as important as fingerprints or any other forensic clue and superiors are to be informed immediately. On the way to the scene of crime information through the informer of how he happened to find such man or whether he knows the victim's identity helps a lot in a later stage of the investigations. The time he found the victim and in what position the victim was found. A doctor must be immediately informed and a statement of the injuries, bullet wounds, bruises or any other external wounds are to be completed by him. The area of the scene of crime should be cordoned off and no one except the forensic team under the supervision of the senior officer are to be allowed. The press must be kept well away from the scene in a sufficient place as indicated by the senior forensic officer. The forensic experts together with the duty Magistrate should be also informed. The note book is the most important thing every officer should carry as all the relative information regarding the crime must be jotted down to help in investigations.

Enquiries must also be made with the neighbours, perhaps one of them may have seen something of great importance in connection with such a crime. The position and the wounds as mentioned before are of great importance, and these should be preserved as found. The next step is the searching for witnesses, as through these one might obtain the reason behind the crime. Also the character of the victim should be established and his whereabouts thoroughly checked. If he frequents any bars, his friends, whether he goes to any gambling places and any other relevant information.

In the case of a suicide, inside or outside, the means used are to be established. One must consider whether the victim could have done such a thing alone. Any notes left behind; if the room was disturbed or not, perhaps any struggling took place. Any defensive wounds or struggle wounds may be observed; any fireman lying about; spent cartridges or any other instruments. These should all be documented in the note book and left intact. All these notes are of great importance to the investigating officers in order to tackle and later solving such crime. After all it is the duty of the first Officer arriving on the scene to preserve such valuable evidence in the best of his ability and by this enabling the forensic officers to preserve as much evidence as possible.

*To be continued in next issue.*