

UPPER MERION TOWNSHIP POLICE DEPARTMENT

POLICY AND PROCEDURE

No. 650

Supersedes: NA

Effective: December 1, 1997

Page: NA Section: NA

Page: 1 OF 5

Date: December 1, 1997

MAJOR CRIME SCENES

- 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 Upper Merion Township Police that all officers understand and adhere to the following procedures to effectively protect, collect and preserve evidence of a crime and conduct initial investigative and other essential tasks at major crime scenes.
- III. **PROCEDURES:**
- A. INITIAL RESPONSE: Officers arriving first shall initiate the preliminary investigation and perform tasks as designated below until otherwise directed by a superior officer, or other officer specifically assigned to criminal investigations:
1. In transit to crime scenes, officers should 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. Never use the telephone at the crime scene. Avoid transmitting sensitive information on radio. Two officers should enter or approach the crime scene and secure the scene. One officer should stay and preserve the crime scene. The other officer should control access to the scene and maintain a log to record who enters and the time. Keep non essential people out.

3. Administer first aid and/or summon emergency medical assistance if required and take those steps necessary to protect victims or others. Futile resuscitative efforts may destroy the integrity of the crime scene.
4. Arrest the perpetrator if feasible and remove him/her from scene as soon as possible. If suspect is arrested note the presence of evidence; blood, wounds, signs of struggle, behavior, etc. Record these observations along with any spontaneous statements made by suspect. Do not interrogate. 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 allowed to escape.
5. Provide Communications with such information as:
 - a. Nature of the crime committed
 - b. Description of the perpetrator and mode/direction of flight
 - c. Description of any vehicle used by the offender and any accomplices
 - d. Use of firearms or other deadly weapons
 - e. Any support required at the crime scene
 - f. Status of victims
 - g. This section has been redacted – procedurally sensitive
 - h. Request Upper Merion Police Department Command, Montgomery County personnel, coroner
6. Identify any witnesses to the crime, secure their identities and request that they remain at the crime scene until they are interviewed
 - a. Where reasonably possible, obtain the identities of any other persons who were present upon arrival at 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. Responding officers shall enter crime scenes only for the purposes of aiding victims or bystanders in need of immediate assistance, apprehending perpetrators or securing the area. Other entries shall be permitted only under the direction of a supervisor.

- a. Officers making initial entries for such purposes shall, where feasible, avoid touching, walking upon, moving objects or otherwise altering or contaminating the crime scene. Move nothing except victims and/or weapons when necessary. Do not clear firearms.
 2. Define the boundaries of the crime scene to include all areas that may be reasonably searched for evidence. As necessary, considering the nature and seriousness of the crime, officer should:
 - a. Request back-up assistance to restrict access to the crime scene and control any on-lookers.
 - b. Erect barricade tape, rope or cordon off, lock or otherwise secure the immediate crime scene and restrict access to defined crime perimeters.
 - c. Record any alterations made at the crime scene due to emergency assistance to victims or the actions of any person at the scene.
 3. Restrict all persons from the crime scene who are not directly involved in the investigation. In the case of homicides or other major crimes the officer-in-charge shall ensure that the identity of all persons entering the crime scene is recorded.
 4. Major crime scenes should be approached only as needed in a single defined line in order to avoid the destruction of footprints and other impressions and the contamination of scent trails that may be useful in K-9 searches. The "place last seen" of kidnapped or missing persons should also be protected in a similar manner.
 5. Remember: Contamination – Preservation - Documentation
- C. COLLECTION OF EVIDENCE: Unless exigent circumstances exist or authorization from a supervisory officer is received, initial responding officers at major crime scenes shall not engage in collection of items of potential evidentiary value. Officers may engage in the following tasks as directed by the officer-in-charge:
1. The chain of custody of all evidence shall be clearly and completely documented beginning with initial collection, packaging and labeling at the crime scene.
 2. Officers shall search the crime scene in a manner or method prescribed by the officer-in-charge for any items that may establish how the crime was committed or who committed the crime. This may include, but is not limited to:
 - a. Unusual objects or objects found in unexpected or unusual locations.
 - b. Weapons, tools, clothing, stains, blood spatters, fingerprints, footprints, tire or tool mark impressions, broken glass, fibers soil or other items or substances.
 3. All evidence should be properly photographed, preserved, packaged and labeled.

4. Gloves must be worn by everyone at the crime scene.
- D. INTERVIEWING WITNESSES: Witnesses at the crime scene shall be identified and preliminary interviews conducted as soon as possible. The neighborhood surrounding the crime scene should be canvassed in order to identify additional witnesses or others who may have knowledge of the crime. The purpose and scope of these interviews is to gather as much basic information about the crime at the earliest point possible in order to identify the perpetrator and establish the basis for the follow-up investigation.
- E. CRIME SCENE REPORTING: Officers conducting the preliminary and follow-up investigations shall complete appropriate reports. At a minimum, reports shall include:
1. Date and time of arrival at scene.
 2. Any relevant weather or situational condition at the scene to include the status of the crime scene upon arrival; (e.g. fire, crowds, and initial observations).
 3. How the crime was discovered and reported and the relationship of reporting individuals to victims or others.
 4. Identity of other officers or emergency personnel present upon arrival and those who responded to the crime scene thereafter.
 5. Physical evidence discovered and officers responsible for collection (special note and security should be made of any valuables collected at the scene, such as currency or jewelry).
 6. Name, address and telephone number, or other appropriate identification of 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 or other similar information made at the scene or the identity of officers or civilians who made such recordings.
 9. Recommendations for further investigation such as the names of witnesses or others who may be able to provide additional information.
 10. Identity of all EMS personnel or coroner at scene. Record pronouncement/time of death by EMS or coroner.

- F. SEARCH WARRANT: Officers are permitted to enter, with force if necessary, premises without a warrant under exigent circumstances in order to conduct protective fan-out searches when they have reasonable grounds to believe that a person within is in immediate need of assistance or a perpetrator is present. If in the course of such a search, evidence is discovered in plain view, it may be seized without a warrant or noted for later removal. Any searches beyond these require a search warrant.

- G. FIELD OPERATIONS GUIDE: Each officer has been issued a Field Operations Guide containing a list of procedures and reminders to be followed at a crime scene.

APPROVED: _____

DATE: _____

APPROVED: _____

DATE: _____

TO BE REVIEWED: ANNUALLY

DISTRIBUTION: All police officers
All police dispatchers
Township Manager
File