



Tool 5.9 Crime scene investigations

Overview

This tool discusses the investigation of crime scenes.

What is a crime scene?

A crime scene is any physical scene, anywhere, that may provide potential evidence to an investigator. It may include a person's body, any type of building, vehicles, places in the open air or objects found at those locations. "Crime scene examination" therefore refers to an examination where forensic or scientific techniques are used to preserve and gather physical evidence of a crime.



Every contact leaves a trace!

What can constitute evidence?

A fundamental principle of forensics is that every contact leaves a trace. This may be contact of a person with a person, contact of a person with a vehicle or location, or of a vehicle with a location etc. Forensic investigators identify those traces and analyse them to explain what has happened. Evidence at crime scenes may include:

- Biological samples such as DNA from blood, semen, saliva and breath, hair, fingerprints and body part prints, urine, teeth
- Fibres such as pieces of material torn from clothing, or pieces of weapons broken during an attack
- Photographs, videos, drawings and plans
- Documentary evidence such as receipts, travel tickets or bank statements

Some crime scene investigation techniques are complicated and resource demanding, and may not be available to all investigators. It is important to note that even very simple actions—such as taking photographs of victims and scenes or making drawings and plans of premises—can significantly improve the chances of successful, fair prosecution. Even where no prosecution eventuates from the investigation, the forensic evidence gathered can support future anti-trafficking activities.

Securing the crime scene

A very simple action that investigators in any country can take is to make sure their staff are aware of the need to secure a crime scene. Investigators should do all they can to ensure that scenes (including the victims as well as the locations and the evidence at that location) are not interfered with, and to allow adequate time to strategize the “forensic examination”. Interference—leading to “forensic contamination”—can be avoided by simple measures

- Controlling access to scenes
- Covering scenes
- Keeping records of everyone who has had access to a scene
- Taking fingerprints and DNA samples from staff before they are allowed to get to a scene
- Providing guidance in the packaging of recovered material, to prevent deterioration or contamination

Organization of crime scene investigation

The recovery, transport, storage and analysis of samples from crime scenes must be organized to include the following elements:

- Samples should be obtained by appropriately trained staff. Staff conducting medical examinations will need to be highly trained; other examinations will require only basic training.
- Staff should be provided with appropriate equipment, including health and safety clothing, bags, boxes and bottles to store samples and material, and labels and record sheets to identify them clearly.
- Appropriate and secure storage facilities should be provided where material is held before it is taken for further analysis, and places of analysis should be clean and have procedures in place to protect samples and materials.
- Material should be transported in a way that does not allow contamination; there should be a system of tracking samples by recording who placed them in storage, who removed them and who received them for analysis.



For more information on planning crime scene investigations, please refer to the UNODC operational training manual to combat trafficking in persons, forthcoming in 2008, at:

www.unodc.org