

TENNESSEE BUREAU OF INVESTIGATION

Forensic Services Division

Violent Crime Response Team Standard Operating Procedures Documentation



2.0 Crime Scene Documentation

2.1 Purpose

Crime scene documentation is important in providing a detailed record of observations, aiding in report writing, and assisting with courtroom testimony. All scene notes, evidence receipts, and other miscellaneous documentation should be completed in a clear and legible manner.

2.2 Notes

2.2.1 Each VCRT member will take notes at each crime scene that is processed.

2.2.2 Each VCRT member (if present) shall record any relevant scene information provided by the officer in charge of the scene.

2.2.3 The VCRT Leader may also use the VCRT Crime Scene Worksheet and VCRT First Contact Worksheet (see Appendix Section).

2.2.4 Crime scene notes should provide a thorough and comprehensive written account of observations made at the scene. Crime scene notes shall also include the actions, procedures, results of controls, and results of all presumptive tests performed by VCRT members while at the scene.

2.2.5 Dates of examination must be listed. This may be expressed as a range or individually.

2.2.6 Any addition, which is a change made to the case documentation after the final examination date or by someone else, will be initialed and dated by the person making the addition.

2.2.7 It is preferred that all notations completed by crime scene personnel be on one side of all paperwork, with the exception of a two-sided form.

2.2.8 Each page will be marked with the following information:

- Laboratory case number
- Analyst's handwritten name or initials
- Date(s)
- Page #

TENNESSEE BUREAU OF INVESTIGATION

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2.2.9 Each VCRT member will sequentially number their crime scene notes and attach them together. Additionally, the VCRT Leader will sequentially number all pages of the crime scene documentation and initial each page.

2.2.10 All documentation will be of a permanent nature, with the exception of rough sketches.

2.2.11 All notes, both original and transcribed, will be retained and kept in the case file.

2.2.12 All original crime scene notes will be maintained in the case file.

2.3 Rough Sketches

2.3.1 Sketches may be produced to assist in documenting the relative positions of objects and/or evidence within the scene. Sketches are used to document all or select portions of crime scenes as needed.

2.3.2 Rough sketches may be done in pencil (see VCRT 10.17 for additional information)

2.4 Finished Diagrams

2.4.1 A finished diagram should depict the crime scene as a 2-dimensional or 3-dimensional drawing and may be done at the request of the lead investigator.

2.4.2 This finished diagram is typically completed with the use of a computer drawing program. It should be produced with the expectation that it will be used to refresh memories, assist the investigation, for scientific examinations, and to depict the scene for courtroom presentations.

2.5 Crime Scene Photography

2.5.1 The primary photographer is an additional duty assigned to one or more of the VCRT members.

2.5.2 Documentation photographs should:

- Provide overall, mid-range, and close-up or evidence-specific views
- Include both scaled and unscaled views when specifically required
- Provide an accurate representation of the scene as found

TENNESSEE BUREAU OF INVESTIGATION

Forensic Services Division

Violent Crime Response Team Standard Operating Procedures Documentation



2.5.3 Establishing photographs should be taken of the location of the scene from a distance, when possible. These photographs should incorporate a landmark, (e.g., intersections with street signs, address information on structures, mail boxes, and/or utility poles), when possible.

2.5.4 Overall views are used to identify the location of the scene and should include a permanent landmark for reference. Mid-range views are used to capture the physical details of particular objects, areas, and items of evidence. Close-up and evidence-specific views are used to illustrate the fine details and characteristics of a piece of physical evidence.

2.5.5 Items of evidence should be photographed so that their relative positions can be determined within the crime scene. Photographs should be taken of evidence in the position it was found. Items moved prior to being photographed shall not be reintroduced into the scene.

2.5.6 The interior of the scene should be photographed from all four corners of each room, when possible. Photographs of rooms and other interior areas should be taken from typical observation points, using the wide angle lens when necessary.

2.5.7 Possible entry/exit points into the scene should be identified and photographed.

2.5.8 Photographs to be used as comparison quality photographs shall be taken with a scale (see VCRT 10.34 for additional information).

2.5.9 All digital photographs taken of a scene will be retained, even if a picture is “blank” or of poor quality. No image will be deleted. Images will maintain a sequential order (no missing image numbers) while photographing the scene. Each media storage device (e.g., SD card) will be used only one time. Scene documenting photographs may be taken in a high resolution .jpeg format. At a minimum, comparison photographs shall be made using a camera in raw format or suitable lossless format.

2.5.10 When possible, avoid including VCRT and non-scene related law enforcement personnel and their vehicles in the photographs and video.

2.5.11 Since the introduction of digital photography, the use of a photo log has been determined to be of little value. The time consumption outweighs the benefit of the information recorded on the photo log which is largely redundant. The digital camera records information such as time, date, f-stop, shutter speed, frame



TENNESSEE BUREAU OF INVESTIGATION

Forensic Services Division

Violent Crime Response Team Standard Operating Procedures Documentation

number, and additional settings embedded within each file or frame recorded at the crime scene.

2.5.12 Specialized photography is utilized at some crime scenes to document evidence that is not visible using normal lighting techniques. These techniques may include the specialized lighting such as use of an alternate light source, fluorescent or luminescent reagents, powders, reflective ultra violet imaging systems (RUVIS), or lasers.

2.5.13 Deceased victims should be photographed using overall, mid-range, and close-up views, when appropriate. These photographs are used to document the position and the condition of the body before it is moved and as it was found by the VCRT. Care should be taken to include written documentation in notes and when photographing deceased persons who have been moved or have been attended to by medical personnel. Photographs should be taken of deceased victims at crime scenes from as many perspectives as are needed to document the position of the body and the evidence adjacent the body. Special attention will be given to the documentation of the condition of the hands, and when appropriate, the feet of the victim. If possible, wounds should be photographed at the scene with a ruler for scale. Any evidence/items removed from the body will be photographed in place before removal, when possible. After the body has been removed from the scene, the area where the body was lying will be examined and photographed where appropriate.

2.6 Video Recording

2.6.1 Video recording may be utilized, as an additional method of documenting the crime scene.

2.6.2 The primary videographer is an additional duty assigned to one or more of the VCRT members.

2.6.3 Crime scene videos may be recorded with or without sound, at the discretion of the videographer. The use of the VCRT Video Trailer form may also be used (see the Appendix Section).