

DALTON POLICE DEPARTMENT

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<i>Subject</i> Crime Scenes			
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I. Policy

It is the policy of the Dalton Police Department that crime scenes be properly processed and protected from unauthorized access that might result in the contamination or destruction of vital physical evidence. Because there is only one opportunity to conduct a proper crime scene investigation, when any doubt exists regarding the actual crime that has been committed, it is in the best interest of the investigating Officer to assume that the crime is possibly the most serious offense and process the scene accordingly.

II. Definitions

- A. *Crime Scene* – A geographical location, vehicle, structure, conveyance, or combination thereof where a crime incident has been or is being committed. The crime scene can be a dynamic situational condition resulting in rapidly changing perimeters and dimensions.
- B. *Crime Scene Search* – A planned, coordinated, legal search by trained, competent law enforcement Officers to locate physical evidence or witnesses to the crime being investigated.
- C. *Evidence* – For the purpose of this policy, only physical evidence will be addressed. Physical evidence is anything tangible, having objective existence, which establishes key elements of a crime and relationships of people associated with a crime.

III. Responsibilities

- A. The first Officer to arrive at the scene of a crime shall be responsible for protecting the scene and processing the scene where there is no serious injury or property damage. Minor crimes may only require a report.
- B. The Criminal Investigations Division (CID) shall be responsible for processing crime scenes involving major crimes, such as homicides, rapes, crimes involving serious bodily injuries or significant property loss, or other incidents as needed. When an Investigator arrives at the crime scene, he / she is in charge of and is

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responsible for that scene. The Department's Crime Scene Investigator may be requested to assist with processing the scene.

- C. Where probable cause for the search of a crime scene exists, the investigating Officer / Investigator is responsible for obtaining legal consent prior to a search or for obtaining a search warrant where consent cannot be legally obtained. Searches without consent or a warrant are justified in cases where exigent circumstances exist (see policy GO98-7.18, Search and Raid Procedures).
- D. The Investigator-in-charge may request assistance from the GBI any time help may be needed in properly processing complicated or major crime scenes.
- E. The investigating Officer / Investigator shall be responsible for requesting laboratory examination of evidence from the GBI crime lab.
- F. Each Investigator shall ensure that during his / her tour of duty his / her assigned vehicle is supplied with items needed to process a crime scene.
- G. All personnel shall receive training in proper evidence collection techniques prior to any assignment that requires the processing of crime scenes or collecting of evidence.

IV. **Protecting the Crime Scene**

- A. Scenes of major crimes shall be secured by crime scene tape, ropes, or other boundaries. Officers may be positioned wherever necessary to assist in protecting the scene, if needed.
- B. It is the responsibility of the first responding Officer(s) to ensure that any item containing suspected DNA be protected from contamination until it can be properly collected. Suspected DNA evidence must be protected from contamination by the public, other persons at the scene, and inclement weather.
 - 1. Because extremely small samples of DNA can be used as evidence, greater attention to contamination is necessary.
 - 2. Evidence can be contaminated when DNA from another source gets mixed with DNA relevant to the case. This can happen when someone sneezes or coughs over the evidence or touches his / her mouth, nose, or other part of the face and then touches the area of the evidence containing the DNA.
 - 3. Care shall be taken to avoid cross contamination, which may occur when traveling between multiple crime scenes, moving around inside a single crime scene, or using the same personal protective equipment while collecting multiple items of evidence.
- C. No one shall be allowed into the crime scene without permission of the Officer / Investigator-in-charge or a Supervisor on scene, and then only if the individual's presence is directly needed in the case. All persons, including all first responders, entering the crime scene area shall be documented on a crime scene log.

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- D. Giving aid to injured persons at the scene of a crime is a matter of first priority. Officers / Investigators shall note all changes to the scene of a crime caused by all first responders.
- E. Officers / Investigators shall not use any tobacco products, use restrooms, use landline phones, run water, or perform any other activities that might contaminate the crime scene or destroy valuable evidence.
- F. No object shall be moved or evidence collected until directed by the Officer / Investigator-in-charge, unless exigent circumstances exist and the evidence may be lost or contaminated.
- G. The District Attorney-on-call may be contacted concerning major crime scenes in order to consult about legal considerations at the scene of a crime.

V. **Processing the Scene**

A. General Rules

- 1. Evidence that might deteriorate over time or be affected by the elements (rain, snow, etc.) shall be processed first.
- 2. All evidence shall be collected in a logical manner using a search method appropriate for the crime scene (i.e., grid, strip, point-to-point, spiral, etc.).
- 3. After processing the more obvious evidence, the search for and collection of additional trace evidence shall be made before dusting for fingerprints.
- 4. If evidence collected in the field changes possession from one member of the Department to another at any time, the transfer shall be documented in the incident report or a supplemental report.
- 5. Fingerprints used for the elimination of suspects and physical evidence standard samples may be collected after the above actions are completed.

B. Collection, Storage, and Transportation of Physical Evidence

- 1. A piece of evidence may be marked on the container or item, as appropriate, to show its original position / location.
- 2. A piece of evidence may be marked distinctively by the Officer / Investigator who found the particular piece of evidence so that it may be identified later.
- 3. A list shall be used to inventory all items of evidence gathered at a crime scene. Each item shall be described exactly and completely on the list. The person or location from where the item was obtained, as well as the name of the Officer / Investigator collecting it, shall be indicated on the list.
- 4. For situations in which there is a possibility of contamination, each item shall be packaged separately.

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5. Smaller items collected at a crime scene shall be placed in Department-approved packaging materials for storage and transport. Larger items shall be placed in Department vehicles for storage and transport. Vehicles or similar items that have to be towed from the crime scene to the impound lot at the Police Services Center shall be accompanied by an Officer / Investigator.
6. Items that may be processed for latent prints in the future shall be placed in paper bags.
- ~~6.7.~~ Collected evidence shall be transported to the Police Services Center within a reasonable amount of time for submission to the Property and Evidence Section (see directive GO88-4.10, Property and Evidence Policy and Procedure).
- ~~7.8.~~ Wet items or items with blood, such as clothing, bed sheets, or patches of carpet, shall be dried before being packaged. The drying chamber, located in the Property and Evidence Section, shall be used for items that will take an extended period of time to dry.

C. Photography, Audio, and Video Evidence

1. The recording of crime scenes through photography, audio, and / or video is an invaluable way to illustrate the condition of a crime scene as it existed in its original state. It shall be notated in a report if a crime scene is recorded through photos, audio, and / or video. The report shall also indicate the date the recordings were taken and the person that made them.
2. Photographs
 - a. Officers / Investigators shall evaluate each crime scene to determine the need for photographs.
 - b. If an Officer / Investigator determines that the taking of photographs would be beneficial in helping to document the crime scene or evidence at a scene, the Officer / Investigator shall take photographs or arrange to have photographs taken. Some scenes may require the assistance of the Crime Scene Investigator.
 - c. All photographs shall be made in an effort to fairly and accurately depict all aspects of the crime scene. Photographs shall be taken of the entire scene first and subsequent photographs taken as the Officer / Investigator progressively moves toward more specific aspects of the scene.
 - d. Photographs should be taken before evidence is processed and collected in order to document where the evidence was found at the crime scene.

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- e. After photographs have been taken, the images shall be downloaded and attached directly to the applicable case number in the Department's RMS system and / or [saved to a storage device](#) and entered into the Property and Evidence Section.

3. Audio / Video

- a. The recording of audio / video is generally reserved for major crime scenes when, in the opinion of the Investigator-in-charge, it would be beneficial.
- b. Like photography, the recording of audio / video should begin by looking at the big picture and then the minute details. Videotaping shall also be conducted before evidence is processed and collected.
- c. When recording audio / video, all persons that are not absolutely necessary in the crime scene area shall be removed.
- d. When recording a video of a crime scene, the audio may be disabled to avoid distracting outside noises.
- e. After audio / video recordings have been completed, the files shall be downloaded and attached directly to the applicable case number in the Department's RMS system and / or saved to a storage device and entered into the Property and Evidence Section.

- 4. Personnel are strongly discouraged from using their personally-owned electronic equipment (cell phones, tablets, and / or audio / video equipment) for official Departmental use.

D. Fingerprints

1. Latent Prints

- a. Fingerprints may be recovered from a variety of surfaces, including smooth surfaces, glass, paper, metal, plastic, and desk or counter tops.
- b. Where the possibility of latent prints exists, the Officer / Investigator-in-charge or Crime Scene Investigator should properly dust for the prints.
- c. When a latent print becomes visible after dusting, the Officer, Investigator, or Crime Scene Investigator shall lift the print by using latent print lifting tape.
- d. The tape shall then be placed onto a fingerprint card with the back of the card notated with the date, case number, location of incident, print location, and the person's name that lifted the print.

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- e. The Crime Scene Investigator or other properly trained personnel may also utilize other techniques and equipment to process collected evidence for latent prints.
- f. The Crime Scene Investigator or other properly trained personnel may utilize the Automatic Fingerprint Identification System (AFIS) ~~equipment~~ software to submit latent prints for possible comparisons to those prints contained in known databases.

2. Fingerprinting of Persons

- a. Fingerprinting of persons not in custody (elimination prints, suspects, etc.) at the Police Services Center shall be conducted in an interview room where a duress alarm is accessible. All completed fingerprint cards shall be properly labeled and submitted to the Property and Evidence Section.
- b. Fingerprinting of a juvenile arrestee shall be performed in accordance with policy GO11-4.28, Juvenile Procedures.

E. DNA

- 1. Suspected DNA evidence shall be collected by personnel that have received proper training in the procedures for the collection and handling of such evidence. At a minimum, the training shall cover the basic collecting and packaging of DNA.
- 2. Disposable latex or nitrile gloves shall be worn when handling items containing suspected DNA or when collecting suspected DNA samples.
- 3. Items that contain suspected DNA shall be placed in paper bags or paper envelopes.
- 4. When collecting suspected DNA samples, the following procedures apply:
 - a. If the surface / stain to be swabbed is wet, use two (2) clean, sterile cotton-tipped applicators and swab the suspect area. Place the swabs into separate swab boxes. The swabs may be placed into swab boxes after either being allowed to dry or while still wet. Seal both ends of the swab boxes and initial the seals.
 - b. If the surface / stain is dry, use a clean, sterile cotton-tipped applicator, moisten the end with a sterile water ampule, then swab the suspect area. Then use a second dry, sterile cotton-tipped applicator in the same area that was just swabbed with the moistened swab. Place the swabs into separate swab boxes. The swabs may be placed into swab boxes after either being allowed to dry or while still wet. Seal both ends of the swab boxes and initial the seals.

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- c. The following information should also be written on the outside of the swab boxes: applicable case number, suspect name (if known), location, date, and name of Officer / Investigator who collected the swab(s).
 - d. Place the swab boxes into paper evidence envelopes and seal. Swabs collected from different areas / stains should be packaged in separate evidence envelopes and submitted as separate items of evidence.
- 5. DNA evidence should never be placed in plastic bags. The moisture contained in the bags can damage the DNA. The collection of some DNA evidence may require specialized techniques and the expertise of the Crime Scene Investigator or other personnel that have received proper training.
 - 6. When transporting and storing DNA evidence, it must be kept dry and at room temperature. The evidence shall be transported in such a way that ensures proper identification and proper chain of custody.
 - 7. The investigating Officer / Investigator shall complete a Georgia Bureau of Investigation Evidence Submission Form for any DNA evidence that requires submission to one of the GBI accredited crime laboratories. DNA evidence shall be submitted to a GBI crime lab in accordance with policy GO88-4.10, Property and Evidence Policy and Procedure.

F. Electronic Equipment and Storage Devices

- 1. When criminal investigations involve the seizure of electronic equipment and other devices capable of storing data in an electronic format, such as computers, cellular phones, tablets, gaming devices, and digital cameras, the proper method of collecting and preserving hardware, software, and data files is of paramount importance.
- 2. Personnel shall follow these general procedures when collecting electronic equipment:
 - a. Immediately restrict access to the electronic equipment or data storage device and the surrounding area to necessary personnel.
 - b. Photograph the scene, including the device and any peripheral equipment.
 - c. Preserve the scene due to possible latent fingerprint evidence.
 - d. Search the immediate area of the electronic equipment, paying special attention to any notes, information, or passwords that the suspect may have written.
- 3. Personnel collecting stand-alone computers shall follow these specific procedures:

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- a. If the computer is off, DO NOT turn it on.
 - b. If the computer is on, DO NOT turn it off.
 - c. Personnel must first remove the power cord from the rear of the computer and then remove the power cord from the outlet. If a laptop computer does not turn off in this manner, then locate and remove the battery pack.
 - d. To enable accurate reassembly later, employees shall clearly label all existing connections to and from the computer.
 - e. Properly package all components and keep them away from magnets, radio transmitters, and other potentially damaging elements.
4. Personnel collecting storage media or computer software should notate the location where the item(s) was located. The item(s) must also be kept away from magnets, radio transmitters, and other potentially damaging elements.
 5. Personnel collecting cell phones, tablets, digital cameras, or other handheld electronic devices shall follow these specific procedures:
 - a. If the device is off, DO NOT turn it on.
 - b. If the device is on, DO NOT turn it off. Leave the device on; powering down the device could enable a password.
 - c. Activate the device's "airplane mode," if available. This will ensure the device cannot be remotely erased.
 - d. If the device is charging, first remove the power cord from the device and then remove the power cord from the outlet.
 - e. Collect all cables and attempt to keep the device charged.
 - f. If the battery is removed, data may be lost.

VI. **Collection of Known Source Material**

When available, materials and substances shall be collected from a known source for submission to the GBI crime lab for comparison with other physical evidence submitted. Examples include hairs, fibers, paint, glass, wood, soil, tool marks, etc.

VII. **Reporting**

- A. A report shall be prepared by the Officer / Investigator who processes a crime / traffic collision scene. The report shall include:
 1. Date and time of arrival

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2. Location of the crime or traffic collision
 3. Name of the victim(s) and suspect(s), if known
 4. Actions taken at the scene, including a list of all physical evidence recovered
 5. Case number and name of investigating Officer
 6. Disposition of physical evidence
 7. Crime scene measurement information, if any
- B. Any Officer / Investigator that locates, collects, transports, or packages evidence shall detail their actions and observations in an incident / supplemental report.
- C. The Crime Scene Investigator or other properly trained personnel that conducts forensic examinations of physical evidence shall complete a supplemental report detailing the type of examination conducted, the results of the examination, and the status of the evidence after the examination. Types of forensic examinations conducted on physical evidence include:
1. Downloading, copying, or extracting data from electronic equipment or storage devices.
 2. Utilizing chemical reactions to reveal the presence of latent prints.

This policy supersedes any previous policies issued.

BY ORDER OF

CHIEF OF POLICE

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