

Crime and Disaster Scene Integrity

417.1 VERSION

Review Date	Effective Date	Approving Authority
01/29/19	07/09/18	Eric D. English, Chief of Police

417.2 POLICY AND PURPOSE

The purpose of this policy is to provide guidance in handling a major crime or disaster. It is the policy of the Harrisonburg Police Department to secure crime or disaster scenes so that evidence is preserved, and to identify and mitigate the dangers associated with a major crime or disaster scene for the safety of the community and those required to enter or work near the scene.

417.3 ACCOUNTABILITY STATEMENT

All employees are expected to fully comply with the guidelines and timelines set forth in this policy. Responsibility rests with the supervisor to ensure that any violations of policy are investigated and appropriate training, counseling and/or disciplinary action is initiated. This directive is for internal use only, and does not enlarge an employee's civil liability in any way. It should not be construed as the creation of a higher standard of safety or care in an evidentiary sense, with respect to third party claims. Violation of this directive, if proven, can only form the basis of a complaint by this department, and then only in a non-judicial administrative setting.

417.4 OFFICER RESPONSIBILITIES

The first officer at the scene of a crime or major incident is generally responsible for the immediate safety of the public and preservation of the scene. Officers shall also consider officer safety and the safety of those persons entering or exiting the area, including those rendering medical aid to any injured parties. Once an officer has assumed or been assigned to maintain the integrity and security of the crime or disaster scene, it shall be maintained until the officer is properly relieved by a supervisor or other designated person.

The following list generally describes the first responding officer's function at a crime or disaster scene. This list is not intended to be all-inclusive, is not necessarily in order and may be altered according to the demands of each situation:

- (a) Broadcast emergency information, including requests for additional assistance and resources.
- (b) Provide for the general safety of those within the immediate area by mitigating, reducing or eliminating threats or dangers.
- (c) Locate or identify suspects and determine whether dangerous suspects are still within the area.
- (d) Provide first aid to injured parties if it can be done safely.
- (e) Evacuate the location safely as required or appropriate.

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- (f) Secure the inner perimeter.
- (g) Protect items of apparent evidentiary value.
- (h) Secure an outer perimeter.
- (i) Identify potential witnesses.
- (j) Start a chronological log noting critical times and personnel allowed access.

417.4.1 CRIME SCENE

Crime Scene personnel shall report to the Incident Commander to ensure knowledge of their presence for recording. Crime Scene personnel shall confer with the investigating officer prior to the start of any activity. The investigating officer shall establish the scope of the processing needed, and rely upon the expert knowledge of the Crime Scene personnel for the most practical method to be used to complete the processing.

After conferring with the investigating officer, crime scene personnel shall evaluate the scene perimeter and, if necessary, establish an inner-perimeter where the actual search and collection of evidence will occur. This perimeter will be established by yellow police tape. No persons shall be permitted within this area without the express permission of the Crime Scene investigator or Incident Commander.

417.5 PATROL SUPERVISOR

- (a) The supervisor, notified by the first officer at a crime/disaster scene, shall review the information in order to determine the feasibility of the support requested and whether or not the resources directly under their supervision are sufficient to effectively control the scene. In scenes which require only the presence of one first line supervisor for effective control, that officer shall be designated the Incident Commander.
- (b) The responsibilities of the Patrol Supervisor shall include:
 - 1. Command of the crime/disaster scene unless specifically relieved by an officer of superior rank or by relief at the termination of a tour of duty.
 - 2. Taking necessary measures to prevent any unauthorized access within the perimeter of the scene or any other secondary perimeter required to assure that Police, Fire and Rescue Department personnel operations may proceed effectively.
 - (a) No persons shall be permitted within a crime scene unless their presence will directly further the investigation being conducted, except personnel involved in a lifesaving role. All persons shall report to the patrol supervisor or his/her designee before entering the scene.
 - (b) All persons permitted within a crime scene shall submit a supplemental report providing details of their activity and function at the scene.
 - (c) Fire and Rescue Department personnel shall be assisted in performing any lifesaving effort if injured persons are found at the scene, and shall not be hampered until their task is concluded. At the time they have completed

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their duties, the patrol supervisor shall reestablish restriction of access to the scene, limited only to those actively involved in the investigation.

3. Assure that no physical object is moved or collection of evidence occurs, unless at the direction of the investigating officer.
4. Request assistance from the Major Crimes Unit, Crime Scene Section, or any other needed support elements.
5. Notify and brief the Duty Officer and/or Emergency Communications Center supervisor in all circumstances which may be significant for inclusion in the Daily Activity Report or which may require notification of authorities outside the Police Department.
6. Assist the investigating officer and support elements in the conduct of the investigation. Assistance shall include expediting all reasonable requests for additional resources for conduct of the investigation.
7. Establish a command post, as needed.
8. Control and limit communications with the Emergency Communications Center originating from units at the crime/disaster scene and also assure that Emergency Communications Center personnel are given adequate information so that they may provide sufficient assistance.
9. Assure that civilians denied passage through the area are, whenever possible, given a reasonable explanation of the reason for the denial, are provided directions on how alternatively they may reach their destination and, in the case of residents of the area, provided controlled egress to their homes whenever such egress will not impede or damage conduct of the investigation or disrupt the crime scene.

417.6 SEARCHES

Officers arriving at crime or disaster scenes are often faced with the immediate need to search for and render aid to victims, and to determine if suspects are present and continue to pose a threat. Upon completion of this protective sweep, and officers are satisfied that no additional suspects are present and/or there are no injured persons to be treated, those exigent circumstances will likely no longer exist. Officers should thereafter secure the scene and conduct no further search until additional or alternate authority for the search is obtained, such as consent or a search warrant.

417.6.1 CONSENT

When possible, officers should seek written consent to search from authorized individuals. However, in the case of serious crimes or major investigations, it may be prudent to also obtain a search warrant. Consent as an additional authorization may be sought, even in cases where a search warrant has been granted.