

Step Four – Survey and Walkthrough

The portrayal of crash scenes in the popular media may provide the impression that every scene is an orderly, perfectly secured area that can be thoroughly scoured for every piece of crucial evidence. In reality, these scenes can be emotionally charged or even chaotic. In the case of crash scenes, inclement weather conditions can quickly damage evidence and create additional challenges for the investigator.

An initial survey of the scene is conducted to prioritize evidence collection. During this walkthrough, the lead investigator will identify potentially valuable evidence, take notes and capture initial photographs of the scene and the evidence. The investigator must document that in some instances the ability of investigators to collect certain evidence may be limited if, by collecting one type of evidence, they must compromise another.

The scene is documented to record conditions such as whether lights are present and whether they were on or off, the position of or inertia movement of discovered evidence, whether anything had been picked up and moved, direction and trail of debris, any smells present, the temperature of the scene, etc. To facilitate this process, scene investigators should create a map of the survey area and create an evidence-free pathway leading to the primary area of interest which was accomplished by conducting a thorough sweep for evidence in that area.

The depiction of a scene investigator retrieving the evidence, whisking it back to the lab for analysis and solving or piecing the story together is far from reality. Understand that most analysts routinely specialize in one particular area of examination, so for instance, a DNA analyst won't likely be called to examine finger prints. It is important to establish reliable lab partnerships and know which labs perform which processing and procedures.