

1                   **OSAC 2021-N-0016**  
2                   **Standard for Initial**  
3                   **Response at Scenes by Law**  
4                   **Enforcement**

5                   *Crime Scene Investigation & Reconstruction Subcommittee*  
6                   *Scene Examination Scientific Area Committee*  
7                   *Organization of Scientific Area Committees (OSAC) for Forensic Science*





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## **Draft OSAC Proposed Standard**

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# **OSAC 2021-N-0016**

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# **Standard for Initial Response at Scenes**

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# **by Law Enforcement**

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Prepared by  
Crime Scene Investigation & Reconstruction Subcommittee  
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### **16 Disclaimer:**

17 This OSAC Proposed Standard was written by the Crime Scene Investigation & Reconstruction  
18 Subcommittee of the Organization of Scientific Area Committees (OSAC) for Forensic Science  
19 following a process that includes an [open comment period](#). This Proposed Standard will be  
20 submitted to a standards developing organization and is subject to change.

21 There may be references in an OSAC Proposed Standard to other publications under development  
22 by OSAC. The information in the Proposed Standard, and underlying concepts and methodologies,  
23 may be used by the forensic-science community before the completion of such companion  
24 publications.

25 Any identification of commercial equipment, instruments, or materials in the Proposed Standard is  
26 not a recommendation or endorsement by the U.S. Government and does not imply that the  
27 equipment, instruments, or materials are necessarily the best available for the purpose.

28 **Foreword**

29 This standard specifies best practices to be employed by law enforcement officers (LEO)  
30 when they arrive at an incident which could be expected to become the subject of criminal or  
31 civil litigation. This standard applies to instances where the responding person's primary  
32 responsibility is initial response and securing the scene and not scene examination and  
33 evidence collection. In instances where the responding LEO is also responsible for scene  
34 examination, documentation, and evidence recovery, they should refer to applicable  
35 additional standards. This document recommends generally accepted professional principles  
36 and practices. The details and issues of each situation and scene require consideration and  
37 will dictate the course of actions to be undertaken by the LEO. Deviations from this standard  
38 should be based on specific articulable circumstances. This standard cannot replace  
39 knowledge, skill, or ability acquired through appropriate education, training, and experience  
40 and should be used in conjunction with sound professional judgement. This standard  
41 provides guidance on some safety issues but is not exhaustive. It is the responsibility of the  
42 appropriate agency to develop a full health and safety plan.

43 This standard is not intended to make agency-specific protocols. This document is intended  
44 to inform individual agency protocols dictating how LEOs are to respond to, approach, and  
45 enter a scene with a focus on evidence integrity and consideration for safety, security, and  
46 medical intervention. This document is intended to provide investigators with a safer work  
47 environment and to limit alterations to a scene, witnesses, persons of interest, and evidence  
48 so that all aspects of the scene are in a substantially similar condition as they were found  
49 when law enforcement initially encountered them.

50 **Keywords:** *Crime scene, document, examination, law enforcement, response, investigation*

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## 69 Standard for Initial Response at Scenes by Law Enforcement

### 70 **1 Scope**

71 This standard describes the protocols required for the initial response by law enforcement to scenes.  
72 These protocols include: arrival procedure, safety considerations, medical intervention, assessing the  
73 scene, scene containment and control, evidence preservation, turning the scene over to investigators,  
74 and document actions and observations. It does not include protocols for a complete scene  
75 investigation.

### 76 **2 Normative References**

77 Guiding Principles for Scene Investigation and Reconstruction [OSAC Proposed Standard]

### 78 **3 Terms and Definitions**

79 For purposes of this document, the following definitions apply.

#### 80 **3.1**

#### 81 **crime scene investigation**

#### 82 **CSI**

83 A scene investigation that involves a potential criminal act.

#### 84 **3.2**

#### 85 **crime scene investigator**

#### 86 **CSI**

87 An individual, however named, who is responsible for performing elements of a scene investigation that  
88 involves a potential criminal act.

#### 89 **3.3**

#### 90 **crime scene preservation**

91 See scene preservation.

#### 92 **3.4**

#### 93 **contamination**

94 The undesirable introduction of a substance to an item at any point in the forensic process. Note: This  
95 includes undesirable transfer of a substance within an item or between items, also referred to as  
96 cross-contamination. (ISO 21043-1)

#### 97 **3.5**

#### 98 **law enforcement officer (LEO)**

99 Any public employee whose duties primarily involve enforcement or investigation of laws.

#### 100 **3.6**

#### 101 **personal protection equipment (PPE)**

102 Equipment worn to minimize exposure to a variety of hazards such as body-fluids, irritants, or  
103 contaminants. Examples of PPE: gloves, foot and eye protection, respirators, and full body suits.

#### 104 **3.8**

105 **scene**

106 A place or object that is subject to and/or requires forensic examination. (ISO/FDIS 21043-1:2018[E])

107 NOTE: A crime scene is a common description of a scene where a presumed crime has been  
108 committed. The scene can be a person or an animal.

109 **3.9**

110 **scene investigation**

111 An examination of a scene to locate, document, collect, and preserve items of potential evidentiary value.

112 [Guiding Principles]

113 **3.10**

114 **scene investigator**

115 An individual, however named, who is responsible for performing elements of scene investigation. [Guiding

116 Principles]

117 **3.11**

118 **scene preservation**

119 The intentional act of refraining from any activity that may alter a scene or anything contained within

120 the scene. [Guiding Principles]

121 **4 Requirements**

122 **4.1 Overview**

123 **4.1.1** Every scene has the potential to yield evidence that may aid in a criminal  
124 investigation. As such, the first responding LEO to a scene shall take all reasonable actions to  
125 preserve the scene in order to maintain evidence integrity until a designated scene  
126 investigator (CSI) is able to respond.

127 **4.1.2** Scene investigation is the responsibility of the responding officer in some jurisdictions  
128 while in others a dedicated unit is deployed to a scene and the responding officer passes the  
129 management of the scene to CSI personnel upon arrival. In such instances, an exchange of  
130 information shall take place between the officer and the CSI personnel.

131 **4.1.3** There are some instances where alteration to the scene prior to CSI response cannot be  
132 avoided, including actions for safety and security, or during medical intervention. Any actions  
133 taken and any known changes to the scene shall be documented and relayed to those responsible  
134 for the investigation.

135 **4.2 Arrival Procedure**

136 **4.2.1** Upon arrival of the first responding LEO(s) to a scene, after reasonably assessing and  
137 addressing any threats or risks of harm to prevent additional injuries or loss of life to the public and  
138 other responders, shall:

139 a) treat the scene as a crime scene, until determined otherwise.

140 b) make initial observations.

141 c) make a reasonable attempt to document the identity and contact information of any  
142 person(s) at or leaving the scene.

143 d) make a reasonable attempt to document any vehicles leaving the scene.

#### 144 **4.3 Safety Considerations**

145 **4.3.1** LEO(s) shall take reasonable precautions to ensure the safety of all parties, while  
146 minimizing changes to the scene. Mitigating actions should include, but are not limited to:

147 a) leaving adequate space for ingress/egress for additional emergency response, should  
148 additional emergencies arise.

149 b) contacting appropriate personnel/agencies if hazards such as chemical, radiological, gas,  
150 biological, animal, physical, or electrical are suspected or discovered.

151 c) directing additional responding units and personnel to minimize any impact to the scene.

152 d) wearing personal protective equipment (PPE) at all times.

153 e) moving a weapon only when necessary to eliminate the threat of harm.

#### 154 **4.4 Medical Intervention**

155 **4.4.1** The initial responding officer(s) shall ensure that medical attention is provided with  
156 minimal contamination of the scene.

#### 157 **4.5 Assessing the Scene**

158 **4.5.1** Assessments shall be made to determine the need for additional resources based on the  
159 nature of and extent of the scene(s), including the approximate number of victims/decedents, and  
160 apparent injuries. This assessment is a continuous process until the scene is transferred to scene  
161 personnel.

162 **4.5.2** The responding LEO is responsible for notifying additional units. This may include  
163 supervisors and supporting units.

#### 164 **4.6 Scene Containment and Control**

165 **4.6.1** Once an assessment of the scene has been made, responding LEO(s) shall establish  
166 boundaries in order to control crowds and / or to restrict access into areas which may have the  
167 potential of containing evidence. Movement throughout the scene should be limited to essential  
168 personnel only. Do not permit additional LEOs to traverse the scene unless absolutely necessary.

169 The initial responding LEO(s) shall make a reasonable effort to:

170 a) Control all individuals at the scene—prevent individuals from altering/destroying physical  
171 evidence by restricting movement, location, and activity, while ensuring and maintaining safety at  
172 the scene.

173 b) Identify and record all individuals at the scene, such as suspects, witnesses, bystanders,

174 victims/family/friends, law enforcement, medical and other assisting personnel.

175 c) Exclude unauthorized and nonessential personnel from the scene (e.g., law enforcement  
176 officials not working the case, politicians, media).

177 d) Secure the scene. Set up physical barriers (e.g., ropes, cones, barrier tape, available  
178 vehicles, personnel, other equipment) or use existing boundaries (e.g., doors, walls, gates).

179 e) Document the entry/exit of all people entering and leaving the scene, once boundaries  
180 have been established.

181 f) Protect the scene. Control the flow of personnel and animals entering and leaving the  
182 scene to maintain integrity of the scene.

183 g) Institute measures to preserve/protect evidence that may be lost or compromised (e.g.,  
184 protect from the elements (rain, snow, wind) and from footsteps, tire tracks, sprinklers).

185 h) Consider search and seizure issues to determine the necessity of obtaining consent to  
186 search and/or obtaining a search warrant.

#### 187 **4.7 Evidence Preservation**

188 **4.7.1** Every item located within the scene should be considered as possibly evidentiary in  
189 nature.

190 **4.7.2** Physical evidence and scene conditions shall be preserved and left undisturbed to allow a  
191 thorough investigation by scene investigators. Items should not be added (e.g., disposable gloves,  
192 food or drink, cigarette butts) or removed from the scene (e.g., weapons or drugs). Exigent  
193 circumstances (e.g., weather, perishable evidence) may necessitate early collection or additional  
194 preservation steps.

#### 195 **4.8 Turning Scene Over to Investigators**

196 **4.8.1** The initial responding LEO(s) at the scene shall provide a detailed scene briefing to the  
197 investigator(s) in charge of the scene. Once a determination has been made to turn the scene over  
198 to investigators, the initial responding LEO(s) should concentrate on scene and/or personnel  
199 security.

#### 200 **4.9 Document Actions and Observations**

201 **4.9.1** All activities conducted, and observations made at the scene shall be documented as  
202 soon as possible after the event to preserve information. The initial responding LEO(s) at the  
203 scene shall produce clear, concise, documented information. The following shall be documented:

204 a) Observations of the scene, including the location of persons and items within the scene  
205 and the appearance and condition of the scene upon arrival.

206 b) Conditions upon arrival (e.g., lights on/off; shades up/down, open/closed; doors and  
207 windows open/closed; smells; ice, liquids; movable furniture; weather; temperature; and  
208 personal items.)



- 209 c) Personal information from witnesses, victims, suspects, and any statements or comments  
210 made.
- 211 d) The LEO(s) actions and actions of others that alter the scene.
- 212 e) Any known changes. If it is essential to move items, the original location and state of the  
213 item shall be recorded prior to movement as well as who moved the item, why, and to where.
- 214 f) Any transfer of evidence, through departmental mechanisms for chain of custody.

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**Annex A**  
**(informative)**

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222 and storage of material.