

Best Practices — Evidence Discovery and Protection

Evidence useful to a crime scene investigation can be discovered by anyone at any time. Whether you are a member of an emergency response team, a search and rescue team or enjoying a leisurely stroll in the park, you may locate an item that could be important to a crime scene investigator. If something seems amiss or out of place, treat it as evidence. The item could be a body, a body part, a weapon, a piece of clothing or other items not normally found in this environment. Listed below are recommended best practices for handling your discovery.

1. Always maintain your personal safety. If the location for the discovery is not safe, move to a safe location. Do not leave the scene, stay where you are and wait for authorities.
2. Determine if there is a possibility of life saving – if not, do NOTHING. This includes young victims and babies.
3. If something is amiss or out of place – assume it is a crime scene.
4. When reporting your discovery consider using a cell phone first as they are more secure. If you communicate using a two-way radio, limit details (such as a body or body parts) because radio traffic is monitored and available to the public. Instead, report "I found something, and I need some police officer or police with EMT". If asked for additional details say the absolute minimum. Report your exact location and directions.
5. If you are part of an organized response team, follow your chain of command for reporting. Provide details only to law enforcement in charge.
6. Everything and everyone brings evidence to a scene. Do not add anything or take anything away. Do not touch or move anything. If you accidentally modify the scene in any way, document everything, even if it is accidental or embarrassing.
7. If you have a camera, take pictures of the evidence and the scene. Remain where you located the evidence and rotate 360° as you snap photos but do wander around.
8. Do not assume you know anything about the scene, remain neutral and provide only your observations.
9. Write notes to yourself. Just the facts (chronological facts about what you did and what you observed). Your opinion or what someone else said is not relevant.
10. Do not write a narrative unless asked.
11. Only speak to the police detective in charge. Follow the chain of command. If you are part of an organized response team, follow your chain of command for reporting your discovery.
12. Never cover any evidence (including a body) with anything. Leave the evidence as you found it.
13. At this moment in time everything is private and confidential. Do not share any information with anyone outside of the investigation, including media, bystanders or family members. IF asked offer only 'NO COMMENT'.
14. Remain professional—the media and the public are likely watching and listening.
15. Ask arriving authorities "what they want you to do".