

OSAC REVIEW / SPRING-SUMMER 2025 (OSAC = Organization of Scientific Area Committees)

NAME OSAC UPDATE #21: ANSI/ASB Best Practice Recommendation 160, 1st Edition, 2024

Best Practice Recommendation for Initial Response at Scenes by Law Enforcement Officers

This best practice recommendation was drafted by the Crime Scene Investigation and Reconstruction Subcommittee of OSAC. It completed the standards development process in the Crime Scene Investigation Consensus body of the AAFS Standards Board (ASB). It is not intended to provide comprehensive guidance for scene investigation and is intended as a part of a series of documents for that purpose.

(Like all OSAC developed Standards, Best Practices, and Guides, these are voluntary and separate from NAME standards and accreditation.)

This is a brief summary of *ANSI/ASB Best Practice Recommendation for Initial Response at Scenes by Law Enforcement Officers*, and as such may leave out or misinterpret important details. **See link to full document (below)**. The AAFS has developed checklists to supplement ASB documents. The link to the checklist is copied below. (This particular checklist is basically a recap of the entire document in outline form.)

Value: Obviously, this document is not directed at Medical Examiners, but overlaps with our work. The responsibilities of Law Enforcement and Death Investigation Authorities at death scenes varies from jurisdiction to jurisdiction, sometimes because of differing law. This best practice document could be used in training to delineate the responsibilities of law enforcement in securing the scene, etc. This best practice document provides recommendations and not requirements.

Foreword:

The document directs very basic scene response when incidents are expected to become the subject of criminal or civil litigation. It applies to instances

where the responding person's primary responsibility is securing the scene and not scene examination or evidence collection.

Overview:

- The first responding officer should take all reasonable actions to preserve the scene and maintain evidence integrity.
- In some jurisdictions the responding officer will investigate the scene, while other jurisdictions have specialized units for scene investigation. If a dedicated unit is deployed to the scene the first responding officer exchanges information with the unit.
- If unavoidable alteration or contamination to the scene occurs, it is to be documented.

Arrival Procedure:

- Law enforcement first assesses and addresses any threats or risks of harm
- Preserves scene until relinquished to the designated scene investigator
- Documents initial observations
- Collects contact information of any witnesses, and vehicles licenses

Safety Considerations:

- Law enforcement ensures self-safety and safety of others
- Directs ingress/egress and contacts any other appropriate personnel or agencies such as Hazmat.
- Moves evidence when necessary to eliminate threat of harm to or loss of evidence

Medical Intervention:

- Ensures medical attention is provided with minimal scene contamination

Assessing the Scene:

- Upon arrival determines the nature and extent of the scene including the number of decedents, personal safety, and the need for more resources.

Scene Containment and Control:

- Establish parameters and restrict access as needed.
- Identify, control, and record individuals at the scene
- Document and control entry/exit of all people
- Request needed resources
- Preserve the scene and evidence, especially items that may be lost or compromised (such as tire tracks from rain or snow)
- Determine the necessity of obtaining consent to search

Evidence Preservation:

- Physical evidence and scene conditions should be left undisturbed to allow a thorough investigation
- Items should not be added (such as disposable gloves, food or drink), or removed.

Relinquishing Control of the Scene:

- The initial responding officer should provide a detailed scene briefing to the responsible investigator assuming control of the investigation, and document this turnover.

Document Actions and Observations:

- Document as soon as feasible and should include time of arrival, conditions upon arrival, observations at the scene, personal information from witnesses, and any alterations made at scene

Full Document:

<https://www.aafs.org/asb-standard/best-practice-recommendation-initial-response-scenes-law-enforcement-officers>

(This document was subject to an open comment period with comment adjudication as it was being considered by the standards development

organization. The above link to the document also allows access to the comments/adjudication.)

Checklist:

<https://www.aafs.org/research-resources-featured-standards-resources-and-training/checklists>