15-13 - Crime Scene Responsibilities

Los Angeles County Sheriff's Department

NEWSLETTER

Field Operations Support Services, (323) 890-5411

CRIME SCENE RESPONSIBILITIES

The intent of this newsletter is to remind deputies of their responsibilities, including providing security, when assigned or tasked with protecting the scene of a crime or major incident. The following information is paraphrased from the Field Training Program Manual.

The handling field unit or deputy has the primary responsibility for controlling the crime scene investigation until such time as it is handed over to a supervisor and/or another Department bureau.

The assigned station or initial handling unit is responsible for security at the location even after specialized investigation teams have arrived, and retain responsibility until they are relieved or dismissed. These specialized units will be focused on their investigation and rely upon field deputy personnel to preserve officer safety and maintain crime scene integrity. Keeping the crime scene perimeter intact is essential for due process, preservation of evidence, and to protect investigative personnel from individuals or groups who may attempt to harm them and/or gain media notoriety through taking advantage of a high profile incident.

Security is not necessarily achieved by having a large number of personnel on scene. Even when many Department personnel are present, a breach of the crime scene or an attack may occur. For example, even though many officers were present, two officers were shot during the most recent Ferguson demonstrations.

Recognizing that safety (officer safety, public safety, and the safety of the person in crisis) is always our top priority, common sense and good judgment must be exercised during any incident. Distractions that reduce officer safety, such as the use of the MDC, cellular phones, portable televisions or DVD players, reading material, or other devices or activities that are not immediately necessary to accomplish the mission, must be avoided. Maintaining and displaying professional demeanor also enhances safety. Callous humor, inappropriate behavior or comments at the scene where a use of force, death, or sex offense occurred may

needlessly incite confrontations or other riotous behavior.

One of the handling unit's crime scene responsibilities is to manage the Field Command Post. They shall control the events at the command post and coordinate other units' responses to the scene. They are to: evaluate the situation, provide emergency medical aid, conduct immediate coordination, request needed assistance and equipment, contain the location, determine the size of the crime scene, establish and control the scene's inner and outer perimeter, establish an ingress and egress corridor, attempt to get basic information on the suspect, determine if there are weapons involved and what type, determine the cause of the problem, preserve the scene, start a log (Major Incident Log) of those who enter and exit the crime scene, make notifications (i.e., Homicide, S.E.B., Watch Commander, Detective Bureau, Crisis Negotiation Team, Mental Evaluation Team, etc.) and provide support to teams after their arrival.

When responding to and preparing an operation for deployment of Aero Bureau, a Special Weapons Team, and Canine Services Detail, the primary handling unit shall use good officer safety skills, be constantly aware of all surroundings, maintain open communication regarding officer safety issues with other deputies, and prepare the location by placing additional deputies a safe distance from the crime scene.

If necessary, evacuate surrounding structures and streets, identify authorized personnel, deal with the media, take charge of the suspect if apprehended, and complete an investigation into the crime.

While at the scene, whether assigned a role at the command post or on a containment post, deputies should continue to utilize the "contact" and "cover" principles. The "cover" deputy shall take up a safe position to cover the "contact" deputy. He/she shall watch the "contact" deputy and the individuals being contacted. The "cover" deputy must concentrate and not allow him/herself to be distracted. He/she should not become involved in the "contact" deputy's conversation with the individuals unless previously planned or officer safety issues arise. The "cover" deputy shall watch for traffic or pedestrians which may become a safety hazard.

The "cover" deputy shall also concentrate on watching for the following additional safety issues: hands in the pockets, concealed weapons or contraband, hostile persons, approaching vehicles, intoxicated or sick persons, initial reactions or nonverbal gestures that signal hostile intentions, possible escape attempts, and bicycles or pedestrians in the area.

The following excerpt is from the Sheriff's Message Regarding the Weekend Murders of Three Police Officers:

Officers have been killed not because of who they were or anything they had done, but because of what they represent. Law enforcement is a dangerous and often thankless job. However hard we train, however strong our relationship with the community, we wear uniforms and drive marked cars which places us at constant risk. Be ever-vigilant, use sound tactics, and back your partners.

Information regarding the contents of this newsletter may be directed to Field Operations Support Services.

References

Field Training Program Manual

Sheriff's Message Regarding the Weekend Murders of Three Police Officers