

TRAFFIC ACCIDENT STUDY GUIDE 2003

SECTION EIGHT



This study guide is designed to provide the law enforcement Explorer with basic principles. The guide is not all inclusive, and does not delineate specific techniques that must be used. The focus of this guide is to provide principals that are flexible and adaptable to various law enforcement situations.

Following the basic principals in this guide should allow the law enforcement Explorer to successfully handle various law enforcement training activities safely and professionally.

The study guide was developed through the cooperation of International Association of Chiefs of Police and the Federal Law Enforcement Training Center.



SECTION EIGHT

ACCIDENT SCENE PHOTOGRAPHY

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SYLLABUS

COURSE TITLE: Accident Investigation Photography

LENGTH OF PRESENTATION:

LECTURE	LAB	P.E.	TOTAL	PROGRAM	OPTION
1:00			1:00		

DESCRIPTION:

This course teaches the students the importance of photography in completely recording an accident scene during an accident investigation. It emphasizes what to photograph, how to sequence the photographs, and when to take the photographs as the officer controls and processes the accident scene.

TERMINAL PERFORMANCE OBJECTIVE (TPO):

The student will identify the proper photographic procedures necessary to document a traffic accident scene.

ENABLING PERFORMANCE OBJECTIVES (EPO):

EPO #1: Identify the importance of accident scene photographs.

EPO #2: Identify eight sources of accident scene photographs.

EPO #3: Identify eight areas of the scene and the six areas on the vehicles that investigators should photograph.

EPO #4: Identify the importance of a photographic log and nine key bits of information.

STUDENT SPECIAL REQUIREMENTS:

There are no special requirements.

Instructor Guide

METHODOLOGIES:

1. Lecture
2. Class discussion

TRAINING AIDS/EQUIPMENT:

1. Instructor:
 - a. Transparencies and overhead projector.
 - b. Computer, overhead projector.
 - c. Writing board and markers.
 - d. Photographs of accident scenes
2. Student:
 - a. Note taking materials.

INSTRUCTOR SPECIAL REQUIREMENTS:

1. There are no special requirements

Outline of Instruction

I. INTRODUCTION

A. RAPPORT AND OPENING STATEMENT

1. Perhaps nowhere is the old adage "a picture is worth a thousand words" more true than when an accident investigator uses photographs in court to clarify a point at issue.
2. This is especially true in traffic accident investigation since even gifted speakers find it difficult to describe degrees of damage or shading of tire-marks, etc.
3. Photographs not only convey the information, but also provide a tangible item of evidence that jurors can hold in their hands while they absorb the information.

B. LESSON PLAN OVERVIEW

1. We will identify the importance of accident scene photographs.
2. Next, we will identify eight sources of accident scene photographs.
3. Then, we will identify eight areas of the scene and the six areas on the vehicles that investigators should photograph.
4. Finally, we will identify the importance of a photographic log and nine key bits of information.

II. PRESENTATION

A. EPO #1: IDENTIFY THE IMPORTANCE OF ACCIDENT SCENE PHOTOGRAPHS.

1. The importance of accident scene photography rests largely with the way people learn.
 - a. Just as most students display a preference for visual, auditory, or hands-on learning, so do the people concerned with accident investigations.
 - b. Supervisors, investigators, safety officers, judges, and most importantly juries absorb information best by one of the aforementioned three methods.

- c. While it is not always possible to provide a hands-on situation, photographs can supply the next best thing and do provide a tangible item for people to mull over.
 - d. Bolstered by good reporting and testimony, photos may provide a jury the next best thing to a full-blown scene reconstruction.
2. Photos provide a permanent record of the accident scene.
- a. Pictures often reveal details of the scene that investigators may have overlooked at the scene.
 - b. They often save time while testifying in court and may reduce the time the investigator spends on the stand during cross-examination.
 - c. Photographs supplement notes, reports, and diagrams.
 - 1) Photos do not replace good observations, notes, reports, and diagrams.
 - 2) The accident investigator should take photographs to accurately record information and not for dramatic impact.
 - 3) In other words, restrict shots of blood and gore to those that are necessary.

B. EPO #2: IDENTIFY EIGHT SOURCES OF ACCIDENT SCENE PHOTOGRAPHS.

1. Usually, the accident investigators take the photographs themselves.
 - a. However, the picture is important (not who took it); try to locate other sources of relevant photographic evidence.
 - b. Sources might include, but not necessarily be limited to:
 - 1) The patrol officer.
 - 2) Assisting investigators.
 - 3) Mobil crime lab personnel or crime-scene search officer.
 - 4) Media personnel, this may require a subpoena.
 - 5) Freelance photographer, again this may require a subpoena.
 - 6) Amateur photographers, such as tourists in park areas, etc.
 - c. In short, try to locate all possible sources of photographic evidence.
 - 1) Do not overlook videotapes.
 - a) Estimates are that the average person appears on videotape 12 times a day because of security cameras at automatic teller machines (ATMs), stores, and other locations.
 - b) Technicians can enhance digitally and make useable even tapes that appear to be of very poor quality at first glance.
 - 2) Cameras in the interior of buildings may yield valuable information if their field of view includes the entrance and adjacent plate glass windows looking out on the street such as in many banks, etc.

C. EPO #3: IDENTIFY EIGHT AREAS OF THE SCENE AND THE SIX AREAS ON THE VEHICLES THAT INVESTIGATORS SHOULD PHOTOGRAPH.

1. The circumstances of the crash will largely dictate what areas and items the accident investigator should photograph.
 - a. An accident may be very serious and yet present a somewhat straightforward scene.
 - b. For example, a vehicle into a tree with no marks indicating evasive action.
 - c. Likewise, a less serious accident involving only property damage may involve several vehicles and a complex intersection with various view obstructions, etc.

2. Most important are overall shots.
 - a. The best single picture would show vehicles in their rest positions with skid marks visible.
 - b. Show where the tire-marks start and shoot in the direction of movement.
 - c. Show view obstructions (parked vehicles).
 - d. Position and condition of traffic control devices.
 - e. Point of view of drivers (remember that eye level is normal).
 - f. Point of view of witnesses (remember that eye level is normal).
 - g. Show all the important marks on the roadway that may help in fixing the course of the vehicle immediately before and during the crash.
 - 1) Tire marks,
 - 2) Gouges,
 - 3) Ruts or furrows,
 - 4) Liquid debris,

- 5) Any other mark of significance,
 - 6) Debris on roadway, and
 - 7) Debris dislodged from the underside of a vehicle.
 - 8) Lane markers.
- h. If the marks or items you photograph extend over a large area, you may have to take a series of photographs.
 - i. Overlapping shots can be used to show two sides of a vehicle. The standard would be four shots, one for each side of the vehicle plus front and back shots.
3. Areas of the vehicles to photograph may include, but not be limited to:
 - a. Lamp damage,
 - b. Damage to the load,
 - c. Friction, abrasion or transfer marks,
 - d. Tire damage,
 - e. Parts failure, and
 - f. Damaged areas showing extent of crush, etc.
 4. When you should to take photographs is as important as what you photograph

- a. Photos taken as early as possible in the investigation will present more of a "true and accurate representation of the scene" as the investigating officer saw it.
 - 1) Less chance of alteration by emergency personnel and citizens.
 - 2) Less vulnerable to attack when introduced in court.
 - 3) Not contaminated by crayon marks, paint, etc., used to mark positions, etc.
 - 4) Early photos and/or tapes may reveal potential witnesses or involved parties not obvious at the time of the investigation.
 - 5) Photograph all damage to the vehicles at the scene to prevent allegations that the towing company caused the damage.

- b. The accident investigator may take follow up photographs if needed.
 - 1) This is a frequent request of the prosecuting attorney.
 - 2) This may be to show details obscured by night, rain, or snow.
 - a) However, beware of waiting too long to take follow up photographs because the scene may change.
 - b) Changes in foliage can occur because of changes in seasons, pruning, etc., that may substantially alter points of view.

D. EPO #4: IDENTIFY THE IMPORTANCE OF A PHOTOGRAPHIC LOG AND NINE KEY BITS OF INFORMATION THAT COMPRISE IT.

1. A photographic log serves as a validation of the traffic accident investigator's work.
 - a. The log can serve to counter the assertion that the photographs taken at the scene do not fairly represent the situation in court.
 - b. With all the important information recorded, the defense could be invited to duplicate the pictures. In other words, the same settings, position and equipment would produce the same results
 - c. Information recorded should include:
 - 1) Date and time.
 - 2) Weather conditions, especially lighting conditions.
 - 3) Position photograph taken from (show on diagram).
 - 4) Camera type, make, model, and serial number.
 - 5) Lens type, make, model, and serial number.
 - 6) Film type.
 - 7) Shutter speed.
 - 8) Lens aperture setting (i.e., f-stop.
 - 9) Distance shown on focus ring.

*** If you used an automatic camera, note the settings shown in viewfinder (if your camera provides that information)**

2. Provision should also be made on the log to indicate the disposition of the film for the purpose of establishing the chain of custody

III. SUMMARY

A. REVIEW OF PERFORMANCE OBJECTIVES

1. EPO #1: Identify the importance of accident scene photographs.
2. EPO #2: Identify eight sources of accident scene photographs.
3. EPO #3: Identify eight areas of the scene and the six areas on the vehicles that the investigator should photograph.
4. EPO #4: Identify the importance of a photographic log and nine key bits of information that comprise it.

B. REVIEW OF TEACHING POINTS

1. Photographs represent an excellent medium for conveying information to personnel involved in the disposition of motor vehicle accidents.
2. They convey information in a format that is easy to understand and which serves as a valuable adjunct to reports, diagrams, and testimony.
3. As with all means used to prove a point in court, the investigator must be concerned with the source, content, and accountability of the photographs.
4. In other words, the investigator must treat them like any other items offered into evidence.

IV APPLICATION

A. LABORATORY

None

B. PRACTICAL EXERCISE

None

REFERENCES

- Baker, J. Stannard. (1975). Traffic Accident Investigation Manual, Evanston, IL: Northwestern University.
- Baker, J. Stannard and Fricke, Lynn B. (1986). The Traffic-Accident Investigation Manual at Scene Investigation and Follow-Up. Evanston, IL: Northwestern University.
- Robar, Neil F. and Ruotolo, George L. (1998). Advanced Traffic Accident Investigation. Jacksonville, FL: University of North Florida.