



Scientific Working Group on Digital Evidence

SWGDE Crime Scene/Critical Incident Videography Recommendations and Guidelines

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1. Objective

(Note: This document is an update to the version previously released as SWGIT Section 20 – Recommendations and Guidelines Crime Scene/Critical Incident Videography.)

The objective of this document is to provide recommendations and guidelines for the use of video camcorders to document crime scenes and critical incidents. Crime scene/critical incident videography should not replace or take precedence over still photography, but can be used as an additional investigative or demonstrative tool.

2. Introduction

Crime scene/critical incident videography augments still photography by providing a portrayal of the crime scene that gives the jury a sense of being there. Crime scene/critical incident videography can provide the context of the scene or event and give perspective of the entire relevant area. It can also depict the relationship of items of importance to each other and the physical landmarks within the scene.

3. Commonly Documented Incidents

- Homicides, suicides, questionable deaths, violent crimes, arsons, assaults
- Natural disasters: floods, hurricanes, weather related incidents
- Other disasters: terrorism incidents, bombings and explosions, mass transit/plane crashes, hazardous material incidents
- Crowd control incidents
- Interviews/Interrogations
- Evidentiary demonstrations/re-enactments
- Officer involved shootings/use of force incidents

4. Equipment

The following list is recommended equipment for videography. Camcorders with removable media are recommended.

- Video camcorder
- AC adapter
- Fully charged batteries / charger
- Power inverter
- Video light with charger
- Appropriate media for camcorder (new blank tape or forensically wiped or formatted media)
- Sturdy fluid head tripod (with quick release)



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- Lens cleaning solution and non-abrasive lint-free cloth
- External microphone (wireless or wired)
- Headphones or earphones
- Audio shorting plug (to disable audio)
- Duct or gaffer's tape
- Identification placards/slates
- Camera bag/hard case
- Rain cover for camera
- Lens cap
- Appropriate video/audio cables
- Neck strap to secure equipment
- Rubber gloves, masks, cloth or rubber booties and other personal protective equipment (PPE)

5. Maintenance

- Proper care and maintenance of equipment should be based on manufacturer recommendations.
- Continued proper operation of key components should be verified and documented on a regular basis, according to agency policy.
- For retention of equipment see *SWGIT Section 15 – Best Practices for Archiving Digital and Multimedia Evidence (DME) in the Criminal Justice System*. [1]

6. Training

Personnel responsible for video documentation should have an understanding of the fundamentals of videography, knowledge of the video recording technology, equipment used, and a basic knowledge of commonly accepted crime scene procedures. The ability of a videographer to properly document a scene should be established and maintained through practical experience and training, both formal and on the job.

The videographer should have a basic working knowledge of his/her respective jurisdictions' legal processes. This knowledge should include familiarity with rules of evidence as they pertain to admissibility and reliability.



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7. General Documentation Procedures

Prior to arrival at the scene, verify all equipment is available and in proper working order. The date/time generator of the equipment should be verified for accuracy.

- Upon arrival, confer with the lead investigator. The investigator and videographer should walk through the scene without video equipment, noting all evidence or items of importance. The scene should be cleared of all personnel during video recording, when possible.
- The scene should be documented in the exact condition the videographer found it upon his/her arrival.
- Each scene should begin with a placard or slate containing information including date, time, location, videographer, and case number. See **Appendix A** for a sample placard or slate. A brief audio recording of this information is also acceptable.
- In addition to the placard or slate, case notes should include equipment information (e.g. camera make, model and serial number).
- Unless circumstances dictate otherwise, audio should not be recorded during documentation. In instances where audio is required, it should be monitored for proper recording.
- All camera movements including pans, tilts and zooms should be conducted in a slow, smooth, and deliberate manner.
- Recordings may be paused and restarted. If possible, similar landmarks or items should be used as points of reference.
- Documentation of the scene should begin with a slow 360° pan of the exterior and surrounding area from a fixed position to document landmarks, lighting, traffic and other investigative factors.
- Record video throughout the scene showing the location and proximity of important items in relation to one another. Starting with the main point of entry, capture general images, proceeding to medium range images and conclude with close-ups.
- Confirm with the lead investigator that all locations and items of importance have been documented.
- If additional items not previously identified are located, document those items in the same manner.
- Confer with the lead investigator and conduct a brief visual verification of the recording prior to leaving the scene.
- Though the length of the video will be dependent on the complexity of the scene, an effort should be made to be as concise as possible. As an example, a single location with few items of importance should take no longer than twenty minutes.



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8. Media Handling Procedures

These procedures are intended to protect the video from physical damage, accidental erasure, or other alterations.

8.1 Tape Based Media:

- Immediately after recording, remove the write protect tab from the tape cassette or slide the tab to the “SAVE” position.
- The tape should be labeled with the following when applicable: agency, videographer, location, date, time and case number.
- Protect the tape from magnetic fields such as those found near police radios, electric motors, solenoids and metal detectors.
- Avoid exposure to direct sunlight, excessive humidity and temperature extremes. Storage and transportation should be in a cool and dry environment.
- Create a copy of the original tape (including metadata such as time/date information) and verify its accuracy. The copy should be used for all subsequent viewing.
 - If the original videotape must be reviewed, it should not be paused.
- All copies and originals should be marked as such and handled in accordance with agency policy.

8.2 File Based Media:

- When possible, separate media should be used for each location. Since the storage media may not be able to be labeled (e.g. internal camcorder hard drive), the placards or slates recorded at the beginning of each scene should be used to assist in the differentiation between locations.

Note: It is advisable to perform a forensic wipe of media before each use (including the first use) in order to prevent residual data from previous recordings from being included in unrelated cases.
- Protect the storage media (e.g. removable card, internal camcorder hard drive) from magnetic fields such as those found near police radios, electric motors, solenoids and metal detectors.
- Avoid exposure to direct sunlight, excessive humidity and temperature extremes. Storage and transportation should be in a cool and dry environment.
- After returning from the scene, prior to review, download and verify copies of the original digital files to an appropriate storage device/media. For more information, see *SWGIT Section 13 – Best Practices for Maintaining the Integrity of Digital Images and Digital Video*. [2]
- A working copy should be produced for review and verified for accuracy. Working copies should be prepared in a commonly accepted file format, labeled appropriately, and

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should include metadata such as time/date information. These copies may be distributed in accordance with agency policy.

- Once copies of the original digital files are archived and verified, data remaining on the original recording media/device should be forensically wiped or formatted prior to reusing the media/device. For more information, see *SWGIT Section 15 – Best Practices for Archiving Digital and Multimedia Evidence (DME) in the Criminal Justice System*. [1]
- If at any time a bit stream duplicate of the original recording media/device is produced, a forensic wipe must be performed prior to using the media/device.

9. References

- [1] Scientific Working Group on Imaging Technology, "Section 15: Best Practices for Archiving Digital and Multimedia Evidence (DME) in the Criminal Justice System". [Online]. <https://www.swgit.org/documents/Current%20Documents>
- [2] Scientific Working Group on Imaging Technology, "Section 13: Best Practices for Maintaining the Integrity of Digital Images and Digital Video". [Online]. <https://www.swgit.org/documents/Current%20Documents>



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Appendix A. – Sample Identification Placard/Slate

Video Identification Card

Case Number:	Date / Time:
Location:	
Videographer:	Lead Investigator:
Comments:	



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