

Shooting Investigations

Session Materials

A. The Ideal investigation recovers:

1. The weapon
2. Missiles that exited the body or were “misses”
3. Empty fired case, shot wads, sabot, plastic cup
4. Additional live ammo from storage on premises
5. The suspect (!)
6. All articles bearing fingerprints and trace evidence

B. Primary basic questions to be answered:

1. Is the apparent gunshot wound really a firearm injury? (Consider a carpenter’s awl, ice pick, kitchen utensil.)
2. Is the apparent “natural death” a fatal gunshot wound? (Bullet entry is concealed by nostril or closed mouth.)
3. Is the apparently charred corpse in burned car or room a victim of gunshot? (Subsequently x-ray will tell, but look for shell case.)
4. Are all the shots accounted for, assuming we have empty cases to count?
5. If truly a firearms injury, weapons absent, are we searching for conventional gun or an exotic weapon (see VI-B)?
6. If a weapon is present, is it consistent with victim’s wounds and cartridges or spent missiles found? Direction and distance of fire?
7. Is the weapon in the hand of the deceased a “plant” by a murderer? (Simulated suicide, or self defense plea)
 - a. An old “disposable” throwaway with rusted barrel bore or dusty bore.
 - b. Never registered, untraceable (but owned by the murderer).
 - c. Prints of the accused on the frame or barrel
 - d. Loaded with fresh modern ammo not in keeping with age and condition of gun.
8. Is there more than one weapon involved as suggested by injuries or other evidence? What person(s) fired the weapon(s)?

C. Procedure for the investigator:

1. Secure the scene — send for backup if necessary.
2. Seize “everything!” Collect/identify/label/seal/sign
 - a. Gun, exited bullets, cases (mark or don’t mark as directed by State Lab rules)
 - b. Render the weapon safe. Don’t send a booby trap to the lab (lower a hammer; put the safety on).
 - c. Collection includes gun cleaning kit, additional ammo, liquor bottles, clothing, bloodstains, intermediate targets, etc.
 - d. If weapon absent, search for silencer trash: bits of steel wool, metal screen, cork, rubber, copper scour pad, etc.
 - e. If victim survives, request **Hospital** to retrieve: clothing, bullets removed, wounds excised (for residue testing) and blood clots removed (may be more accurate alcohol level than blood drawn on admission.)



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3. Photograph and diagram with measurements, including location of ejected cases, position of body and its extremities. Records serial #, manufacturer, type, action, barrel length, etc. of weapon.
4. In rifle or shotgun "suicide" measure victim's arm and trigger to muzzle distance.
5. Observe precautions for preserving evidence on body at scene.
6. Conduct a trace of the weapon through the Bureau of Alcohol Tobacco and Firearms ATF.

Important:

Protect clothing and injury site during transportation to morgue.

Paper Bags should be placed on hands and feet and secured with paper tape to protect possible sources of physical evidence.

Do Not Allow body to be washed or cleansed by anyone prior to pathologist's viewing.

Do Not Allow fingerprinting OR gunshot residue testing prior to the pathologist's viewing.

Do Not Allow anyone to remove the victim's clothing prior to pathologist's viewing.

Be careful not to dislodge or remove any foreign body (e.g. projectile) or substance from the body. Wadding from a shotgun shell can appear to be a blood clot if it has absorbed blood. Wadding usually will be found in wound if target-muzzle distance is less than 6'.

X-Rays should be ordered immediately upon arrival into the morgue, so that the location of the projectile will be immediately determined for the pathologist and the law enforcement agency personnel.

If Injury Was Possibly Self-Inflicted, be sure to ask Suicide Indicator Questions.

