Death Investigation
Expanded Course Outline and Hourly Distribution
For Two-Day, 16 Hour Course

INSTRUCTOR: Michael Brown
Third Degree Communications, Inc.

Learners:
Approximately 35 In-Service Police Officers from various California Law Enforcement agencies

Length of Instruction
Two 8-Hour Days: 16 Hours Total

Objective:
The student will learn the basic investigative skills necessary to handle a variety of death investigation cases by understanding each of the following topic areas:

Day 1 0800-1200:
I. Goals
II. Legal Issues Related to Death Investigation
   A. Understanding the Criminal Justice System
      1. Overview of criminal process from arrest to appeal.
   B. Search and Seizure
      1. Review of search and seizure issues related to investigations.
      2. Consent to search forms.
      3. Consent for release of medical records.
   C. Statements
      1. Understanding the concepts surrounding what constitutes a voluntary statement.
      2. Circumstances under which a Miranda warning should be given.
      3. The nature of a spontaneous statement.
   D. Case Law
      1. Various court decisions used to illustrate the above points as they relate to death investigations.

III. Basic Death Investigation
   A. Natural vs. Unnatural Death
      1. Understanding the nature and response to both situations.
      2. Expected death vs. unexpected sudden death.
   B. Approach to a death scene.
      1. Inside/out observations.
      2. Outside/in observations.
      3. Mental note taking.
      4. Physical note taking.
   C. Essential Information
      1. Persons on scene.
      2. Records checks of persons on scene and residence.
      3. Medical condition of victim.
   D. Coroner/Medical Examiner role.
1. Who is in charge?
3. Common medical definitions.

E. Missing Persons Investigations
   1. Essential information needed in case the missing person turns up deceased.

1300-1700:

IV. Wound Recognition

A. Bruising
   1. Naturally occurring bruising vs. suspicious bruises.
   2. Stages of bruising.

B. Ligature
   1. Recognizing a self devised/inflicted ligature mark from a mark inflicted from a second party.

C. Incised Wounds
   1. Basic understanding of instruments used and the appearance of the wounds produced from these instruments.

D. Gunshot wounds.
   1. Basic understanding of wounds left by a variety of firearms.
   2. Exit vs. entry wounds.

V. Apparent Suicide

A. Overdose/Poisoning
   1. Physical manifestations associated with overdose and poisoning suicides.
   2. Evidence items to be on the look out for associated to overdose and poisoning.

B. Hangings
   1. Evidence items to be on the look out for associated with hanging suicides.
   2. Examination of victim for evidence.
   3. Measurements to be recorded.

C. Jumpers
   1. Examination of primary and secondary suicide scene for evidence.
   2. Examination of victim for evidence.

D. Gunshot Suicides.
   1. Examination of the scene for evidence.
   2. Examination of immediate scene for evidence.
   3. Examination of surrounding area for evidence.

VI. Apparent Accidental Death

A. Overdose
   1. Recognition of signs of accidental overdose vs. suicide.
   2. Recognizing signs of alcohol poisoning vs. chronic alcoholism.

B. Fire
   1. Working in tandem with Fire Department personnel.
   2. Recognizing “heat induced” injury vs. suspicious injury.
   3. Posturing.

C. Falls
   1. Understanding the difference between injuries caused by a fall vs. those caused by a second party.

D. Traffic Fatalities
   1. Accident scene security.
   2. Understanding when an accident turns into an “on purpose.”
   3. The importance of identifying onlookers.

E. Drowning
1. Understanding what evidence to look for upon initial arrival.
2. Obtaining water samples and from where to obtain them.

F. Auto-erotic
   1. Understanding what evidence to look for upon arrival
   2. Interviews of family, friends, and associates.

The student will also learn the critical components essential for first responding police officers to ensure proper scene integrity at cases involving child deaths, homicides, and major crime scenes:

**Day Two: 0800-1200**

I. Goals

II. Child Death Protocol
   A. Definition of “Child Death”
      1. Understanding what constitutes a child death.
   B. SIDS
      1. The evolution of understanding into possible causes Sudden Infant Death Syndrome.
   C. Abuse Situations
      1. Understanding what evidence to look for in possible abuse situations that may have lead to the death of a child.
      2. Requesting “Full Body X-Rays” at a hospital.
   D. Neglect Situations
      1. Understanding what evidence to look for in possible neglect situations.
   E. Pediatric Records
      1. Obtaining consent from parents for each facility/doctor that has seen the child.
   F. Child Care Facilities
      1. Scene security at a child care facility.
      2. Cooperation of other involved agencies.
      3. Recognizing criminal vs. civil concerns of management.

III. Major Crime Scene Management
   A. Establishing Perimeters
      1. Understanding the function of inner perimeters and outer perimeters.
   B. Initial Witness Statements
      2. Environmental considerations to initial statements.
   C. The Art of a Complete Canvass
      1. Documenting residence profiles.
      2. Documenting target area profile.
      3. The optimum vehicle canvass.

IV. Officer Involved Shooting/In-Custody Death
   A. Peace Officer’s Bill of Rights
      1. Understanding primary issues upon initial arrival.
      2. Understanding attorney/client privilege as it relates to involved officer.
      3. Information to be elicited from initial officer upon arrival.
   B. Criminal vs. Administrative Investigation
      1. Understanding the necessity for the separation of both investigations.

**1300-1700:**

V. Evidence Recognition/Photographing/Documentation
   A. Defining Evidence
      1. Understanding the difference between evidence and extraneous material.
B. Types of Evidence
   1. Understanding physical, testimonial, and circumstantial evidence.
C. Photographing a Scene (Telling a story with your photographs)
   1. Understanding the composition of long view, medium view, and close up.
D. Digital vs. Film Photography
   1. Understanding advantages and disadvantages associated to both.
E. Documenting the Investigation (Painting a picture with your words).
   1. Understanding words used to describe specifics as opposed to generalities.

VI. Witness Interviews
   A. Separation
      1. Understanding how to effectively elicit an uninfluenced statement.
   B. Monitoring
      1. Understanding how to maintain control of witnesses.
   C. Recording
      1. Understanding the importance of recording interviews.
      2. Psychological effect of overt vs. covert recording.
   D. Understanding officer demeanor and approach in a variety of death investigation situations.

VII. Case Studies of Death Investigation
   A. People vs. Carrasco
      1. The body of a homeless woman is discovered in an encampment.
   B. People vs. Jeshurin
      1. A dependent adult is discovered deceased by her in-home caregiver.

VIII. Question & Answer
IX. Conclusion

Facilities, Materials, Personnel Needed:
- Class time is from 0800-1700 hours
- Flip Chart
- Flip Chart Stand
- Laptop Computer (PowerPoint Presentation)
- Computer Image Projector
- Handout Packets
- All Audio/Visual Media is in WAV/MPEG format to be played through Computer Image Projector via attached Stereo Speakers:
  A. PAPD Fitzhugh Case (Excerpts from Discovery Channel Special)
  B. 911 Call from Ahern case