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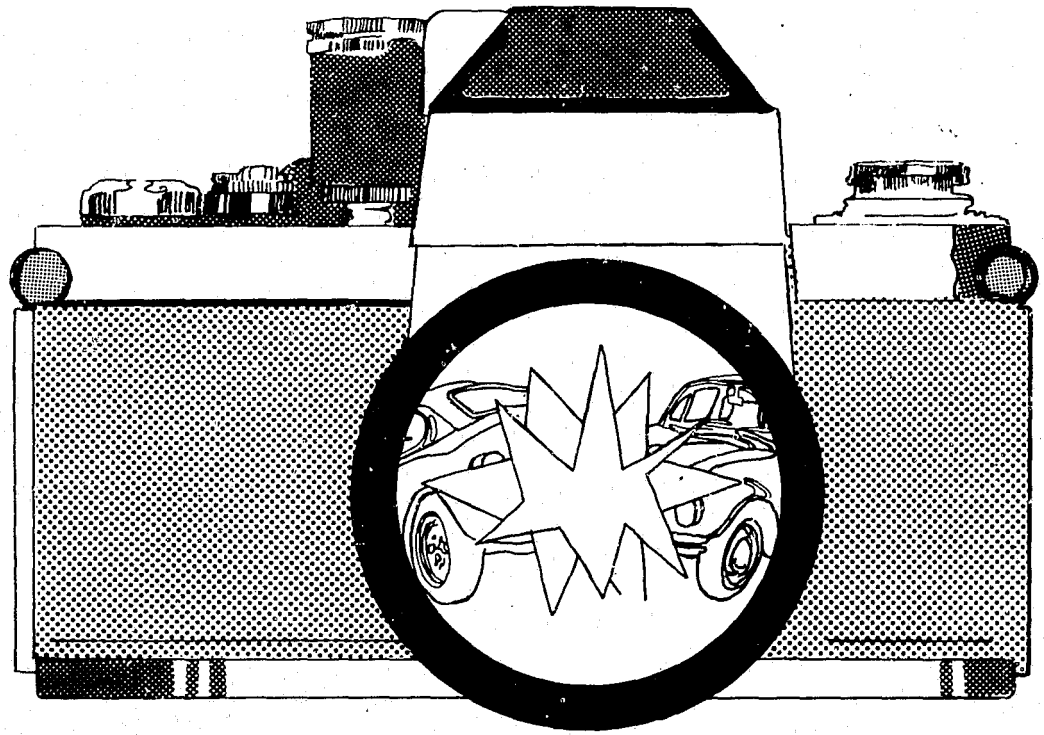
COLLISION MANAGEMENT PROCEDURES

PART 8
Photographing the Collision Scene



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Aberdeen Police Department
Baltimore County Sheriff's Office
Bowie State College
Brunswick Police Department
Cecil County Sheriff's Office
Coppin State College
Department of General Services
Harford County Sheriff's Office
Md. Center for Public Broadcasting
Mass Transit Administration
Military Department of Maryland
North East Police Department
University of Maryland-Baltimore County Campus

Salisbury, Maryland - 10/6/75-12/2/75

Cambridge Police Department
Centreville Police Department
Chestertown Police Department
Crisfield Police Department
Denton Police Department
Easton Police Department
Federalsburg Police Department
Fruitland Police Department
Hurlock Police Department
Kent County Sheriff's Office
Ocean City Police Department
Pocomoke City Police Department
Queen Anne's County Sheriff's Office
Queenstown Police Department
Rock Hall Police Department
Salisbury Police Department
Salisbury State College
Talbot County Sheriff's Office
University of Baltimore

Prince Georges County - 10/14/75-12/15/75

Armed Forces Police
Bladensburg Police Department
Brentwood Police Department
Calvert County Sheriff's Office
Charles County Sheriff's Office
Cheverly Police Department
GSA-Office of Buildings and Grounds
Hyattsville Police Department
Md. National Capital Park Police
Mt. Rainier Police Department
Riverdale Police Department
St. Mary's County Sheriff's Office
Takoma Park Police Department
University Park Police Department
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COLLISION MANAGEMENT PROCEDURES, PART VIII

"PHOTOGRAPHING THE COLLISION SCENE"

ABSTRACT

This unit is designed to provide the student with information concerning the techniques on the proper method of photographing the collision scene. The unit treats the use of the camera along with a list of general rules for photographing the accident scene. The unit also deals briefly with the preservation of photographic evidence.

BEHAVIORAL OBJECTIVES

Identify the general procedures in photographing various aspects of an accident scene.

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COLLISION MANAGEMENT PROCEDURES VIII

Photographing the Collision Scene

Introduction

Photographs are a forceful and convenient means of recording the physical conditions of the accident scene. They can supplement but not supplant other forms of documentation, such as careful observation of the accident scene and measurement and diagraming of the accident scene events and objects. Photographs may capture some aspect of the scene which was overlooked by the investigator while under duress. A picture may help clarify some point that the investigator or someone else may want to know at a later time.

A study of the photographs can help in reconstructing the accident. They help the investigator as well as expert analysts to arrive at conclusions about the accident. The photographs may also be used by the prosecutor as evidence to prosecute traffic violators. They may be introduced as critical evidence in setting claims for damages resulting from the accident.

Use of the Camera

Background

A patrolman cannot legally be prevented from taking pictures on public property. However, the laws of trespass may prevent him from taking pictures on private property. If an accident occurred on private property, legally, the patrolman cannot take a picture on the property without the owner's permission; but, it would be perfectly legal to take a picture of the scene from a public road. Someone attempting to prevent a patrolman from taking a picture on public property is interfering with the patrolman's performance of duty and this could be considered a misdemeanor. Pictures should be taken as soon as possible after arriving at the accident scene since the situation is likely to change as time goes on, i.e., short-lived evidence may be obliterated or removed.

When and What to Photograph

When and what to photograph normally depends on the urgency of higher priority tasks, such as caring for the injured or maintaining a traffic flow and control of bystanders. However, when no one is injured and wrecked cars must be moved to clear the road, photographing the accident scene may be one of the patrolman's initial tasks. Initially, one should photograph information that may be quickly lost, such as:

- Debris which shows the point of impact (e.g., broken glass, dirt which fell from the underside of the vehicles, etc.)

- Tire imprints or skidmarks in soft material (i.e., dirt, mud, snow, etc.), which may be disturbed or obliterated due to traffic, weather, and/or persons at the scene.

Later, photograph more permanent evidence, such as roadside objects, view obstructions, position of traffic signs. Damage to vehicles may show up better after they have been removed, especially if the vehicle ran off the road and turned over. However, make note of any damage or physical change to the vehicle photographed which resulted from moving the vehicle or rescue operations (e.g., windows were broken in order to rescue occupants, spare tire substituted to facilitate towing, etc.).

Remember that a photograph must be a pictorial representation of the scene as found upon arrival on the scene, except for the care rendered the injured.

Commonly Photographed Accident Situations

The following are examples of situations where photographs are of particular value to assist the patrolman in reconstructing the accident and forming opinions.

- Accidents involving fatalities
- Accidents where a large vehicle such as a truck or bus ran off the road or roadway
- Accidents involving vehicles which ran off a bridge or through a guard rail
- Accidents at railroad crossings
- Accidents involving pedestrians
- Hit and run accidents
- Unusual/freak accidents, such as a vehicle colliding with an airplane.

Remember that a general overall photograph may be useful later in identifying witnesses.

General Rules

1. Background

Photographs are not always necessary, especially if the accident is minor but when in doubt, they should be taken if the patrolman has a useful objective in mind. Keep the number of photographs to a minimum, since too many photographs waste valuable time and film. Photographs showing details of vehicular damage are good, however, close-up photographs of bodies and blood are usually of little value.

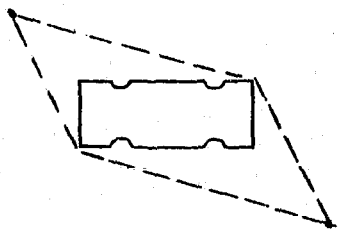
2. Plan the Pictures

The patrolman should plan the type of picture he wants before setting up the camera. Good planning will eliminate the need to take several photographs when one good photograph will do. Plan pictures so as to include not only objects of interest, but their relationship to other accident scene objects. The patrolman should attempt to make the photograph show as much as possible. Exclude extraneous items insofar as possible. Ask bystanders to step out of the field of view as they may detract from the photograph and pose additional problems if the photograph is used in court.

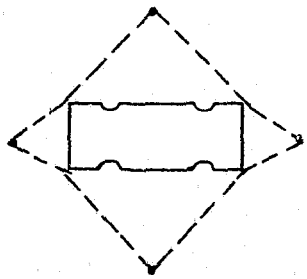
Remember that close up photographs showing bodies and blood are inadmissible as evidence because of the effect upon a jury.

3. Photographing Vehicular Damage

Photographs of vehicular damage are useful in reconstructing the accident. To reflect the extent of total vehicular damage, a minimum of two oblique pictures are required, as illustrated below, to show all four sides of the vehicle:



However, oblique pictures should only be taken when time is a factor, since they do not reflect the extent and direction of collapse. The best illustration of vehicular damage is where four pictures are taken with each aligned with the axis of the vehicle, as illustrated below.



It is best to photograph vehicular damage before the vehicles are removed, so that towing-incurred damage will not interfere with the patrolman's analysis of the accident. To present a true representation of the accident, photographs should include detached vehicular parts where they were found in the roadway. If possible, photographs of the final resting places of the vehicle should include recognizable landmarks.

4. Roadmarks/Tire Marks

Photographs of roadmarks (gouges, scratches, etc.) and/or tire marks are excellent supplements to physical measurements. Some of the patrolman's considerations for photographing these marks are reviewed below:

- Aim the camera at the roadmarks/tire marks and no closer than 3 feet above the ground.
- At least one of the roadmarks/tire mark pictures should show a large road area to prove that other marks have not been intentionally omitted.
- At night, several synchronized flash sources may be needed if the roadmarks/tire marks are long. Generally a single flashbulb is sufficient to illuminate marks up to 25 feet long; beyond that, additional synchronized sources are required every 25 feet.

5. Final Position of Objects

The final position of vehicles and objects must be measured and diagramed. However, photographs are excellent supplements to this information.

6. Roadway Environment

Photographs of the trafficway environment are useful, only if they are intended to document some of the following factors:

- View obstructions
- Sign distances
- Position/condition of traffic control devices
- Roadway irregularities
- Possible illusions or interferences with vision
- Road surface deficiencies
- Other conditions showing a direct bearing on the accident.

General Techniques

The following are general techniques employed to photograph an accident scene.

- Black and white film is desirable since it is quite satisfactory for documentary purposes, and easier and faster to process than color film. It also offers greater flexibility with available light. Color film rarely enhances accident scene photographs. It is used for recording paint rub-off and traffic control devices.
- For most pictures the camera should be held level to avoid distortion of perspective. Tilting, swinging and/or rotating the camera can give the wrong perspective of the actual environment. It can make a graded road look level.
- Bystanders should be asked to stand aside to avoid obstructing the view.
- Depth of field must be adequate to record all desired objects in focus.
- During daylight, flash may be used to fill in details shielded from available light.
- When photographing small objects, a scaled ruler or an object of known size should be placed next to the object being photographed. Remember, however, that several court cases have been disputed over the use of the ruler in photographs.

Categorization and Preservation of Photographic Evidence

The patrolman must make a record of certain facts after taking each picture. For example, the following information is normally recorded:

- Location of the scene or objects photographed
- Compass direction of each photograph
- Identification number of the camera
- Type of film used
- Type of lens used (if variable)
- Type of filter used, if any
- Settings employed (e.g., f-stop, focal distance, etc.).

The type of film used and the size should be that which is preferred by the photographer or that which is required by the department.

Keep in mind that photographs may be introduced as evidence at the discretion of the judge providing they comply with the rules of evidence.

Directions: Circle the letter of the one item which best completes the following statements.

1. Photographs:

   a. can supplant other forms of documentation

   b. may capture some aspect of the scene which was overlooked by the investigator while under duress

   c. are an essential means of recording accident scene events

   d. all of the above.

2. Photographs:

   a. may be introduced as critical evidence

   b. may help the investigator to arrive at conclusions

   c. may be used as evidence to prosecute

   d. all of the above.

3. Plan the photograph in order to:

   a. include not only objects of interest, but their relationship to other accident scene objects

   b. include as many objects and details as possible

   c. both a and b

   d. neither a or b.

Directions: Circle the letter of the one item which best completes the following statements.

4. The best illustration of vehicular damage:

   a. is where two oblique pictures are required to illustrate all four sides of the vehicle

   b. is where four pictures are taken with each aligned with the axis of the vehicle

   c. both a and b

   d. neither a or b.

5. Photographs are useful in documenting:

   a. roadway irregularities

   b. sign distances

   c. road surface deficiencies

   d. all of the above.

6. Color film:

   a. is necessary for documentary purposes

   b. rarely enhances accident scene photographs

   c. both a and b

   d. neither a or b.

Turn to the next page to check your answers.

KEY

1. b. may capture some aspect of the scene which was overlooked by the investigator while under duress.
   (See page X - 2.)

2. d. all of the above.
   (See page X - 2.)

3. a. include not only objects of interest, but their relationship to other accident scene objects.
   (See page X - 6.)

4. b. is where four pictures are taken with each aligned with the axis of the vehicle.
   (See page X - 7 .)

5. d. all of the above.
   (See page X - 9 .)

6. b. rarely enhances accident scene photographs.
   (See page X - 10.)