

## **How to avoid contaminating crime scene evidence?**

The collection of evidence at a crime scene is one of the first and most important investigative steps. Evidence collection may aid or diminish the possibility of criminal prosecution depending on the extent to which the crime scene can be preserved. Only police officers or safety personnel, i.e., Fire or Hazardous Materials professionals, should collect evidence.

Routinely, the school custodian is among the first to respond to a crime which occurred on campus. It is recommended that the custodian seal off the room or area on campus where the evidence may be located. Containing the scene by eliminating or limiting unnecessary foot traffic is a necessity. This can many times be accomplished by locking a door. On other occasions, this may require that a staff member remain with the evidence until the police arrive.

Crimes against persons and property have the potential for evidence collections. The acronym "RESPOND" should help custodians to manage a school crime scene and prevent evidence from being disturbed.

### **Respond**

- Personal safety - Your safety comes first! You can't help others if you are injured.
- Organize your thoughts and formulate a plan on how to handle the situation.
- Make mental notes of your observations.

### **Evaluate**

- Evaluate the severity of the situation. Is the crime/incident in progress or not?
- Identify all involved and uninvolved individuals in the area.
- Be aware of weapons and hazards (flammable materials, etc.)
- Be aware of potential evidence.
- Don't touch potential evidence unless the evidence may be destroyed or stolen if left unsecured.

### **Secure**

- Clear away uninvolved people.
- Establish a perimeter with custodial tape, cones, desks.
- Police will adjust the perimeter if they need to.

### **Protect**

- Safe guard the scene - limit and document any people entering the area.
- Don't use phones or bathrooms within the scene area.
- Don't eat, drink or smoke in the area of the scene.

**Observe**

- Write down your observations - These notes will be utilized to report crime scene management to responding police. Your notes could possibly be used at a later date in criminal court.
- Record detailed information - don't rely on your memory.

**Notify**

- Call 911 (Police/EMS/Fire Personnel), if not already called or school police dispatch

**Document**

- Take good notes - Such as: time, date, people at scene, weather, doors open or closed, lights on or off and position of furniture.
- Be prepared to provide your notes and information to police.