

Criminal Evidence Response Team (CERT)

603.1 PURPOSE AND SCOPE

The purpose of this policy is to define the functions of the Criminal Evidence Response Team (CERT). The Newark Police Department will provide specially trained personnel and evidence collection apparatus to process crime scenes which are either sophisticated, of a serious nature, or are uniquely large or challenging. The mission of CERT is to identify, collect, and preserve relevant evidence in a manner consistent with contemporary law enforcement standards.

603.2 FUNCTION

The CERT team is a unit comprised of one police supervisor and other members of the rank of either Police Officer or Community Service Officer. Each CERT member will be trained in a POST certified basic evidence technician or equivalent course.

Team members will be assigned to address crime scene photography, sketching, video, evidence collection, and preservation, and all other duties associated with evidence processing. Activation of all or part of this team will be determined by the team supervisor, or, in his/her absence, the on-duty supervisor or watch commander.

The CERT Team is specifically trained for use in the following situations and should be activated at the discretion of the Field Operations Commander or his/her designee:

- (a) Homicide
- (b) Suicide, including attempts where death is likely
- (c) Any suspicious death
- (d) Any in-custody death
- (e) Forcible rape
- (f) Assault with serious injury
- (g) Discharge of a firearm by a police officer resulting in death or injury to any person
- (h) Arson investigation
- (i) Any felony investigation that has either significant or exhaustive evidence collection issues

The CERT Team has an additional function of providing relevant training to all members of this Department. The team is not designed as a substitute for the routine functions of line personnel. Officers and CSO personnel are still responsible for processing crime scenes which do not meet the team call-out standard. The CERT Team will assist Department members with this continuing responsibility by providing periodic briefing sessions and written training materials.

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603.3 CERT TEAM ACTIVATION

- (a) Members of the CERT Team will be available via departmental pagers.
- (b) When circumstances exist as outlined in this Policy, on-duty supervisor may activate CERT Team members as needed and available. Many situations may arise which necessitate the assistance of one or more members of this team. On-duty members would be the first priority for activation. Additional members may be selected based upon an approaching shift or an availability known to the supervisor in charge. The unit supervisor should be notified of even a partial call-out.

603.4 CERT TEAM VEHICLE

The CERT Team van is a specially equipped vehicle. This evidence van will be maintained in a state of readiness with respect to maintenance, orderliness and equipment. It will be the responsibility of the unit supervisor to insure that the evidence van and the specialty gear associated with it are in a constant state of good order. All expensive/fragile equipment will be placed in secure and cushioned storage spaces. It is imperative that the evidence van remain clear of any reasonably preventable contamination/security issues. Evidence collection inventories will be maintained at appropriate levels. The evidence van itself should not be used for any duties other than crime scene responses unless authorized by a Division Commander. A unit equipment log will be maintained in the evidence van to track the depletion of evidence items for inventory purposes.

603.5 UNIT SUPERVISORY DUTIES

The CERT Team is charged with the significant responsibility of identifying, collecting, and preserving physical evidence. This function carries a high degree of expectation and scrutiny by all parties in the criminal justice system and the operating competency of the team must be quintessential. The unit supervisor is responsible for assuring that the level of training, direction, and oversight maintains this standard. Further, the supervisor must insure that the evidence packet, or that portion of the incident report which is submitted by CERT members be complete and thorough. One collated and complete evidence packet shall be submitted as opposed to individual report submissions by team members. It is the responsibility of the unit supervisor to ascertain the expectations and needs of the various prosecutorial bodies in order to deliver a working product which is consistent with the needs of all parties involved in criminal case dispositions. This includes the identification of training/equipment needs and upgrades.

603.6 UNIT MEMBER DUTIES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

CERT Team members are responsible for processing crime scenes in accordance with their training, directions, and policies of the Department. Written documentation will be professional and suited for the court process. If no CERT Team supervisor is available, members shall proceed at the direction of the on-duty/on-scene supervisor. Key responsibilities include the following:

- (a) Appropriate identification, collection, and preservation steps.

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- (b) Addressing chain of evidence issues.
- (c) Maintaining communications with laboratory, forensics, and district attorney personnel as needed or as requested.
- (d) Being fully prepared for court duties, including having evidence and pertinent reports ready for court, being prepared to testify professionally, etc.
- (e) Updating the unit equipment log so that each utilized evidence item can be replaced.
- (f) Providing training updates to line personnel, as assigned.
- (g) All team members will be cross-trained in the full array of evidence technician functions. Specialty assignments may develop based upon unique abilities or enhanced training in a specific area. The mission of the team, however, incorporates the ideal that all members are able to fully process a scene independently.