

# 3 Ways to Take Suspicion Out of Your Death Cases

Critical 3 - Ep. 003

[00:00:00.12] The National Criminal Justice Training Center of Fox Valley Technical College presents the Critical 3 Series, providing timely and crucial information from our most popular training offerings. Visit [NCJTC.org](http://NCJTC.org) to find more essential criminal justice training created for you by experts in the field. We are pleased to bring you 3 Ways to Take Suspicion Out of your Death Cases, with Bill Hanson.

[00:00:28.90] Suspicious deaths take the most time. They could take months, even years. If you don't do a proper job with this and work with everybody, you're going to have either a cold case, or it'll be an unsolved altogether.

[00:00:40.84] The first point that I'd like to make is, the missteps that you may have with your first responders. Now by "first responders," I mean officers that are first on the scene. That could mean fire department personnel that respond, or EMS personnel.

[00:00:54.49] These people need to be taught on what a pattern injury is, what a bullet strike may look like to a body, what a hesitation mark may look like on a suicide subject. In order to make a better case, they need to know what to look for, how to help you out in your case. Because a lot of these cases, you may have a child that's at a house that's hurt. Fire department personnel show up, they take the baby and go to the hospital, and later on you find out that the baby was injured and has died, and you've lost your scene. You've got one chance to get to that, and if you have EMS personnel or fire personnel that can look for these type of things, they might be able to give you a heads up and help your case right off the bat.

[00:01:40.45] The best way to do this is by training-- to train your first responders, your medical personnel, new investigators that may be coming into the unit. There is unit training that you could do where you attend each briefing and talk to the units about what you're looking for in these cases and how to benefit the case. You could go out to the advanced officer training and provide classes to your people that go to the scenes where they're able to learn what needs to be done on a crime scene and what things you're looking for.

[00:02:10.66] You could attend fire personnel briefings. You could do a memorandum of understanding. And you could also have your investigators attend a Homicide Investigators Association, where they might be able to obtain basic and advanced homicide knowledge.

[00:02:26.60] The second point that I'd like to make about this is it's your crime scene and your canvass can either make or break your case. If you have difficulty with either, there's a chance that that case will go unsolved or go cold. With your crime scenes, it's important that you treat each case as a homicide. You don't treat that as a suspicious death or a suicide, you treat it as a homicide-- that way, you're covering all your bases.

[00:02:51.97] When you go out to these scenes, you need to make sure that you're getting it all at one time, because you only have one chance at these crime scenes. If you don't do a proper job, your case will suffer.

[00:03:02.23] As far as your canvass, if you go out and lay down a business card on a door where someone does not answer, if you don't do proper follow up, or the other investigators don't do that, you're going to have difficulty with your case and it may just be disastrous. For your recorders that are going out to these scenes, your investigator that's doing all your documentation, you should have some type of form that will give you a checklist on what to look for at that scene.

[00:03:27.40] A SUIDI form is good for a child case, but if you have some other documentation that you could do or make up, it will show the things that are done at the scene that you may be able to memorialize and put right in your case report. This is important, because in 5, 10, or 15 years, this may end up being a cold case. You won't remember who kicked in a door, who opened up drawers, who did certain things. But with those checklists, you can certainly bring that up and it will assist others who are now looking at that case to try to make a solve.

[00:03:59.32] The checklist that you make up is your own. If you use one that's a generic file, that's fine. But if you make up your own, it's very important, because you can add and delete things that might be important with your cases.

[00:04:12.45] Say it's a house, say it's a trailer, a vehicle, a field where a body is found. You're able to go through these checklists. You could make those up, you could change them, make them a department check list, and that will be of assistance to you down the road. And they should all be standardized, at least for your department.

[00:04:29.28] A third point is to work with your medical examiner and coroner, your prosecutors, your first responders, to make this a better case. The way to do that is to attend your autopsies, bring in your photos, your reports, possibly a weapon that was used in this so the medical examiner or coroner becomes involved in this case and they could see that.

[00:04:49.54] They don't respond to these scenes anymore. They need to know what you found out there. They need to know what you didn't find out there. So it will help in the autopsy, toxicology report, and you're able to be in line with them on your cases.

[00:05:02.18] It's important to look at these cases. I had an aggravated assault in 2000 that I knew would be a murder case once that person died. Our evidence section tried to get rid of evidence eight years later, because the statute of limitations is seven years on an aggravated assault.

[00:05:17.63] I requested it be held. 13 years later it was destroyed by our county attorney who said, yes, it should be. 15 years later, the person died, it became a murder case. When I went back to get my evidence and try to reprocess it, it was all gone.

[00:05:33.46] So it's important to hold onto those things, because you may lose your evidence, especially if it's a suspicious death and you don't know what the cause or manner may be-- that the medical examiner makes it undetermined. You have to hold on to your evidence. It's very important for this case, it's very important for your victim and for their family.

[00:05:55.99] Number one, first responder and investigator missteps. Number two, your crime scene and your canvass can either make or break your case. And number 3 is working with your medical examiner, your coroner, your prosecutor and your first responders and support groups to make sure you have a solid case.

[00:06:25.44] We're all given toolboxes. Put this in your toolbox and hopefully it will benefit you down the road in working with these cases. Thank you very much.