



Crime Scene Sketching

By: Bill Hull

Processing a crime scene is quite demanding and producing clear and accurate sketches is required along with the notes, pictures, latents and all the rest. A crime scene sketch is not intended to be a work of art such as would be submitted by a forensic artist but is a drawing made in the field that accurately depicts the crime scene and gives the measured locations of items of interest within that scene and augments the pictures to give the scene a 3D character. A sketch greatly aids the investigators in reconstructing the scene for study and also, at a later date, may help in the crime scene reconstruction as would happen if, for one reason or another, an unsolved crime becomes active again. A crime scene sketch is often presented to a jury in order for the jury to better understand what the scene looked like and to follow what has occurred there. Generally when needed in court the original sketch will be redrawn by a forensic architect. Drawn to scale, the sketch will look quite clean and photo-like without all the dimension lines and extras required to make the original sketch, and thus much easier understood by the jury.

There are certain items to include as a minimum on a sketch; the case number, date, time, your name and number, mark "not to scale", and orient the sketch to magnetic north with an arrow indicator.

Good measurement requires good tools and I list here a minimum amount of tools needed to do a passable sketch in the field. (There may be other more sophisticated tools that would make the task easier and faster.) A good clip board, pencils and erasers, pads of graph paper, 12 inch straight edge or a 30-60-90 drafting triangle of that size, a 180 degree measuring protractor, steel measuring tapes of 150 feet, 25 feet, steel scales of 3 feet, 12 inch and 6 inch, and a good magnetic compass. For use in remote areas a transit and

level were once needed, but now these expensive and hard to use instruments can be replaced by a "global positioning instrument". Now in remote areas rather than spending time with the transit and pulling chains for measurement (not to mention trig and math charts) one can ping a satellite, read out a longitude and latitude position, drive a stake and start measuring and sketching in minutes. Accurate starting point within a few feet. Great! Mark the lon/lat on the sketch and start measuring. A word of caution lest we forget we are working a crime scene, watch where you step, don't touch things, don't move things, and all the rules apply. Follow the directions of your group leader or whoever is in command at the scene.

There are many types of scenes; indoors, outdoors, and combinations of these. There are also many kinds of sketches that can be made. A choice needs to be made of the one that best and most accurately depicts the scene at hand. In the majority of cases the "birds-eye view" or "floor plan" sketch can be used. It is used when all items of interest are located in one plane. The "elevated plan" can be used when vertical items of interest must be included. Essentially a floor plan, but depicting the wall of a room or the like with vertical measurements usually from the floor up to the item of interest. The "exploded plan" is a combination of the first two. It is the same as a floor plan, except the vertical walls are folded down into the same plain as the floor and usually enjoy a common line where the floor and wall meet. There are other types but they require lots of skill and I suggest the previous types be used. They will cover 98 percent of what will be required in the field. There are an infinite number of ways to proceed, I prefer the following, however everyone will in time develop their own methods and there is not any one method that is correct, what ever is

comfortable for each individual is the correct method for them. Let us assume an indoor scene. Lay out the basic room, add doors and windows, show which way the doors open and the position they were in when you arrived at the scene, windows open or closed and how far, add permanent fixtures, large furniture, smaller furniture and items, unusual items, items of evidence, in that order. Then measure, and add dimensions to the items in the sketch. Taking time to always double check the scale readings and keeping the dimensioning as neat as possible. Make the room border lines a little heavier than the rest so the dimensioning lines do not distract from the room outline. When dimensioning, lay in the longest measured dimensions furthest from the room border line, then progressively the shorter measured dimensions inside and close to the room border line. Always measure and show dimensions from one end of the room where possible. Items shown in a sketch must be dimensioned from two directions for a positive location. Measure and dimension the items in the sketch from a fixed reference at 90 degrees from the first fixed reference whenever possible. Each item should be dimensioned with coordinates, as an example; a shoe 6 feet 3 inches from the North wall and 2 feet 4 inches from the east wall. All measurements must be made in a straight line, pulling the tape tight before reading and scales and rules must be held parallel and square to the reference points. Vertical measurements will be done the same way. As an example a bullet hole in the north wall 4 feet 2 inches above the floor, 7 feet 3 inches from the east wall. Generally for accuracy and ease of operation, two people are required to hold and read measuring tapes longer than 3 feet.

When sketching the position of body, measure and dimension to; top of head, ears, shoulders, elbows, hands

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(show position of hands), hips, crotch, knees, ankles, and feet (show position of feet). Stick figures may be used or commercially produced templates of a great variety can be purchased for this purpose. A professional artist can draw a figure into a sketch that will look like a photograph, however I can sketch a stick figure in seconds and depending on how long the victim has been there, sometimes every second counts, so I recommend the stick figure method. I have found that in making a sketch where there will be many dimensions in a close area, like with a body as in the example above, a letter may be as-

signed to each point measured and dimensioned. Make a simple table in the sketch margin and show the corresponding dimensions there. Example; top of head assign letter "A". Table would show A=6 feet from north wall, 2 feet from east wall, and continue until all body position measurements are recorded. Easy and effective.

When required to sketch a weapon, I follow the rule that all guns are loaded and ready to fire and may do so when touched. Keep everyone at the scene out of the range of fire until the weapon is rendered safe by your weapons expert. This usually happens after the

measurements for the sketch are made, so be careful. Also, remember to observe all precautions for working with biohazard evidence, such as blood.

The neatness and accuracy of the sketch often has a significant effect on the investigation and prosecution of a case. Always use care and pay attention to detail, it will help bring the case to a proper conclusion. ■

(This article was written by William Hull who is currently employed with the Levy County Sheriff's Office. This article originally was used in Mr. Hull's lecture/class at the 1998 FDLAI Conference.)

Task Force Looks at Identity Theft

The Associated Press

Tallahassee – Orlando consultant Christopher Robinson drives with a letter explaining he hasn't sexually assaulted anyone.

He's a victim of crime, not a perpetrator.

Someone Robinson knew in college stole his identity – his name, his date of birth, his driver's license number and his Social Security number.

Robinson told his story Friday to a new Task Force on Privacy and Technology during its first meeting.

The 17-member group is charged with making recommendations to Gov. Jeb Bush and the Legislature by next February. One of the issues it will study is balancing the openness of public records with the need to protect privacy.

Other issues include the sale of public records to businesses and technology fraud, including identity theft.

Robinson discovered his identity had been stolen when he was on the verge of getting a state contract. A background check indicated he was wanted for violation of probation in a sexual assault case.

He said it cost him \$1,000 in attorney fees and four weeks of lost time when he refused to drive out of fear he would be stopped and arrested.

Robinson eventually got it sorted out – with his fingerprints – and now drives around with a letter from the prosecutor explaining the situation.

"It could have been a lot worse," Robinson told the task force by telephone. "But it caused me a lot of angst and worry to think a policeman was going to show up at my door and I would be arrested."

Robinson said he believes the friend who stole his identity had access to Robinson's key numbers – date of birth, and Social Security number – because he worked in one of the university departments and had access to a university computer.

"I don't know what the answer is and I hope you folks come up with a good way of addressing this problem because it is getting worse," Robinson said.

Philip Ramer, special agent in charge of the Florida Computer Crime Center at the Florida Department of Law Enforcement, said computer crime has exploded so that it "now basically touches everything we do in the law enforcement business."

Some 900 million people use the Internet with nearly 2 million new users every day, Ramer said.

"One of the biggest problems we deal with is identity theft," Ramer said.

"it's probably one of the fastest-rising crimes that we have."

And, he added, a lot of new criminals have been created because computer fraud is "so dadgum easy to do."

The most common form of identity theft is credit card fraud, followed by cell phone fraud, bank fraud and fraudulent loans, Ramer said.

Roy Cales, chief information officer for the state, told the task force that the government had to take another look at how much data it collects and what it does with it.

"We gather information on just about everything from the time people are born to the time they die," he said.

He called identity theft the No. 1 issue facing the group and the state and said in almost every case "access to government information has played a key role."

Another presenter, Bob Schlanser with Science Applications International Corp. of McLean, Va., said that the average American appears in more than 70 public databases – and more than half of them are on the Internet.

The task force meetings are Sept. 18 in Orlando and Oct. 24 in Miami. ■

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