

Key Police Procedures After a Homicide

1. Why a body is not covered

The taking of a human life is the most important type of investigation and prosecution that law enforcement agencies pursue. The scrutiny and thoroughness of a homicide investigation cannot be sacrificed or reduced for any reason.

If "shortcuts" were taken in a homicide investigation, or if evidence is not properly retained, suspected murderers could conceivably escape conviction and be freed to possibly kill again. It is in the best interest of the victim, the victim's family, and society that the homicide investigation be conducted as thoroughly and flawlessly as is possible as there is no second opportunity to collect evidence.

Because homicide court trials are usually carried out for years after the fact with the utmost of scrutiny and cross examination, every minute piece of evidence must be collected and recorded in the exact position it was in at the time the crime was committed, or the prosecution could fail.

Covering homicide victims with a blanket or other object disturbs the position of minute pieces of evidence, the position of the body, and could absorb fluids necessary for analysis.

Also, if a body is behind a solid wall or building and not directly in public view, covering it would serve no plausible purpose.

2. Why cars may not be removed from parking lots.

If the evidence search area, or "crime scene" involve most of a parking lot, individuals' cars could not be removed until a meticulous search for other (often very small) items of evidence could be conducted.

3. Notification of family.

This is the duty of the Office of the County Coroner, whose deputies follow established procedures in making notification. Coroner staff members are sometimes delayed in making death notifications by law enforcement's meticulous collection of evidence.

4. Isolation of witnesses.

Witnesses to a crime may be sequestered and told not to discuss the incident until they are interviewed. The reason for this is that hearing someone else's version of what they saw can **alter** a witness's own perception. The seriousness of a homicide investigation is

such that each witness's account must be recorded in its individual, original, and uninfluenced state in order to document the most accurate information.

The law enforcement departments acknowledge that witnessing a homicide is a traumatic experience, and that people need the comfort of others at a time like that. However, the accurate documentation of verbal testimony must take priority so that guilty persons will be prosecuted and thus prevented from hurting others.