

## FORENSIC SCIENCE

# WANT TO BECOME A CRIME SCENE INVESTIGATOR? HERE'S THE REAL STORY

by Officer Chris D. Cush

**Crime Scene Technician - Watertown (NY) Police Department**

Everyone is familiar with the CSI shows on television. They find forensic evidence at every scene, they use forensic evidence to solve every crime, and they do it within an hour. They can find fingerprints on tree bark, and DNA on the head of a pin.

The reality is far different. Most REAL crime scene investigators don't like these shows on TV. Most of us would tell you that we DON'T find relevant forensic evidence at many of the scenes we investigate. And when we go to a crime scene and tell the victims we can't find anything, they look at us like we're incompetent. Some have even said: "But I saw them find that on TV!"

This becomes a problem in two areas.

The first is the impression it has on the jury pool. Juries today expect to hear about forensic evidence during a trial; so much so that the District Attorney has made this a part of questioning during voir dire:

"Do you realize that forensic evidence isn't found at every crime scene, and do you realize that all crimes of this nature are not solved within an hour?"

Nevertheless, this becomes an issue at a trial where there is no forensic evidence, or there is just a circumstantial case. Juries are sometimes reluctant to convict, when there is no forensic evidence introduced.

The second problem is that these TV shows help to educate the criminals. Many times, crime scene investigators find that gloves have been worn, or that the scene has been cleaned up with Clorox, or some other cleaning agent. Although there are ways around this, it makes our job more difficult.

The other thing these TV shows can't depict is the odor at some of these scenes. The really bad ones are persons who have been deceased for about a week at room temperature; or who have been outdoors for some time before they are found, and the "critters" have had a chance to work on them. Then there's the bodies that have been burned by fire. (Hopefully, they died from smoke inhalation before the

flames reached them). At fire scenes, there is climbing over debris, residual smoke, the water dripping, and trying to take good photos in the middle of the night at 16 below zero.

Then, there's the heart breaking death investigations involving children and babies.

If you don't like attending autopsies, find another line of work!

I have also seen a TV show that depicted officers cavorting around in a meth lab, with no protective clothing or breathing apparatus on. Or the TV detectives searching crime scenes with no gloves on, picking evidence up and moving it before it is numbered and photographed.

Not to mention the TV crime labs that perform miracles, and have the DNA results back in half an hour.

The other fallacy these TV shows depict is that crime scene work is a 9 to 5, Monday thru Friday career. The reality is a "middle of the night, weekends, called in from vacation" career. It's getting called to a double death scene, just when you're sitting down to have Christmas dinner.

And the other the thing that really kills me about these CSI folks on TV, they NEVER have to do any paperwork!

Crime Scene Investigation is a fascinating and rewarding job. But be forewarned: the reality is far from what you see on TV.

### **Questions**

1) What problem do investigators encounter at many crime scenes?

2) What 2 things are negative consequences of the CSI shows?

(a)

(b)

- 3) What aspect of crime scenes does Mr. Cush describe vividly?
- 4) What is the difference between TV crime labs and real crime labs?
- 5) How does a forensic investigator on TV compare to one in real life?

## Forensic Files

Name

---

**Episode Title:**

**1. What was the crime?**

Type of Crime:

Location:

—

Time/Year:

Victim(s):

Suspect(s):

**2. Use the chart to keep track of the evidence.**

[illegible]

### 3. Which pieces of evidence were most important? Why?

#### 4.What was the outcome?

## Current Events: Forensic Science Articles

### Assignment:

As we learn about the science of forensics throughout this semester, you will be applying your knowledge to current events pertaining to forensic science and crime cases. Your task is:

- Find an article on a current forensic science discovery or crime case involving forensics in the news or on the Internet (use reliable website only). Articles must be **more than one printed page**. Articles that are only a page due to large font or pictures do not count.
  - The Innocence Project and About.com “articles” do not count as appropriate.
- Articles must be from within the last 5 years in order to use them.
- Write a personal response to each article in the format on the provided handout. Your response must be handwritten in blue or black ink.
- Keep the article and your response together.

### Good Websites:

- [www.forensicmag.com](http://www.forensicmag.com)
- [www.brightsurf.com](http://www.brightsurf.com) (In the search tab within the website type in “Forensic science current events”)
- [www.forensictoday.com](http://www.forensictoday.com)
- [www.sciencedaily.com](http://www.sciencedaily.com) (In the search tab type within the website in “Forensic science”)

### CURRENT EVENT FORENSIC SCIENCE ARTICLE SUMMARY

Title of Article: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Website: \_\_\_\_\_

Author: \_\_\_\_\_

1. On the back of this sheet, write a one paragraph summary of the article
2. Summarize the information below.

What crime was committed?/ Discovery Made	
Location?	
Suspect(s)?/Who made discovery?	
Evidence found?/Support for Discovery	
Forensic Science used?	

3. What is your personal reaction to this article?

### CURRENT EVENT FORENSIC SCIENCE ARTICLE SUMMARY

Title of Article: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Website: \_\_\_\_\_

Author: \_\_\_\_\_

1. On the back of this sheet, write a one paragraph summary of the article
2. Summarize the information below.

What crime was committed?/ Discovery Made	
Location?	
Suspect(s)?/Who made discovery?	
Evidence found?/Support for Discovery	
Forensic Science used?	

3. What is your personal reaction to this article?

### CURRENT EVENT FORENSIC SCIENCE ARTICLE SUMMARY

Title of Article: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Website: \_\_\_\_\_

Author: \_\_\_\_\_

1. On the back of this sheet, write a one paragraph summary of the article
2. Summarize the information below.

What crime was committed?/ Discovery Made	
Location?	
Suspect(s)?/Who made discovery?	
Evidence found?/Support for Discovery	
Forensic Science used?	

3. What is your personal reaction to this article?