

General Order

Houston Police Department



ISSUE DATE:

October 2, 2023

NO.

600-27

REFERENCE: Supersedes all prior conflicting Circulars and Directives, and General Order 600-27, dated June 27, 2018

SUBJECT: INITIAL AND FOLLOW-UP INVESTIGATIONS

POLICY

Officers present at a crime scene or investigating a potential crime shall manage and protect the integrity of the scene and investigation to the maximum extent possible and shall complete a thorough initial investigation.

This General Order applies to classified employees only.

1 INITIAL INVESTIGATIONS

The primary patrol officer on the call slip shall conduct the initial investigation unless another officer handles the investigation (e.g., an investigator from the concerned division). When an officer not assigned to the calls for service loop is dispatched to or on-views an incident, the officer shall first secure the scene and request medical personnel if needed. If the officer is unable to continue the initial investigation, the officer shall request an appropriate unit to the scene. If the on-scene officers cannot agree which officer will conduct the initial investigation, the officer(s) shall request a patrol supervisor responsible for that area to make the determination.

Officers at the scene shall use body worn cameras pursuant to General Order 400-28, **Body Worn Cameras**, and provide first aid pursuant to General Order 600-17, **Use of Force**.

Notification to Concerned Division

After securing the scene, the officer handling the initial investigation (excluding an officer assigned to the concerned division) shall contact the concerned division from the scene if required by any other General Order or if:

- a. Any person has suffered serious bodily injury or death.
- b. Any person is likely to be endangered by delayed notice to the concerned division.
- c. A felony investigation would be endangered by delayed notice to the concerned division.
- d. The case has unusual noteworthiness or complexity.
- e. The officer wants to conduct a custodial interview or interrogation.
- f. An officer has collected evidence or property to be tagged.

Unless immediate notification is warranted, the officer shall first obtain enough initial information to provide an accurate summary and review the incident with the concerned division, including but not limited to determining the type of incident, establishing the elements of the crime, and

confirming the status of any injured parties. If an investigator from the concerned division responds to the incident, that investigator shall take charge of the investigation upon arrival.

If required to contact the concerned division for items (a) through (e) above, the officer shall contact the concerned division prior to contacting the district attorney's office.

Scene Security and Investigation

Unless instructed otherwise by the concerned division, the non-investigative officer(s) at the scene shall do all the following, as applicable:

- a. Secure the crime scene and protect evidence to the maximum extent possible (e.g., yellow crime-scene tape, blocking roadway with patrol vehicle(s), posting officer(s) at strategic spots). The officer(s) shall not intentionally touch, handle, or disturb evidence and/or weapons unless one of the following exceptions applies:
 1. There is no other way to preserve the item from loss or destruction.
 2. The item poses an immediate and articulable threat to the officer or public safety and there is no other way to secure the item (e.g., a hostile scene where others have uncontrolled access).
 3. Houston Forensic Science Center (HFSC) and/or investigative division personnel will not be responding to the crime scene and the officer is collecting the item for tagging.
- b. Separate, identify, and interview all individuals (e.g., suspects, victims, occupants, and witnesses), keeping them out of sight and hearing range of one another if possible.
- c. Exclude non-essential personnel from the inner crime scene absent exigent circumstances or the express approval from the concerned division.
- d. Comply with the Patrol Operations Standard Operating Procedures and any General Order specific to the incident (e.g., General Order 600-07, **Death Investigations**).
- e. If the victim is located at an emergency room, respond to the facility or ensure that a secondary unit responds. The responding officer shall gather any available medical information (e.g., the treating physician's information, Medical Record Number). The officer shall document the status of the victim in the incident report (e.g., stable, critical, brain dead).
- f. If relevant to the investigation, take digital photographs of any injuries, or lack thereof, of any victim(s) and suspect(s) still on-scene, including healing and/or old injuries. The officer shall also take digital photographs of any disarray or destruction, or lack thereof, at the scene, if relevant to the investigation. Officers shall not rely solely on the video recorded by body worn cameras at the scene. The officer shall upload the digital photographs pursuant to General Order 700-01, **Property and Evidence Control Regulations**.
- g. Collect any evidence, view and document any video and/or photograph evidence, and tag such items pursuant to General Order 700-01, **Property and Evidence Control Regulations**.
- h. Continue investigating the incident within the scope of the officer's training and responsibility

if an immediate, continuing investigation has a high probability of the officer arresting the suspect or securing additional relevant evidence or information. The officer shall obtain approval from a concerned division supervisor if the above subsection, *Notification to Concerned Division*, applies, and also obtain approval from an appropriate patrol supervisor prior to leaving an assigned district. The officer shall notify the dispatcher of such approval.

- i. Contact the appropriate district attorney's office for approval or denial of charges, pursuant to General Order 500-07, **Filing Class B or Higher Charges**, if reasonable under the totality of the circumstances.
- j. Arrest suspects pursuant to General Order 500-01, **Effecting Arrests and Searches**, as well as other parties to the incident who have any outstanding warrants for felony, family violence, and/or violent offenses (including complainants, witnesses, and reportees), and complete all applicable in-custody charges. Officers may also complete to-be warrants.
- k. Complete an incident report pursuant to General Order 800-07, **Completion of Incident Reports**, fully and accurately documenting the incident (e.g., conditions, events, remarks, evidence, video evidence viewed by the officer, arrests, to-be warrant status).

When the inner crime scene is controlled by HFSC personnel or investigative personnel, officers shall receive express approval from such personnel prior to entering an inner crime scene area marked by red crime scene tape and abide by the established HFSC protection level. At a minimum, an officer with approval to be within an HFSC controlled inner crime scene shall wear protective gloves, particle mask, and shoe covers, which the officer may obtain from HFSC personnel.

2 FOLLOW-UP INVESTIGATIONS

Investigators assigned to the concerned division have the primary responsibility for conducting follow-up investigations pursuant to the standard operating procedures of that division. Following the initial investigation, officers other than the assigned investigator(s) shall not conduct follow-up investigations without the express approval of an appropriate supervisor from the concerned division, including:

- a. Proactively locating and interviewing any complainant, witness, or suspect about the incident.
- b. Proactively locating and/or obtaining any additional evidence related to the incident.
- c. Filing a to-be warrant after receiving new information about the initial incident.

The above items do not prevent an officer from responding to a call for service involving any person related to the incident or evidence retrieval. The officer shall document any actions taken in a supplement report, including documentation of the approving supervisor's name.


Troy Finner
Chief of Police