



'Exchange of practices and the development of common tools are the best ways to improve the forensic response and meet the expectation of the law enforcement and justice services.'

Marcel Authier, Director of France's National Forensic Science Institute (Institut National de Police Scientifique – INPS) (2018)

Online Module: Executive Summary

Forensic awareness training should be considered of high importance for all police first responders. First responders lacking forensic awareness can easily make poor decisions on arriving at the scene of an incident or crime. These decisions can have serious consequences, such as destroying crucial evidence or leading to more human casualties.

The scene of an incident or crime typically contains traces of various materials that can provide evidence, from shoeprints or tyre tracks to materials that cannot be seen by the naked eye, such as DNA. These traces can be of great significance in the outcome of a case. As a result, first responders should always be aware of the possible presence of traces, but there are numerous reported cases where such traces have been destroyed or contaminated by first responders.

Forensic technology and methods are constantly developing. In modern societies, the investigation of a crime scene and forensic handling of the evidence is a multidisciplinary scientific procedure. Forensic analysis encompasses many diverse aspects, including ballistics, fingerprint examination, DNA analysis, fibre examination and explosive residues.

This module targets all police officers who might at some point face the challenges and the multi-layered responsibilities of being a first responder. Its aims are to:

- enhance forensic awareness of first responders by introducing them to the forensic principles and procedures in a more understandable and simplified way;
- highlight the important role first responders have, especially as they often need to take crucial decisions quickly and sometimes on matters outside their area of expertise;
- enhance first responders' preparedness concerning the protection of the scene and preservation of evidence.

The module consists of an introduction, eight topic chapters and a glossary of terms and abbreviations related to forensic awareness. In the My Progress section, users can assess their levels of understanding of each of the topics by considering a selection of true/false statements.

The individual chapters are:

1. **Introduction**
2. **Main Forensic Principles:** This chapter covers the main forensic principles, practices and procedures used in law enforcement. It aims to provide an introduction to the forensic process and highlight what is of critical importance for forensic investigators and the judicial process in court.
3. **Arrival at the Scene and Initial Assessment:** This chapter focuses on the important tasks that first responders need to perform in the first crucial moments when they arrive at the scene.
4. **Protection and Control of the Scene:** This chapter covers the key tasks of establishing and controlling a scene. The sooner a scene is controlled, the better the material traces are preserved, and the higher the likelihood of obtaining valuable evidence admissible in court.
5. **Communication with Emergency Services:** This chapter covers how first responders should communicate with the other emergency services that might be present at a scene. These can include medical services, search and rescue services, fire brigades, police special forces, counter-terrorism units, bomb squads and crime scene investigation (CSI) teams.
6. **Documentation and Handing Over the Scene:** This chapter covers the verbal and written documentation of the scene by the police first responders for the crime scene investigators. It also discusses the transfer of responsibility for the scene to the investigators.
7. **Health and Safety:** Any scene could be a hazardous place. This chapter details the assessments and actions that first responders need to make at a scene concerning health and safety issues and risks.
8. **Media and Family:** This chapter focuses on how first responders at a scene should handle and communicate with the media and with the close family members of affected persons.
9. **International Cooperation:** This chapter presents the opportunities and obstacles that police first responders might encounter in performing their tasks, in cases when two or more countries are involved.