

Metropolitan Police Academy



2.4 Preliminary Patrol Investigations

November 28, 2023

Introduction

During this lesson, you will discuss prioritizing your tasks and conducting a thorough preliminary investigation. You will be walked through what a preliminary investigation entails and the patrol officer's responsibilities. Key terms will be defined for you. Prior lessons on MPD radio usage and note-taking skills will be reinforced and utilized in this lesson to further your understanding of their importance. In addition, you will learn how they relate to conducting preliminary investigations and on-scene interviews. You will outline the important information needed from an interview and how to utilize this information to broadcast a lookout and canvass for suspects and witnesses. You will also be able to identify the on-scene notifications needed to further your preliminary investigation. By the end of this lesson, you will clearly understand important basic patrol functions and preliminary investigations.

2.4.1 Define key terms related to preliminary investigation

Preliminary Investigation

The preliminary investigation is the first investigative effort undertaken by a department member. Typically, it is the investigative effort of the first member(s) arriving on the scene of an event and involves initial contact with the complainant, witnesses, and/or suspects on the scene of a crime or incident.

The purpose of a preliminary investigation is to determine, as soon as possible, the facts of the event, verify if a crime has occurred, and, if a crime has occurred, identify whether there are solvability factors present.

Solvability factors

Solvability factors are items of information or evidence that contribute to the closure of any investigation. They are often used to determine if a case will likely be solved or assigned to a detective for further investigation. Some of these factors are:

- clear descriptions that will identify the perpetrator(s)
- license tag information when a vehicle is involved
- direct knowledge of who committed the crime
- physical evidence that can identify the perpetrator(s)
- witnesses who are able to identify the perpetrator(s).

Other solvability factors could be present at the scene, and it is important for the responding officer to be able to identify when these are present.

Oftentimes, radio calls for service are easily resolved or have already been resolved by the time of an officer's arrival. Such cases normally do not require a formal police report. For example, they are responding to an address where multiple citizens report a loud party. In this case, the officers, would scan and make observations of the area, looking for a significant number of cars or double-parked cars near the address. In addition, the officers would listen for loud noise or music and, if it was heard, knock on the door, and attempt to seek compliance from the homeowner in lowering the volume and/or bringing the event to an end. The officer would advise the dispatcher: "XXXX, advised" and continue patrolling without completing a formal police report. For more detailed information on noise at night statutes,

please read Section P Disorderly Conduct (Noise at Night) of **GO-SPT 302.01 (Calls for Service)**. Ten codes are redacted with XXXX for public use.

Incident

An incident is any non-criminal event brought to the attention of MPD for which members request central complaint numbers (CCNs). Incident reports include Sick or Injured Persons to the Hospital, Intra-Family Disturbance, and Damage to Property.

Offense

An offense is any criminal event defined under the District of Columbia Code, the DCMR, or the US Code. An offense is a crime or social harm defined and punishable by law. Offenses are also reported using central complaint numbers (CCNs).

If an offense has occurred, be sure to obtain a description of the suspect for a lookout and broadcast it over the air as soon as practicable so that other responding units can be on the lookout (BOLO) enroute to the assignment. This will increase the chances of a timely arrest and closure of the case.

Responding officers should be able to recognize businesses in the area that may have surveillance cameras or security personnel that may assist in the investigation. MPD closed-circuit television (CCTV) cameras have been incredibly valuable in capturing events, in whole or in part. They can sometimes be viewed while conducting your preliminary investigation on scene.

NOTE: Additional resources and notifications will be necessary depending on the situation. This will be further discussed in other areas of training.

Central Complaint Number (CCN)

A CCN is a unique eight (8) digit number that the Office of Unified Communications (OUC) issues to MPD members upon request when MPD members record events via field reports, arrests, and other types of events. CCNs track patrols, incidents, offenses, and self-initiated assignments. Most field reports and related PD forms require a CCN. The first two digits of the CCN correspond to the last two digits of the year the report is taken.

Special Attention

Patrol officers will routinely pay special attention to specific locations and district crime trends. These are simple checks and increased patrols requested by community leaders or residents. They typically do not require a formal police report to be filed but are important in deterring crime and focusing on problem areas and trends. Special attention areas are often assigned during roll call to individual officers or groups of officers to focus on during their shifts.

Business Checks

One of the numerous functions of police officers while on patrol is to conduct checks of establishments in their respective police districts. Establishing and maintaining good working relationships with business owners is valuable to them and us. Being approachable and building relationships in the community encourages people to share issues and information with us. Officers should routinely stop by when not on assignments to check on businesses and speak with owners, managers, or employees. Doing so reassures them of our presence and demonstrates to them and others that we are actively patrolling for crime.

2.4.2 Identify the patrol officer's responsibilities when conducting a preliminary investigation

Although terms of a preliminary investigation have been defined, many other factors are involved while conducting your preliminary investigation.

The first officer on the scene should establish and maintain scene safety, assess the situation and, decide what action to take. Depending on the nature of the call for service, officer's action in the first few minutes on the scene may determine whether the incident is effectively and successfully resolved. An officer's response to incidents in which there are injuries may mean the difference between life and death for the parties involved.

Before or upon arriving at an assignment, if equipped with a computer or tablet, check the notes section of the assignment. The dispatcher only provides the primary information and does not always read all of the notes attached to the assignment. Additional information can be ascertained by reviewing the notes section, such as the suspect's location, whether the suspect is armed or under the influence, etc.

The officer conducting the preliminary investigation is responsible for performing these basic roles:

- Assess and ensure scene safety.
- Determine if any additional resources are needed.
- Advise the dispatcher and other responding units of on-scene conditions.
- Provide necessary medical interventions and request DC Fire and Emergency Medical Services (DCFEM) to respond to sick or injured persons. Ensure that injured or sick persons receive medical attention.

Determine if an offense or incident has occurred.

- If the subject has left the scene of a suspected offense, voice a flash lookout over the radio.
- Secure the scene to prevent loss or contamination of evidence. When using crime scene tape, secure as much of an area as you need
- Minimize non-essential members and document everyone entering and exiting the scene in your field notebook.

If the first officer on the scene can conduct a thorough preliminary investigation and quickly identify or obtain a description of a subject, the chances of a timely arrest of the subject are significantly increased.

The patrol officer is responsible for gathering and collecting all pertinent information. This normally requires the patrol officer to identify and interview the involved parties. The victim/reporting person/complainant will be the person you want to identify and interview first. The victim/reporting person/complainant, and witnesses on the scene, will normally provide the officer investigating with much of the information needed to report and close the incident or offense.

If the subject has left the scene of a suspected offense, voice a flash lookout. As you learned in an earlier lesson:

- A flash lookout is less detailed and should be broadcast within five (5) minutes using the flash lookout card and information received from the victim/reporting person/complainant.
- A general broadcast is more detailed and should be broadcast within ten (10) minutes with

information obtained from the victim/reporting person/complainant and witnesses. Additionally, use available footage, etc., to make the description more accurate.

Witnesses should be interviewed separately from one another. If interpreters are needed, request one through the dispatcher or utilize MPD’s **Language Line**.

Patrol officers must take into consideration the difference between interviewing a community member who lost a cell phone or a community member involved in a minor traffic collision, on the one hand, and interviewing a victim/reporting person/complainant of a serious crime such as an assault or robbery. Interviewing a complainant of a serious crime can pose many more challenges. The person can be in shock and have difficulty communicating the events and circumstances. As a police officer, you have to understand key guidelines to approach and interview such a complainant effectively. Acknowledge the complainant’s emotional state and allow them to regain a sense of security.

NOTE: Gaining the respect and trust of witnesses and/or complainants is crucial to performing police functions and gathering the necessary information.

Do not make any false promises to a complainant. Be cognizant of the words you choose to use, and to the tone of your voice. Ask the complainant to explain the events leading up to the crime. Allow the complainant to tell the story in their own words, with minimal interruption. You should not, except in very exigent circumstances, have your notebook out and try to write down every word the complainant says. Let the complainant tell you what happened. Then, summarize and paraphrase the events reported. Ask questions for clarity and understanding. Ensure you capture the who, what, when, why, where, and how of it all.

An officer must help the complainant cope with the shock and the trauma that immediately follows a crime. The complainant may be feeling frustrated, angry, mad, or upset. Members can help the complainant regain a sense of control and composure by making an introduction, if possible. You should give your name (“I am Officer ____”) and explain why you are there and the steps of what you are will do. Ask the complainant if they are injured and/or need an ambulance.

Flash Lookout Example - within five (5) minutes

FLASH LOOKOUT INFORMATION	FLASH LOOKOUT BROADCAST
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Race 2. Gender 3. Age 4. Build 5. Height 6. Any unique characteristics 7. Type and color of clothes 8. Method and direction of escape 9. Armed? 10. The type of offense 11. Location of offense 12. Date and time of the offense 13. Additional miscellaneous information 	<p>Recruit: 1041 Dispatcher: Go ahead, 1041 Recruit: I have a flash lookout for my assignment Dispatcher: Go with the flash, 1041 Recruit: The lookout is about an assault that occurred approximately ten minutes ago at Little Miss Whiskey Saloon. The suspect is a white female, 25-30 years old, slim build, approximately 5’5” in height, pink hair with a neck tattoo, wearing a black trench coat and sneakers, last seen running westbound in the 1100 block of H Henry Street, NE approximately five minutes ago, she was carrying a box cutter.</p>

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General Broadcast Example – within ten (10) minutes

General broadcast Information	General Broadcast
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Type of offense 2. Date and time of offense 3. Location of offense 4. CCN 5. Race 6. Gender 7. Age 8. Height 9. Weight 10. Eye Color 11. Hair color/style 12. Complexion 13. Unique characteristics 14. Hat description 15. Coat description 16. Pants/dress description 17. Shirt/top description 18. Shoe description 19. Armed? 20. Direction and method of escape 21. Description of property taken 22. Vehicle description 23. Additional miscellaneous information 	<p>Recruit: 1041</p> <p>Dispatcher: Go ahead, 1041</p> <p>Recruit: 1041, I have a general broadcast in reference to my assignment</p> <p>Dispatcher: Go ahead, 1041</p> <p>Recruit: This lookout is in reference to an assault with a dangerous weapon that occurred today at 1530 hours, CCN 15-123456, in the 1100 block of H Henry Street, NE. The suspect is a white female, 27 years of age, 5’3 in height, approximately 120 lbs., with blue eyes, shoulder-length pink hair, and fair skin with a spider tattoo on her neck. She was last seen wearing a black trench coat, blue jeans, a white shirt, and pink sneakers. She is armed with a black box cutter and was last seen running westbound in the 100 block of H Henry Street, NE. She then entered a green four-door Volvo with DC tags E Edward, B Brown, 1003, which fled northbound on 9th Street, NE, from H Henry. She is known to hang out in the area of 8th and H Henry Streets, NE.</p> <p>End of Lookout.</p>

2.4.3 Outline the types of information needed for an interview

To thoroughly document incidents and offenses, officers must obtain appropriate personal information from complainants and witnesses and a detailed description of property stolen or otherwise involved. The personal information obtained is preferably recorded from a government-issued identification card. If this is not possible, other forms, including verbal identification, will suffice.

Victim, reporting person, complainant, and witness:

- Full name
- Date of birth
- Address: home and work
- Phone number: home, cell, and work
- Email address
- School name and address, if applicable
- Social media accounts
- Preferred mode of contact and time of day

Property Information:

- If it is stolen, lost, damaged, evidence, weapons, a getaway vehicle, etc.
- Description of the property (for example: phone, purse, wallet, vehicle, etc.)
- Make and model, if applicable
- Color
- Nature of the damage
- Year or age
- Registration State, Tag number, vehicle identification number (VIN)
- Unique and identifying marks or stickers
- Serial number, if applicable
- Value
- Insurance information
- Owner information if different than complainant or person reporting the incident
- Quantity
- Ability to be tracked or traced

It is a good practice to check all persons involved for active warrants, probation violations, stay-away orders, civil protection orders, temporary protection orders, aliases, etc. while you are conducting the investigation. These checks can also provide information warning officers about violent tendencies, drug abuse, etc. related to the persons involved.

It is important to be tactful in conducting these checks. Ideally, an assisting officer would do this in a vehicle or some distance away so as to keep the check concealed from the person(s) involved, especially complainants and witnesses who may feel that the checks are unreasonable. If equipped with a computer or tablet, checks can be made discreetly using the device and without the persons involved becoming aware or alarmed.

NOTE: Checks are a valuable tool to gather information and protect yourself from what you may not know about persons you are interacting with.

Example
<p>Officer: 1041 Dispatcher: Go ahead, 1041 Officer: I have a XXXX to run when you are ready to copy Dispatcher: Go ahead, 1041 Officer: Last name Hernandez, Henry, Edward, Robert, Nora, Adam, Nora, David, Edward, Zebra. First Name: Aaron Adam, Adam, Robert, Ocean, Nora. Date of birth: 11, 6, 1989. He is a Hispanic male. Dispatcher: Copy, stand by. Dispatcher: 1041 Officer: 1041, go ahead. Dispatcher: Running Aaron Hernandez, 11/6/1989, Hispanic male, XXXX misdemeanor arrest warrant for simple assault and a stay-away order against Shayanna Jenkins. Do you need assistance at your location? Officer: Copy. Negative, I have sufficient units on the scene with me.</p>

Ten codes are redacted with XXXX for public use.

2.4.4 Compose a lookout

Recruits will practice composing a lookout at the direction of their instructor.

2.4.5 Identify notifications a patrol officer is required to make during a preliminary investigation

Depending on the nature of any given assignment, notifications to various resources, command centers, and specialized units may be necessary. The typical notifications made by officers in the field are listed below.

DC Fire and Emergency Medical Services (DCFEMS)

Also commonly referred to as “the board” or “the fire board,” DCFEMS can be requested through the dispatcher and should always be requested when anyone makes the request or when an officer encounters sick or injured persons.

Fire Safety Concern

When an officer observes a fire safety concern, they shall:

- Notify their supervisor of the fire safety conditions, who shall then respond to the scene. The supervisor shall notify the DCFEMS Fire Liaison Officer (FLO) through the Office of Unified Communications (OUC) of the location and potential life-safety threat.
- Members shall also email dcra@dc.gov and cc (copy) mpdcic@dc.gov with the following information:
 - Location
 - Violation
 - CCN
- Members shall complete the appropriate field reports and documents.

Tow Crane

Commonly known as a tow truck, a tow crane is available through the dispatcher when an officer needs a vehicle moved. This is normally requested on the scene of traffic crashes (XXXX) in which vehicles are damaged. You will discuss this topic in more depth in block 12. Ten codes are redacted with XXXX for public use.

Mayor’s Command Center

When an officer discovers damaged or non-functioning DC government property, this notification should be made. This type of notification can be made through the dispatcher or by calling **(202) 727-6161** or using the 311 app on your department phone.

School Resource

For school-related crimes or incidents, notify school resource officers and officials through the dispatcher. If a resource officer is unavailable or on duty, one can be paged through the Command Information Center (see below).

MPD Official

An MPD official should be notified and updated about the situation. This is done so supervisors to monitor and track situations and ensure that scenes are thoroughly managed. In most cases, Officials will monitor and respond automatically. If this is not the case, you need to make a notification through the dispatcher for cases involving a firearm, use of force, serious injury to anyone involved, missing persons, injuries to MPD personnel, sick or injured prisoners, assault on a police officer, domestic violence, fires, bomb threats, radiation, suspicious packages, lost or damaged MPD equipment, and hate/bias-related offenses or incidents.

MPD Detective

A detective shall be notified for all part-one offenses, causes of death, sex crimes, hate bias offenses, bombings, arsons, burglaries, robberies, kidnappings, extortion, any offense involving the financial system of Washington DC, arrests of Washington DC employees, fraud arising from DC government programs, cases involving government officials or employees in connection to their employment, and assaults without a suspect present. Different detective units will handle certain offenses based on the elements of the crime.

Command Information Center (CIC)

The CIC should be notified of all serious incidents and offenses, including robberies, shootings, stabbings, critical missing persons with command posts, large-scale traffic disruptions, and any arrest of an elected official, law enforcement officer, government employee, or dignitary.

Specialized Units

Officers have numerous specialized resources to employ when the need arises. This may include K-9, bomb technicians, air support (Falcon), an Emergency Response Team (ERT), the Harbor Patrol, Major Crash, and the Explosive Ordinance Division (EOD).

Crime Scene

Crime scenes involving the collection or processing of evidence require notification to one of the two crime scene technician types used by MPD: Evidence Technicians, also called District Crime Scene, or the Crime Scene Investigations Division, also referred to as the Department of Forensic Science (DFS). See below for distinctions between the two:

- **District Crime Scene:** Handles all assaults that do not result in death or serious injury, burglary II scenes, theft from auto cases, recovery of stolen automobiles, destruction of property cases, shell casings without a felony crime attached to it, and illegal fireworks.
- **Department of Forensic Science:** Processes scenes and offenses of a more serious nature, up to and including homicide. It has further capabilities in analyzing evidence such as DNA and forensic studies. This DC government agency comprises civilian members and a limited number of detailed MPD sworn members.

NOTE: All notifications should be documented in your field notebook, and any subsequent report produced after an investigation.

Summary

Although police officers often respond to calls for service involving similar circumstances, no two scenes are the same. A structured preliminary investigation is crucial in determining what happened and the action is best.

In cases involving offenses, recruits should be able to quickly gather the necessary information to broadcast a flash lookout and general broadcast. Lookouts are crucial to the closure of offenses that just occurred when victims are able to provide a description.

As a preliminary investigation unfolds, an officer must make proper notifications as new information is gathered. An officer must use their resources to bring closure to the incident ultimately. Knowing one's resources and making appropriate notifications will help maintain control of the scenes of serious incidents and complete a preliminary investigation in a timely manner.

References

GO 302.01	Calls for Service	02/28/2023
GO 304.01	Operation and Management of Criminal Investigations	10/11/1987
GO 201.26	Duties, Responsibilities and Conduct of Members of the Department	04/05/2011
GO 101.09	Duties and responsibilities of Sworn Officials	07/28/2011
GO 401.01	Field Reporting System	07/19/2012
GO 302.02	Radio Broadcasts and Lookouts	10/26/2012
GO 803.06	Command Information Center	05/19/2015
SO 11-22	Bias-related / Hate Crimes	12/01/2011
SO 12-22	Witness Canvasses	10/26/2012
SO 12-04	Mandatory Reporting & Broadcast of Serious Crimes	03/06/2012
TT 8-120-12	Crime Scene Notifications	08/30/2012
TT 10-046-08	Command Information Center Notifications	10/10/2008
TT 01-091-17	Reminder Regarding MPD Policy on Questioning Related to Immigration Status	01/30/2017