

Scene Detection and Processing in Forensic Anthropology



WHAT IS AN AAFS STANDARD FACTSHEET?

The AAFS produces clear, concise, and easy-to-understand factsheets to summarize the contents of technical and professional forensic science standards on the OSAC Registry. They are not intended to provide an interpretation for any portion of a published standard.

WHAT IS THE PURPOSE OF THIS STANDARD?

This standard provides structured guidance and requirements to assist forensic anthropology and archaeology practitioners with proper scene detection, processing, and evidence handling. It also highlights the need to follow jurisdictional requirements and maintain a chain of custody.

Methods based on general archaeological principles and paradigms are promoted; therefore, practitioners are required to have training in archaeological theory and methods and practical field experience.

WHY IS THIS STANDARD IMPORTANT? WHAT ARE ITS BENEFITS?

Forensic anthropology and archaeology practitioners may be placed in charge or assist law enforcement, death scene investigators, coroners, or medical examiners with the documentation and recovery of human remains and associated evidence at scenes.

Human remains and related materials must be carefully handled to preserve their integrity for further forensic analysis. These recommendations and requirements foster scientific accuracy and thoroughness in the processes of detecting, documenting, and recovering human remains and associated evidence.



HOW IS THIS STANDARD USED, AND WHAT ARE THE KEY ELEMENTS?

This standard facilitates the thorough recovery of human remains and associated evidence when implemented by practitioners at a scene. They must apply the standard as completely as they can while considering what is feasible and appropriate for the specific situation they are working in. If there are no clear procedures to follow, or if existing procedures conflict with one another, the practitioner should still aim to follow the underlying goals and principles of the standard.

Scenes differ from one another in both type and scale, and some complex scenes, like fire scenes, involve specialized techniques. This standard acknowledges the challenges associated with diverse scene types and a lack of universal methods and addresses the need to define and secure scene boundaries.

This standard provides general requirements and recommendations for scene processing, scene documentation, material sampling, and reporting and specific requirements for surface, burial, and fire scenes.

Communication between forensic practitioners and jurisdictional authorities is emphasized to ensure clarity throughout the forensic process.