

**The Bill Blackwood
Law Enforcement Management Institute of Texas**

**Criminal Investigation Case Management
Using Case Solvability Factors**

**A Leadership White Paper
Submitted in Partial Fulfillment
Required for Graduation from the
Leadership Command College**

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ABSTRACT

Effectively and efficiently managing a criminal investigations division often puts law enforcement agencies between the proverbial rock and a hard place. Adoption of a formal case screening program can achieve both quantity and quality when it comes to case management and case clearances. Budget cuts and sinking economies only exasperate rising crime rates, unmanageable caseloads, and personnel issues. The implementation of a formal case screening program and the use of standardized case solvability factors can resolve many of these issues. Criminal Investigations Units should use a standardized case screening method using written solvability factors to aid in reducing case assignments and enhancing investigator efficiency and effectiveness.

Information from the 1970s to present, including the 1975 Rand Study, the Georgia Chiefs of Police Association, abstracts from the National Criminal Justice Reference Service, The Texas Law Enforcement Management and Administrative Statistics Program, Santa Monica Police Department, the Tallahassee Police Audit, and others confirm the benefits of the use of a formal case-screening program. Law enforcement agencies must balance the need for public relations with the goals of a streamlined case management program. The use of solvability factors in a case management program can help solve both problems. Training, consistency, and follow-up are the keys to the implementation of a solvability factor program.

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INTRODUCTION

Criminal Investigations Units are often sandwiched between rising caseloads, demands for higher clearance rates, and administrative requirements for appropriate levels of customer service. The use of standardized and objective case screening methods will meet each of these needs. The agency administration will ultimately be responsible for balancing the case screening methods with the needs of the agency.

Smaller law enforcement agencies or agencies with elected chief administrators typically lean towards using informal case screening methods. Informal case screening methods are generally neither written, nor standardized. An agency philosophy of immediate and personal contact with the complainant or victim often requires informal case screening methods. In the end, investigator efficiency and effectiveness may suffer but the constituency remains satisfied.

Conversely, larger law enforcement agencies, where the chief administrator is appointed, or agencies ruled by civil service statutes, often use formal case screening methods. Formal case screening methods are commonly written and standardized to allow any employee tasked with assigning cases to do so in an objective method. Solvability factors are case screening methods using written criteria. These factors allow investigators to concentrate on cases that contain valid leads or information and usually have a higher probability of arrest or prosecution. Larger agencies tend to lean towards case closure rates and, at the same time, provide a more generic type of contact to inform the complainant of the case status.

Federal, state, and local data retrieval standards often dictate the circumstances in which a case may be closed. Law enforcement agencies generally use some

variation of three categories for clearances. Actively investigated cases with information that may develop a suspect, recover stolen property, or seize contraband are open or workable cases. Cases are deemed inactive when there are no leads, information that would not result in an immediate arrest, or lead to future prosecution. Additional names describing inactive cases may include the term non-workable, suspended, or filer cases. While there can be several types of clearances for closure, the term closed case generally identifies a case that has been solved by arrest and/or prosecution, lack of prosecution by the state or county prosecutor, lack of prosecution by the complainant, or exceptional circumstances.

POSITION

Criminal Investigations Units should use a standardized case screening method using written solvability factors to aid in reducing case assignments and enhancing investigator efficiency and effectiveness. Law enforcement administrators often have to balance the need for additional personnel and at the same time, dwindling budget resources. Law enforcement administrators can use case solvability factors to reduce caseloads, thus allowing investigators to work on cases that have a higher probability of arrest or prosecution. Chaiken (1975) stated in the Rand Report, "The purpose of these procedures is to focus the investigators' attention on important or potentially productive cases and to eliminate unnecessary workload" (p. 30). Examples of common types of solvability factors may include, but are not limited to, witness information that would identify the suspect, suspect vehicle information, traceable property taken from the scene, evidence recovered from the scene, and other extraneous evidence, such as surveillance video from outside sources.

The first investigative action taken on a case actually starts with the law enforcement officer who generates the initial offense report. The public is often lured by media into thinking that a criminal investigation is solved, the suspect arrested, and prosecuted in less than an hour. In reality, the bedrock of a criminal investigation relies on both the quantity and quality of the initial information documented by the patrol officer at the scene. Horvath, Messig, and Lee (2001) stated, "Research study results from the 1970's to the present show that information collected by patrol officers was the most important determinant of case resolution...and a critical factor in determining whether a follow-up investigation would be conducted" (as cited by Doran, 2007, p. 2).

Unfortunately, law enforcement agencies have a history of not training new recruits in criminal investigations. In the Rand Study, Chaiken (1975) stated, "Nearly all departments...reported that their training program for new recruits included material related to crime investigation, although in a large majority of cases the investigative component totaled two weeks or less of training" (p. 17). In the same study, Chaiken (1975) stated, "the patrolmen's role in related to reported crimes was limited to preparing crime reports, securing crime scenes, and taking the necessary steps to arrest perpetrators" (p. 23).

Regardless of whether an informal or formal method of case assignment is used, the primary decision to assign or not assign a case hinges on the efforts of the initial patrol officer at the scene. During the implementation of any case screening method, patrol officers should be included in any training on the concept of solvability factors and the importance of how their offense reports set the tone for case assignments. In 2007, the Georgia Association of Chiefs of Police agreed that when uniformed officers

became trained stakeholders in the solving of a case, the officers' morale and quality of information increased.

Patrol officers should be equipped with the training, necessary equipment, and supervisory follow-up to produce quality offense reports. An agency goal should be the empowering of patrol officers to not only complete thorough offense reports, but to complete the investigation of specific misdemeanor crimes that would not require specialized investigators. There is hope, though, as Horvath, Messig, and Lee (2001) stated in "Twenty Five Years After Rand,": "There appears to be a growing recognition that the patrol officer's role is key to the investigative process, as 72% of the agencies reported efforts to enhance that role within the last five years" (p. 2). Realizing the lack of initial investigative training for patrol officers and investigators alike, Chaiken (1975) stated in the Rand report that, "Many departments appeared to follow a policy of providing limited or no training at the start, followed by on-the-job training, and then offering periodic courses related to special topics in investigation" (p. 17).

Upon completion of the original offense report, law enforcement agencies generally forward the patrol officer's offense report to the Criminal Investigations Unit, where the report is reviewed or screened for possible assignment to an investigator. McDevitt (2005) agreed that the patrol officer's offense report was "perhaps the first (and many would say the most important) element of the investigative process" (p. 68).

Case screening officers become a second level of review of an offense report. Case solvability factors also ensure uniformity among those who review cases for assignment. It is the case screening officer's responsibility to separate cases into two basic categories: assignable or non-assignable. By using standardized, written

solvability factors, any officer assigned to review cases can do so without bias. Geller addressed the critical role of information in solving crime stating, "The key to solving crimes and making arrests is to understand how much and what kind of information is available and how to organize it to make it more accessible and useful" (cited by Doran, 2007, p. 1). The case screening officer should assign cases using case solvability factors that meet or exceed a solvability threshold. The threshold may literally be a list of criteria that the information in original offense report or case report must meet before forwarding the case to an investigator, or it could be a list of weighted criteria listed by importance. In his Doran (2007) stated, "Certain elements of information-solvability factors-comprise the information pertaining to a crime that have, in the past, demonstrated their importance in determining the likelihood (probability) of solving a criminal case" (p. 6). Appendix A reflects a sample list of weighted solvability factors. A second opinion from Garmire (1982) confirmed the need "to develop a system for documenting the presence or absence of solvability factors during the initial investigation" (as cited by the Texas Law Enforcement Management and Administrative Statistics Program (TELEMASP, 2003, p. 2). Appendix B reflects the second list of recommended solvability factors.

All case reports should be forwarded to the Criminal Investigations Division for review; however, not all cases need to be assigned to an investigator. Studies have shown that formal case screening methods using solvability factors can reduce investigator caseloads. While conducting an evaluation on the differences between informal and formal case screening methods in the Santa Monica Police Department Criminal Investigations Division, Johnston (1978) wrote that regarding informal case

screening methods, "It was, in short, a system which "robbed Peter to pay Paul". The time spent...in writing "follow-ups" on the worthless cases was time that was unavailable for the cases which had a high probability for a successful solution" (p. 24).

In 2000, the Tallahassee, Florida police department faced a backlog of approximately 4,000 non-investigative criminal cases. The Tallahassee Police Department had been using an informal method of case screening and had no formal written case management policies. An executive summary of an audit conducted by the City of Tallahassee (2001) concluded, "We reviewed a sample of cases that were not investigated, and we agreed with the sergeants that, given available information and limited resources it was more cost effective to not review these cases" (p. 1). Many law enforcement agencies across the country can agree with the executive summary. The City of Tallahassee reviewed CID statistics in an eighteen- month period and found that case loads almost doubled during the period. In the same period, the number of outstanding cases increased almost two and a quarter times. Regarding the lack of policies and procedures regarding case management, the executive summary also stated that the Criminal Investigations Division did not have standard operating procedures that would produce meaningful performance measures. In addition, employee turnover and changes of employee responsibilities increased the risk of circumvention or incorrect performance of duties.

Investigators act as the third level in the case screening process. Assigned cases generally have evidence, workable leads, or other information that could identify a suspect or lead to prosecution. It is the responsibility of the investigator to follow-up on those leads until the case is cleared or is determined to be no longer workable.

Investigators are generally given a specified time period to follow-up on the case. At the point where all leads are exhausted or the specified time has passed, the case is usually suspended and filed with the agency's records division.

Investigative supervisors are the seldom seen but often needed level of responsibility for reviewing and approving case progress, case suspensions, investigator supplements, and documenting performance measures. By using formal case solvability factors, investigators and supervisors can concentrate on solvable cases, thus increasing the efficiency and effectiveness in the investigative process. An integral part of any formal screening method is the adoption of policies. There should be clear guidelines for specific job responsibilities, use of solvability factors, and on-going case management procedures. A written policy regarding the handling of diverted cases should also be included. In the Tallahassee Police Department study, the executive summary stated, "Performance measures on the other hand provide managers tools for monitoring the quality, effectiveness, and efficiency of services provided by the Division. These measures help strengthen internal controls, and promote accountability and stewardship within an organization" (p. 11). Appendix C reflects the performance measures in place at the time of the survey and the recommended performance measures. In addition to performance measures, a TELEMASP survey on Investigative Caseloads (2003) recommended that a maximum number of days for a case disposition should be established. Thirty-six agencies responded to the survey. Thirty days was the most common response. The lowest number of days was three, while the highest number of days was 90. Eighteen

agencies reported no time limit for case dispositions. Appendix D reflects these statistics.

Law enforcement agencies have several options in which to offset customer service issues. A common practice among agencies is to assign one or more civilian investigations employees to the duties of contacting complainants by phone to advise them of the status of their case, ask for any additional information, if any, and explain the remaining steps of the investigative process. Agencies may also mail form letters to complainants detailing the status of the case and contact information in the event additional information was to surface at a later date.

Law enforcement agencies that utilize volunteer programs for administrative duties may reassign the volunteers to make contact with complainants by phone or by processing form letters. An added value to using volunteers would be that there would be minimal or no labor costs for the program. Chaiken (1975) stated, "One department specifically noted the importance of sending a form letter to those crime victims whose cases are "screened out" (p. 30). The letter was said to be well received and eliminated a "great deal of unnecessary legwork" (Chaiken, 1975, p. 30).

The Santa Monica study also incorporated follow-up procedures on the diverted cases. In addition, the department conducted a survey on customer service regarding the diverted cases. In the Santa Monica study, Johnston (1978) stated, "The results were quite positive" (p. 51). Johnston's survey showed that 87% of victims were either "Satisfied" or "Extremely Satisfied" by the follow-ups made on their cases. In addition, 71% stated they preferred to be contacted by mail so there would be a record, and the letter would also serve as documentation for their insurance company. While the

majority of cases that were diverted were burglary cases, only 12% of complainants responding to the survey expected to get anything back. Johnston (1978) continued, “Contrary to the fears of the Administration, the system of sending brochures to the victims appears to have been a public relations improvement rather than causing harm” (p. 52). In addition, the rapidly growing interest and use of the internet allows agencies to post department notices and policies through a myriad of social networks and websites. The Henry County, Georgia Police Department website (2014), states how their Criminal Investigations Division handles case screening and assignment. Appendix E reflects this website.

Smaller agencies, with the philosophy of immediate and personal contact with the victim, may prefer informal case screening methods over formal solvability factors due to their impression that formal solvability factors do not allow flexibility in case assignments. In reality, the use of formal solvability factors incorporates both the human element (screening officer) and subjective criteria (exceptional circumstances), as approved by the agency’s administration during the implementation process. Typical subjective factors may include exceptional circumstances such as major cases, cases with political impact, cases that reach the attention of the media, or a series of cases that have similar characteristics. Most formal screening methods also include the ability for an investigator or investigative supervisor to reopen a case at any time when new or additional information is learned.

COUNTER POSITION

The 1975 Rand Report was, for decades, the benchmark research survey for criminal investigations management. In 2007, Womack stated the 2001 Rand Report

“provided comprehensive information on the criminal investigation process, however the study faced criticism because of limitations in data collection throughout the study” (p. 9). Critics claim that the 1975 Rand Report only collected data on approximately 300 of the largest law enforcement agencies and did not include state agencies and thousands of smaller agencies. Approximately one-half of the agencies responded to the survey, and out of those agencies, less than 30 were involved in actual on-site surveys. Horvath, Messig, and Lee (2001) stated, “A number of the findings were based on data and samples collected during on-site visits to seven or fewer agencies, and some findings based on information from just one agency” (as cited by Womack, p. 10).

In 2001, Horvath, Messig, and Lee initiated an overhaul of the original Rand Report, where they contacted approximately 18,000 law enforcement agencies to gain new information regarding both patrol and criminal investigations procedures. Approximately 1,750 agencies of all sizes and jurisdictions responded. The authors also felt that changes in crime problems, policing techniques and technology had little influence on how the process of investigations were conducted.

One must also consider the philosophical changes that could change the outlook of the entire department. On one side of the issue, if patrol officers were given expanded training and responsibility of criminal investigations, more time would be needed to conduct those investigations. If patrol officers were used in this manner, then more patrol officers would theoretically be needed to handle the routine calls for service. Additionally, the expanded patrol model would not reduce the amount of investigators needed to continue investigations. If agencies were to continue with the traditional patrol model, officers would still need training and policies enforced to obtain the

information during the initial investigation. The initial report must reflect information that coincides with the agency's written solvability factors.

Law enforcement must make a tough decision on which patrol philosophy they want to use. Regardless, case solvability factors are needed in either scenario. Law enforcement agencies should work towards balancing investigator workloads and at the same time suspend cases that are not solvable. Patrol reports with little or no information causes more useless cases assigned to an investigator. Patrol units that follow-up on cases that are fresh and include pertinent information can make or break the difference between solving a crime and filing the report in a file cabinet. .

RECOMMENDATION

Research from local, state, federal law enforcement agencies and publications from the 1970's to present have shown that the implementation of a formal case screening method using formal solvability factors can have beneficial effects. Criminal Investigations Units should use a standardized case screening method using written solvability factors to aid in reducing case assignments and increasing both the efficiency and effectiveness of investigators. It should be recognized that the implementation of a formal case screening process requires several steps. These steps may include testing and validation of the use of the solvability factors. Validation and testing of the solvability factors documents the process and will give a snapshot of the possible results to be expected in the future. In conjunction with validation and testing, patrol officers should be trained in both the theory and the practical application of solvability factors. This training should give patrol officers an idea of not only the required information needed in initial offense reports, but it also should improve the content

quality of the offense reports. Investigations supervisors and detectives should also be trained to understand the solvability factor process and how it will affect their investigations. Supervisor oversight and case management is a must. Law enforcement agencies should also adopt a formal, written policy that includes not only that a formal case screening process is being used within the agency, but also describes a logical progression of the “hows” and “whys” of what is required.

Critics may believe that formal case screening methods often divert too many cases prematurely without proper review, thus suspending cases without proper review. In reality, a formal case-screening program involves five steps of review and only the cases that have the least amount of probability of being solved are diverted. Formal case screening programs also leave the flexibility of having cases reopened upon new information or evidence at any time.

Formal case screening programs using written solvability factors are sometimes overlooked because of the perception of rigidity. Formal case screening methods incorporate factors that have been tested and validated by the agency. Criminal Investigations Supervisors may adjust the solvability factors to meet the needs of both the agency administration and the community.

Perhaps the most common misconception regarding formal case screening programs may be that customer service is sacrificed for the sake of efficacy. There are several options that provide the personal contact needed to satisfy both the agency and citizens. Criminal Investigations Supervisors may choose to assign diverted cases to a single investigator or civilian employee to follow-up on the cases and contact the complainant. Some agencies use volunteer programs to make phone contact with the

complainant at little or no cost to the agency. Finally, form letters may be mailed to the complainant that serves the purposes of both contacting the complainant and providing written documentation of the status of the case.

The task of implementing a formal case-screening program using written solvability factors can be daunting. However, once the validation, testing, training, and implementation is complete, an agency can see reductions in investigator case loads and more available man-hours for cases that have a higher probability of being solved. Concerns of premature case diversion and decreases in customer service can be mitigated. Law enforcement administrators using formal case screening and solvability factors can reduce the feeling of being squeezed between budget issues and the need for more investigators.

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APPENDIX A

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R.A. Doran & Associates, *Police Management Consultants*

that is necessary for the successful commission of a crime) or a behavioral profile of the suspect can reasonably be developed (e.g.; signature—emotional fulfillment in committing crime); or an identifiable crime pattern or series

j. Usable physical evidence

Latent fingerprint(s), DNA, bullets/casings, trace evidence have been collected at or near the crime scene. Other significant physical evidence (either traceable or uniquely distinctive) has been collected

k. There was a definite, limited opportunity for anyone except the suspect(s) to have committed the crime

Solvability Factor Uses

- Case Screening Criteria
- Establish Case Priority
- Direct Initial and On-Going Investigations
- Basic Report review Criteria
- Case Assignment Decisions
- Monitor Continuing Investigation
- Critique Continuing Investigation
- Assess Investigator Performance

Unweighted Solvability Factors

The number of solvability factors added to produce case solvability score

Weighted Solvability Factors

Solvability factor weights are added to determine total case points.

Solvability Factors	Weight
A. Reliable Witness	3
B. Suspect Named	5
C. Suspect Described	2
D. Suspect Location	2
E. Suspect Identified	2
F. Suspect Previously Seen	1
H. Vehicle Description	2
I. Traceable Property	1
J. Significant MO	1
K. Usable Physical Evidence	1
L. Limited Opportunity For Another	2
... Other Than Suspect	
	Total
Scoring	
The minimum number of solvability points needed for an active field follow-up is five (5) points.	

Figure 5

Weighted Case Screening Model

Weighted case screening model by Doran (2007), *Managing Criminal Investigation Units*, chapter 3, p. 7.

APPENDIX B

TELEMASP EXAMPLE OF SOLVABILITY FACTORS

Investigative Caseloads



Table 1

Rating of Solvability Factors

Factor	Mean	SD
Knowledge of a suspect's name	4.5	.71
Presence of significant physical evidence	4.1	.80
Is there a witnesses to the crime?	4.0	.85
Identifiable property with traceable characteristics, marks, or numbers	3.9	.89
Description of a suspect	3.8	.73
Aggravating circumstances such as the use of a weapon	3.8	.94
Description identifying an automobile used by the suspect	3.6	.87
Existence of a significant MO	3.4	.71
An opportunity for but one person to have committed the crime	3.4	1.20
Belief that a crime may be solved with publicity and/or reasonable additional investigative effort.	3.3	1.00

APPENDIX C

RECOMMENDED PERFORMANCE MEASURES

CITY OF TALLAHASSEE AUDIT REPORT #0110

JANUARY 2001

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE TALLAHASSEE POLICE DEPARTMENT CRIMINAL INVESTIGATIONS DIVISION

CURRENT INPUT MEASURES

Number of Investigators
Available Person hours

RECOMMENDED INPUT MEASURES

Number of Assigned Cases per Investigator
Average Work Hours per Investigator
Average Number of Cases Received per Investigator

CURRENT OUTPUT MEASURES

Cases Investigated
Number of Arrests
Cases Cleared

RECOMMENDED OUTPUT MEASURES

Average Hours per Cleared Case
Average Number of Hours per Case Assigned
Outcome Measures:
Percentage of Cases Cleared
Citizen Satisfaction
Crimes Committed per 100,000

The current measures reflect the performance measures collected at the time of the audit.
The recommended measures were supplied by the Governmental Accounting Standards Board (GASB).

APPENDIX D

NUMBER OF DAYS BEFORE A CASE DISPOSITION

MUST BE RENDERED

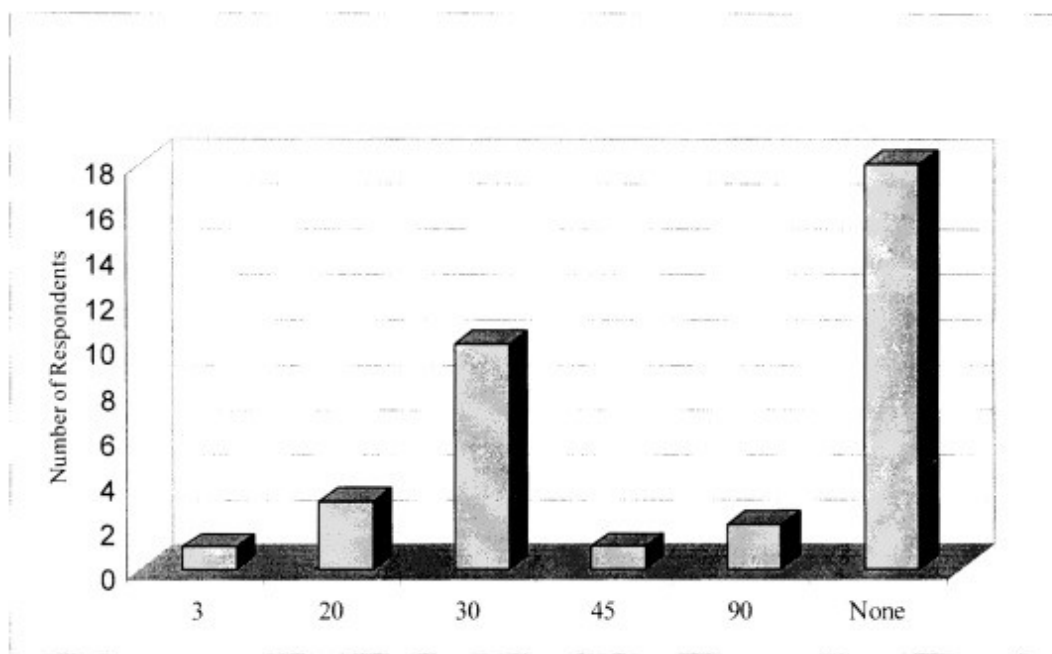


Figure 3. Number of Days Before a Case Disposition Must be Rendered

APPENDIX E

HENRY COUNTY, GEORGIA POLICE DEPARTMENT WEBSITE

EXAMPLE OF CASE ASSIGNMENT/SOLVABILITY FACTORS



HENRY COUNTY POLICE DEPARTMENT
GA

May 18, 2014

Menu Options

- Police Home
- Henry County Home
- News

Administrative

- Office of the Chief
- Deputy Chief
- HCPD History
- Internal Affairs
- » Lieutenant P. Bratton

Support Services

- » Major K. Going
- Records Division
- Training Division
- Research & Development
- Certification Manager
- Quartermaster
- Chaplaincy Program

Criminal Investigations

- Investigations
- Crimes Against Persons
- Crimes Against Children
- Crimes Against Property
- Crimes Scene
- Investigations
- Forensic Video
- Financial Crimes
- Property & Evidence
- Special Services
- Special Victims Unit (SVU)

Uniform Patrol

- Uniform Patrol
- » Major M. Amerman
- COPS
- C.A.G.E.
- H.E.A.T.
- Honor Guard
- K9 Unit
- Motors Unit
- Reserves
- SWAT
- School Crossing Guards
- Traffic

Careers

- Current Openings
- Requirements
- Pay & Benefits
- Application

Community

- Request A Home or Business Check
- Statistical Information
- Request
- Citizens Police Academy
- Compliment an Officer
- File a Complaint on an Officer

Criminal Investigations Division

The Criminal Investigations Division is divided into nine sections:

1. Crimes Against Persons
2. Crimes Against Children
3. Crimes Against Property
4. Domestic Violence
5. Crime Scene Investigations
6. Forensic Video/Criminal Analysis
7. Financial Crimes
8. Property and Evidence
9. Special Services

The Division's responsibilities are: to identify and apprehend offenders; recover stolen property; gather, document and evaluate facts in reference to criminal activity; process crime scenes, recover and preserve evidence and property; and present evidence to various courts to seek a successful prosecution of the offender(s).

All criminal reports made to the Henry County Police Department are sent to the Criminal Investigations Division for assessment. The reports are reviewed for facts and information which would lead detectives to the identity of a suspect.

Case Assignment

Solvability factors are used to determine if a case is assigned. Some of these factors are: clear descriptions that will identify the perpetrator(s), license tag information, and direct knowledge of who committed the crime, physical evidence that can identify the perpetrator(s) or witnesses who are able to identify the perpetrator(s). There may be other factors that will also be used to determine assignment.

Citizens who are victims of crimes are encouraged to contact the Criminal Investigations Division if they become aware of additional information that was not given to the officer at the time of the report. Due to the overwhelming number of reports, cases are only assigned if there is sufficient information or evidence to justify the expenditure of manpower on an investigation.

When a case is assigned, the detective will contact the victim within 48 hours of receiving the assignment. During the course of the investigation, the detective will maintain contact with the victim and update them on the progress of the case. When a final resolution is reached, the detective will contact the victim and advise them of the final disposition. In those instances where no information was developed for prosecution, the case will be considered inactive. Should new information be developed, the case can be re-activated for additional investigation.

I WANT TO . . .

- Restrict a Record
- Get a copy of a police report
- Get a copy of an accident report
- Get an alcohol permit
- See employment opportunities
- Become a reserve Officer
- See crime statistics
- Speak to someone in a specific department
- Get my property returned to me
- Attend the Citizen's Police Academy

Follow Us On:

f t y

SUBMIT A TIP

Report It
Citizen Property Inventory System
Powered by LeadsOnline

GET ACCIDENT REPORTS ONLINE