

Underwater Crime Scene Investigation: A Guide For Law Enforcement

Florida State University



Although underwater recovery certainly isn't new, it wasn't until the early 1990s that police dive teams started to switch from the "snatch-and-grab" mentality of collecting evidence to more measured methods of recovery. It is, of course, much more challenging to apply standard investigation techniques to underwater crime scenes to preserve important data, which could prove invaluable in court.

The federal government recognized during the USS Cole investigation in 2002 that the process of securing an underwater crime scene, and gathering evidence that would be presentable in an international court, was a formidable task since there were no standardized protocols. In 2002 the U.S. Navy approached Florida State University to develop state-of-the-art protocols for underwater investigations. The U.S. Department of Defense contributed \$500,000 toward this research.

In 2007 Tom Kelley, Ph.D., director of Florida State University's Panama City Underwater Crime Scene Investigation

(UCSI) program, and team members Dale Nute, Ph.D., Mike Zinszer, Mark Feulner, Gregg Stanton, William Charlton, Joerg Hess, Terry Roy Johnson, and Kenneth McDonald, released “Underwater Crime Scene Investigation: A Guide for Law Enforcement.”

This manual is the first resource that describes the principles, policies and procedures of an underwater investigation. It adapts surface investigative techniques to the underwater environment, including the use of integrated sensors, robotics, and computer modeling.

“*Employing these methods underwater decreases typical investigative times from a few days to a few hours, and preserves more critical information.*”

The program consists of a 20-hour academic minor in UCSI and three 100-hour underwater investigative training courses. It is ideal for all local, state, and federal law enforcement agencies, as well as NOAA and NASA. This specialized curriculum has also generated interest from insurance companies that investigate underwater claims, such as the sinking of watercraft.

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