MISOURI STATE HIGHWAY PATROL • CRIME LABORATORY DIVISION

MSHP vs. C.S.I.

The well-known forensic science television series C.S.I. has had quite an impact on the Missouri State Highway Patrol Crime Lab. Fairly often in court, the MSHP criminalists are asked to compare their job with C.S.I., since most of the junior law enforcement officers have watched the popular series. The MSHP lab has a different mission: submitting evidence, and not just preserving a crime scene. The world of C.S.I. paints a glamorous portrait of crime scene processing where an investigator quickly obtains lab results from pristine evidence to apprehend the suspect and solve the case, the world in which the MSHP lab exists is quite different.

Crime Scene Processing— Unlike C.S.I., the MSHP lab criminalists seldom go to crime scenes or attend autopsies. Occasionally with non-routine cases, an officer requests our assistance through our lab director. In those instances we assist the officer by taking the evidence location, presumptive testing, and sample collection. However, the officer is still responsible for packaging and submission. We do not interview witnesses or question individuals involved in a case.

When submitting evidence, consider packaging multiple evidence items in separate containers. Individual packaging not only preserves the integrity of each item by inhibiting cross contamination, but also assists criminalists with inventory, since all items in a container must be inventoried whether those items are examined or not.

A Final Note—The forensic advisors to the C.S.I. writers make an attempt to keep the story realistic. However, the program would not be as glamorous if the writer were not involved. While the show is entertaining, the science must be kept in perspective. If you have any questions about laboratory procedures or evidence processing, please contact the lab, or visit the new Patrol website (www.mshp.dps.mo.gov).