

# CRIME S.C.E.N.E. EXCELLENCE PODCAST

## Episode One



## Safety and Security

### Introduction:

The National Public Safety Partnership presents the Crime S.C.E.N.E. Excellence podcast, Episode One, Safety and Security. And now, retired Lieutenant Floyd Wiley welcomes retired Chief of Police Joe McHale to discuss safety and security in the first of five podcasts on crime scene excellence.

### Floyd Wiley:

I'm Floyd Wiley, senior research associate with IIR. I'm a retired lieutenant from the New Castle County Police Department, Delaware, after 20 years of service. During my career, I have had the pleasure to serve in the criminal investigations, narcotics, and the police academy, and I also served 17 years on the New Castle County Police SWAT team in multiple capacities and, ultimately, I was team commander. But most importantly, as it pertains to today's podcast, I've served many years in patrol as an officer, a direct supervisor, and a platoon commander.

I will be the host for this edition of the Public Safety Partnership's Crime S.C.E.N.E. Excellence training concepts. Now pay close attention, this training concept is a tool designed to assist law enforcement officers, such as yourselves, in achieving a safe, secure, and successful crime scene investigation. The successful prosecution of criminal cases ultimately relies on you and crime scene excellence.

When we took our oath as law enforcement officers, we vowed to discharge our duties to the best of our ability. Crime scene investigations deserve the best of our ability. This will be one of five podcasts of which we will be discussing the critical elements when responding and managing major crime scenes.

I am joined today by Joe McHale, who served with the Kansas City, Missouri, Police Department [KCPD] for 26 years, retiring at the rank of major. During Joe's tenure at KCPD, he commanded their largest patrol division. In addition, he commanded the violent crime enforcement division. He has managed hundreds of violent crime scenes and has extensive experience in responding to volatile situations in a major city in the United States. Upon his retirement from KCPD, Joe also served as the Chief of Police in Marion, Iowa, for three years. He now serves as a senior manager with IIR in support of the Public Safety Partnership.

So, let's specifically talk about safety and securing the scene. There are several things when it comes to safety and responding to the scene that are extremely important. There are a few things that come to my mind, and mindset is one of them. What are some of the things that come to your mind?

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**Joe McHale:** Mindset. Your mental frame of response is going to be critical to how you handle that scene. When a hot call comes out, you get those tones and it amps you and get you stressed, Floyd. They do that for a reason. They're trying to change your mindset, and when you respond to that scene that you have your game on, you're paying attention to what matters and you arrive there safely.

And that mindset carries over when you get to that scene. You're in charge and you have to remember that. Take charge of that scene, identify your suspects, identify your victims, and know the steps that you're going to take next to secure that scene.

So having that frame of mind, being strong mentally and emotionally, to be that first responder, to handle the stress effectively, chaotic and emotional events that most people cannot even fathom handling, you're the person to do it, and you're going to do it well.

**Floyd Wiley:** Exactly. And we have to have that mindset throughout our day, every day, before we even leave our house, even. You know what I mean?

**Joe McHale:** Absolutely.

**Floyd Wiley:** So, when we talk about safety, also in law enforcement we have this culture of speed. We're always in a rush. We're always speeding. I know John Wooden from UCLA, he used to be a basketball coach, he talked about be quick, but don't hurry. How does that apply to our response?

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### Joe McHale:

The dispatcher is going to start you off right on the wrong foot. You're going to have to go lights and sirens and what's that. It builds into your psyche, I got to get there quick. And you do, but take your time when you get there and notice things that are occurring on your way. Oftentimes, you're going to be passing suspects, you're going to be [crosstalk 00:04:24] for areas where you can . . . Where's the place I'm going to park? How am I going to walk up to the scene? What's occurring behind me and around me? And set yourself up for success by where do you make that initial entry into the scene. Is your car going to be secure? How are you going to tape the scene off? Everybody says slow is smooth and smooth is fast. Take the time to assess that scene, park correctly, get the resources that you need.

You may have such a chaotic scene that the worst thing you could possibly do would be go in there and try to secure it with only two officers. You may need to order additional personnel and come in it from a tactical perspective and just have the resources you need when you make that initial entry into that scene.

### Floyd Wiley:

Right, and as you were talking about, being situationally aware, when you slow things down, and like you said, a lot of people say slow is smooth, smooth is fast. I tend to say slower's smoother, smoother's faster, because sometimes you do have to get there quickly, but not recklessly in a hurry. But we want to make sure that we look to see versus look to look. I'm just going off piggybacking off of what you said, as far as being able to see these suspects that may be leaving the scene. That's a good point.

So let me ask you a question. Once you secure those boundaries, what are some of the things you think about when you're securing the boundaries of that crime scene?

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**Joe McHale:**

Yeah, first of all, are you making it big enough? Because you figure when you put that tape up, you're saying the public cannot come beyond that point. I would highly recommend that you do dual tape, one for the inner scene where your shell casings, where your grit of the scene's actually going to be, but then take it one step out with an extra set of tape. People can stand, you can chat with people at that tape, but you can also pull your investigative resources and you can do your planning sessions outside of earshot of the people in the community or the media's microphone that's going to be right there.

Bigger is better at the beginning, Floyd. Take the time to identify where your critical areas are, and then I say go 20 yards out, if possible, to just to give you that extra room to work.

**Floyd Wiley:**

Right, because sometimes you've been in those scenes where you get there and you're like, "Holy cow. This scene is not large enough." So now you're trying to expand it and you run into a lot of difficulty at that point in time.

**Joe McHale:**

It's too late. You got people trampling on your shell casings, you've got people that are causing you trouble because they're right in and you can't hear yourself think, so you're right, absolutely.

**Floyd Wiley:**

Yeah, it's better to push it out. So, let's also talk about, so now we've secured the scene, we might have had to secure some suspects. So, let's talk about that searching because a lot of times you see people, they get a suspect, they whisked him away, and they don't do a thorough search of that individual for weapons.

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**Joe McHale:**

Yeah. Huge, huge point of responsibility for you at that point. When you identify a suspect and you put the handcuffs on him, not only are you immediately responsible for the safety of your fellow officers to make sure that you do a thorough search on that person, you then have to retain control of that person so he doesn't run away from you. And then also you have to take into account that you're now responsible for that person's safety. I don't know how many scenes that I was at where we had a suspect in custody and here comes a family member of the victim wanting to do something to cause harm to this person. Get him searched, get him to a secure environment, whether that's a wagon . . . you may even get that person down to a station and get them progressing through the integration piece and just have to talk with them later so you can secure your scene. But a lot of factors to take into account there, Floyd.

**Floyd Wiley:**

Exactly. And sometimes we get complacent on scenes and you see some guy. I know you've been on those scenes where some guy or girl comes riding by on a bicycle and next thing you know they're taking off down the street and they've taken some form of evidence away, but because you weren't paying attention and securing it properly, you may have lost a vital piece of information to that crime.

When we talk about complacency, let's also talk about ambushes. Because the FBI statistics show that there are numerous accounts where officers are ambushed while on-scene containing that scene. So how important is it for us to make sure that we have some sort of police overwatch, and what does that mean?

**Joe McHale:**

It's huge, Floyd. You got to figure you're now in a stagnant environment that you cannot move from. Every scene must have officers that are specifically designated to watch the perimeter and look for threats to those that are operating administratively inside that scene. Without that component of people providing the overwatch to watch for secondary attacks, to watch for people that could do harm to you, you're missing a key component of scene security.

You'll have people outside the scene. They're going to holler things in at you, they're going to be belligerent, but you have to have that demeanor and provide that overwatch to the individuals that are at that scene. I rambled a little bit there at the end.

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**Floyd Wiley:**

No, no, that's great, because I'll tell you what, the other key to that is the fact that we truly need to have our brother and sisters six. We talk about it, but we actually have to have it.

You mentioned the word, when we talked before about being an ambassador, and I thought that was so powerful. When you talk about being an ambassador, as an officer that is arriving to these crime scenes, can you expound on that just a little bit?

**Joe McHale:**

Absolutely. So, the public doesn't differentiate the officer that's providing overwatch, the officer that's stringing tape, to that detective that they're going to talk to later. So if you find yourself on a crime scene where your role is to simply stand at the tape and make sure everybody's safe, remember that you have a distinct responsibility to represent your agency and your community as a whole. Give people respect, pay attention to what's being said, build a rapport with those individuals at that crime scene tape to take it to the next level for the next interaction that you have.

One thing that I would typically do at a crime scene is I would find somebody that was sympathetic to what's going on. I would engage them and use them as a conduit to engage other people at that scene. You become the conduit for communication between the community and the police, and it's up to you to be that ambassador that takes it to the next level.

**Floyd Wiley:**

And that's so important. That just comes back to having ally equity. You put a deposit in with your community engagement, and you engage people, hearts and minds, one person at a time—that could be the difference in resolving this investigation in a positive manner and, on top of that, maintaining control at that scene.

We've talked about tactics in medicine when we respond to the scene and there are injured subjects there. And we have a term that we say is "tactics before medicine," meaning security before we have medical respond. Can you talk about that just a little bit and give us some information on how you've seen that take place on your scenes?

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**Joe McHale:** Floyd, the tactics have to come before the medicine. If your scene isn't secure, if you haven't provided for the safety of the individuals that are still there, for you, your partner, and the people that need to get in that scene, you haven't done your job. So, your first reaction is going to want to be to apply medical attention and try to help people, right? That's what we do, Floyd.

**Floyd Wiley:** Right.

**Joe McHale:** But the most critical steps that you can take are to take a step back from what's occurring medically and create that safe environment in those precious moments to get those medical personnel that are staged just down the street into that scene in a safe manner as quickly as possible.

**Floyd Wiley:** Exactly. What we do is to try and keep it clear so we can get EMS in there.

Now, let's talk about the professional demeanor. I mean, how important is that? And you talked about as far as being an ambassador. How does that come into play?

**Joe McHale:** You never get a second chance to make a first impression, right, Floyd? Treat people with respect, and nine times out of ten, they're going to treat you right back with respect. Build that rapport with your citizens; let them know that you're there to help them. Make them understand that this is a traumatic time and that you understand that. We can be callous to this when we respond to scene after scene after scene. But to them, this is new and it's real. Show them respect, build that rapport with them so they communicate with you, but also show that empathy. This is not normal in their community, and you don't want it to be normal, and when you respond to multiple shootings in the same neighborhood, it does become their normal. But make them understand that we're not going to tolerate it, you respect that this is where they live, and that you're there to help them.

**Floyd Wiley:** And you kept repeating the "R" word: respect. And I see respect as an officer safety issue. Talk to me about it, Joe.

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**Joe McHale:**

Absolutely. If you disrespect somebody, what do they want to do? They want to disrespect you right back. You haven't searched these individuals, you don't know what they're capable of, you don't know what they're involved. Treat others like you want to be treated, and be that presence in the neighborhood that stabilizes it. Don't be the antagonist that makes things worse. I know we've all seen that one officer that comes on the scene when you know it's just going to blow up from the moment he opens his mouth. Just take a moment, think about what you're doing, think about where you're at, and give people respect where they are. You can do the same thing, and you can identify threats at the same time and engage with people and get yourself a long way towards creating a safer scene.

**Floyd Wiley:**

Exactly. We want to treat people as people, not as objects. Respect is an officer safety issue. Joe, I'd like to thank you for taking the time to speak with me today. I also want to encourage our listeners to visit the Public Safety Partnership website at [www.nationalpublicsafetypartnership.org](http://www.nationalpublicsafetypartnership.org) for more information on this topic and other Public Safety Partnership topics.