



WARREN

Pictures: Are they really worth a thousand words?

Photographing Accident Scenes

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Insurance adjusters, Investigators, and Engineers use photography to record the condition of incident scenes: fire scenes, collision damage, tire marks on roadways, machine configurations, and many other things in the course of recording investigations for subsequent analysis. Those photographs are essential to show and describe what happened when it comes to settling claims.

It is important that the person taking the photographs has a plan in mind before shooting the photographs. That plan needs to consider the reports and presentations that will be produced in the course of actions that follow.

Here are some of the things the photographer must consider:

1. Compose the photographs so that the viewer can see enough of the scene to establish an orientation.
2. Work from big to small. For example, if you need to depict the fire patterns that identify the origin of a fire, step back and shoot a photograph that shows as much of the compartment as possible.
3. Include points in the photograph that identify locations, and then shoot a series of photographs at closer and closer viewpoints until you get the resolution that you need.
4. Each photograph in the series should have points in common with the earlier photograph so that the viewer can maintain orientation.

The photographer must also keep in mind that there are situations where photographs are not the best way to preserve data. One of those is in the documentation of tire marks and roadway dimensions at a collision scene.

The collision reconstructionist needs relatively precise distances and locations in order to make calculations. Although it can be done, it is difficult to obtain the length of a skid mark from a photograph. We cannot measure that length directly from the photograph. The photograph does serve to show the relative location of the collision scene data. However, the actual measurements are best if they are taken at the scene with appropriate tools with the photograph as backup.

So, is an incident scene photo worth a thousand words? The answer is *sometimes*. It just depends how well it documents the incident scene and how it can be used in subsequent analysis.